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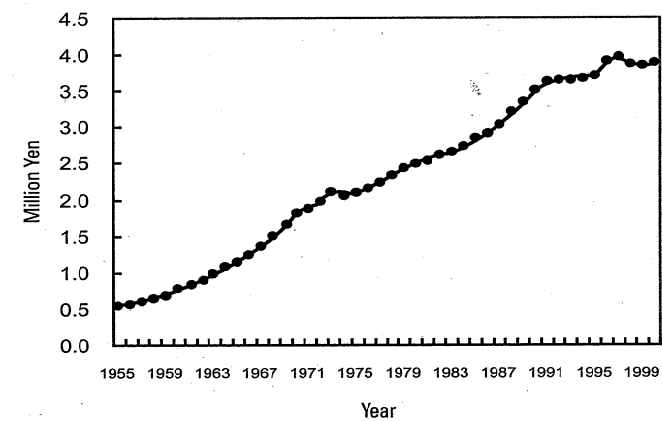
## Japan

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### INTRODUCTION

JAPAN IS AN advanced industrial economy. Real per capita GDP (Figure 1) has increased from about half a million yen (around US\$4,500) in 1955 to approximately four million yen (around US\$36,500) in 2000. However, Japan trails behind among the advanced industrial economies in the Gender-related Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measurement (GEM).

Figure 1. Per Capita GDP in Japan, 1955–2000 (1990 prices)



In 2003, Japan was ranked 14<sup>th</sup> in GDI and 43<sup>rd</sup> for GEM (UNDP, 2005). These are fairly accurate indicators of the reality of women's position in Japan, where a male-biased paternalistic structure has persisted for centuries. Faced with this challenging situation, Japanese women have always been "quiet" agents of change within their own small communities. For example, women are very active members of parent-teacher associations, though the chairpersons of those same associations are usually men; and women are at the core of community-based activities — cleaning public parks, organising environmentally friendly garbage disposal management and working in childcare and care for the elderly. However, all of these activities are socially valuable "unpaid shadow work" undertaken without any tangible rewards. In fact it is considered mandatory, especially by men, that *married* women take care of domestic and community work; this is a type of "division of labour" between husbands and wives.

The Japanese workforce, until recently, has been shaped by the conventional gender division of work in Japan: women should take care of household work and earn supplemental income up to a level not exceeding that which allows for the spousal deduction under the Japanese income tax law (which was formulated based on the concept of "men as breadwinners and women as housewives"). However, recently, partly because of Japan's deflationary economy, which has created a need for women to supplement household income, women's roles and work have become more visible and appreciated in society. Fierce global economic competition has also led the private sector to employ more part-time workers to minimise production costs, and women have become the majority in the workforce.

Against this backdrop, workers' co-operative and workers' collective movements have emerged and expanded gradually as an alternative to part-time jobs with private companies. Their characteristics include women-led groups, joint ownership, self-reliant business groups, income-earning entities and democratic management. Furthermore, their work orientation is based on "women's skills developed through their communal roles and domestic chores".

Thus, it is important for us to examine if indeed the workers' collectives and co-operatives have brought about any changes to the roles and positions of women in Japan at various levels. Questions include:

1. Are women gaining power over decision making at home, relative to their husbands?
2. Are women changing their opinions on critical social issues in Japan?
3. Does the structure of the tax system influence female members of workers' collectives and co-operatives?

4. Have there been significant changes in women's non-economic power in society?
5. Do we need to support the workers' collectives and co-operatives movement in Japan and what needs to be done to expand it?

In order to analyse the questions above, we will examine the case of workers' collectives in Hokkaido (the north island of Japan) based on the author's field survey data collection.

### ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE WORKERS' CO-OPERATIVES AND COLLECTIVES IN JAPAN

The origin of workers' collectives and co-operatives can be found in the US and Europe, respectively. Workers' collectives originated in California in the 1970s, when the US had a large pool of youth with strong social consciousness who started up some group-based self-reliant economic activities (Jackall and Levin, 1984). Workers' co-operatives, on the other hand, originated in Italy, Spain and other European countries, and included regional-based organisations and producers co-operatives (Oakeshott, 1978; Cornforth, et al, 1988). These two traditions were first introduced to Japan separately in the 1980s by different groups of people, resulting in different terminology (workers' co-operatives and workers' collectives) to describe very similar economic activities on the ground. The two groups, however, have different visions of their activities and organisational approaches.

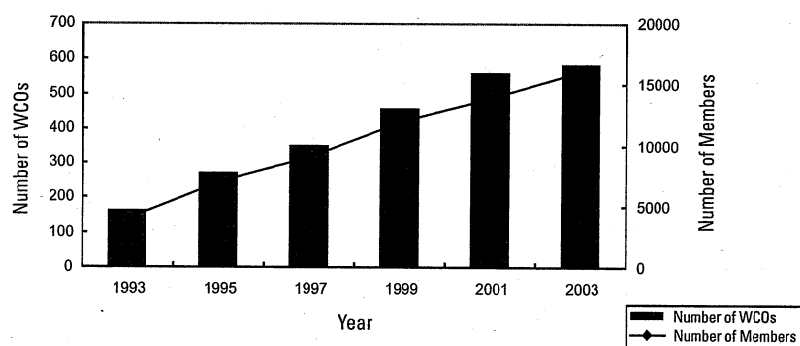
One example of a workers' co-operative is JIGYODAN, established in 1971 in Nishinomiya in Hyogo prefecture, west of Osaka, mainly for job creation for middle-aged unemployed people. In 1983, a study group working with the organisation supporting JIGYODAN visited Italy to study successful workers' co-operatives. JIGYODAN was then transformed into workers' co-operatives in 1986 and the union became the Japan Workers' Co-operative Union (JWCU). The JWCU has regional branches all over Japan from Hokkaido to Okinawa and the number of workers' co-operatives has grown. The type of work these workers' co-operatives have engaged in include total management of hospital buildings, collaboration with other workers' co-operatives, management and greening of parks (commissioned by local government), food and agricultural businesses, recycling, and editing and planning.

The first workers' collective was started in 1982 by the Kanagawa Seikatsu Club Consumer Co-operative in Kanagawa prefecture to the south of Tokyo Metropolis. It was called NINJIN, which means "carrot" in

English, and its business was to receive contract work from the consumer club co-operative for produce distribution. After the success of the first workers' collective, the number of workers' collectives and their membership have grown in and outside of the prefecture (Figure 2). In 2003, according to the survey conducted by the Workers' Collective Network Japan (WNI), the numbers of workers' collectives has increased from 164 in 1993 to 580 in 2003; membership has grown from around 4,000 in 1993 to 16,149 in 2003. Recorded business turnover showed rapid growth from 5.7 billion yen (US\$54 million) in 1997 to 12.7 billion yen (US\$121 million) in 2003. Over the years, Workers' Collective Associations have been founded in various locations, including Tokyo, Kanagawa, Chiba, Hokkaido and Kyushu. The first conference of the All Japan Workers' Collective Association was held in 1993, and it has been held biennially since.

It is clear that workers' co-operatives and workers' collectives are similar in many ways. However, differences can be found, such as in the fact that workers' collectives are founded and developed in a bottom-up style, while workers' co-operatives receive technical and financial support from the JWCU in their start-up and later. As the objective of this study is to search for evidence of women's empowerment, it is deemed more appropriate to examine workers' collectives (WCOs) because they are more or less independent of each other.

Figure 2. Growing Workers' Collectives (WCOs) in Japan, 1993–2003



## CASE STUDY OF THE HOKKAIDO WORKERS' COLLECTIVES

### Background and Institutional Set-up

In Hokkaido, the secretariat of the Seikatsu club co-operative first formed a WCO association after they learned of the successful take-off of WCOs in the Tokyo-Yokohama area in the early 1980s. This is in contrast to the case in the Tokyo-Yokohama metropolitan area, where separately established WCOs formed a consultative group after commencement of work activities. Two WCOs were then formed in Hokkaido in 1986: one was the workforce for the Seikatsu club co-operative produce distribution centre, Hamanasu, and the other was for childcare services, called Kazaguruma. Since then, continuous expansion has led to a total of 30 WCOs with 450 members in 2005.

The 20 years of experience of the Hokkaido Workers' Collectives, coupled with the size of its membership, have allowed for examination of whether economic empowerment among women members of WCOs has taken place and how that economic empowerment has been measured.

The Hokkaido Workers Collective Association defines the work of a WCO as:

1. Democratic management/alternative to a conventional workplace through:
  - horizontal workers' relationship; and
  - team-based work.
2. Contribution to enriching the lives of local people by:
  - providing appropriate services based on service users' needs; and
  - strengthening local social ties.
3. Dedication to the realisation of a society fair to both men and women through:
  - fair gender division of work; and
  - a social security system and income tax laws.

## RESEARCH METHOD AND DATA COLLECTION FOR EVIDENCE OF WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Field work was carried out by the author between January and March 2005 to gather data to analyse how women's jobs, created by joining WCOs, influence their control over their own income and allocation of their time at home, their relative power in household decision making, and their views of their work and prevailing social issues.

Two sets of questionnaires were prepared, including quantitative and qualitative questions, to be filled out by management representatives of WCOs and their individual members respectively. With the support of the Hokkaido Workers Collective Consultation Group, the author sampled all of the WCOs in Hokkaido, and the total number of members sampled was 220 or about half of all members of the Hokkaido workers collectives. The questionnaires were distributed and collected through postal services. More than 200 questionnaires were returned to the author, which shows a recovery rate of more than 90 per cent. As for the organisation-based survey, questionnaires were distributed to all 32 WCOs in Hokkaido and recovered from 30 of them, representing a more than 90 per cent recovery rate. In addition, the author visited two WCOs to observe their work and collected users' views on those WCOs and their work in Sapporo.

### EVIDENCE OF WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT FROM THE HOKKAIDO EXPERIENCES

For evidence of women's economic empowerment, we will examine first the individual level and then the WCO (organisational) level. However, before doing so, we will first look at some key characteristics of the members of the WCOs in Sapporo that we sampled.

#### Characteristics of the members of the WCOs in Sapporo

- **Age** — More than 80 per cent of the members sampled are in their 40s and 50s. The average age is 50 years old, ranging from 35 years old to 70 years old.
- **Educational background** — Ninety-six per cent of respondents have at least a high school diploma. Almost 40 per cent of the respondents finished their schooling at the high school level. Some completed two-year college, which used to be very popular among Japanese women.

- **Marital status** — One hundred and ninety-three of the respondents are married, while only seven are unmarried. The mean age of the unmarried group is about 60, while that of the married group is about 50. This implies that there are few single young women joining the WCOs in Hokkaido.
- **Family structure** — The size of the family ranges from one (where the respondent is the sole household member) to eight persons. Most of the married respondents have children, with an average of two children.
- **Family situation** — Most of the respondents who joined WCOs do not have young children; only four respondents have children under five. On average, the age of the youngest child is 17 years old. Less than half of the respondents have children under 15 years old, which is the age for entering high school in Japan. More than 20 per cent of respondents have older family members at home; eight of them have older family members who require daily care at home.
- **Spouse's income level** — Husbands' income levels varied. More than ten per cent of the respondents indicated that their husbands' income exceeds ten million yen per year, while close to eight per cent of respondents indicated husbands' income of only less than three million yen per year. In 2004, the average income level of a worker in Hokkaido was 5.82 million yen per year. More than two-thirds of respondents said their spouses' income is higher than six million yen, which implies that the majority of members have a relatively stable household income base.
- **Work experience** — Exactly half of the respondents had worked prior to joining a WCO.
- **Work experience as a WCO member** — A member, on average, has worked for about five years with a WCO in Hokkaido. The longest-serving member has worked for more than 19 years. Our data shows that the largest number of respondents (54 per cent) had worked for a WCO for less than five years.
- **How did members first come to know about WCOs?** — The majority of members first learnt about WCOs through their membership of the consumer co-operative club, which was the founding force for the Hokkaido WCOs. However, over time, the number of members who learnt about WCOs from their friends has increased. Among members who have 10 to 15 years of WCO experience, less than ten per cent discovered WCOs through their friends, while among those who have less than five years of experiences, this rate exceeds 20 per cent.

This is clear evidence of the expansion of this movement beyond the small closed circle of consumer co-operatives in Hokkaido.

- **Main reasons for joining WCOs** — Reasons for joining WCOs are varied. Interestingly, 40 per cent of the respondents joined the WCOs because of their willingness to contribute something to society, almost double the number of respondents who said it was to earn their own income.

## Individual-level Evidence of Women's Economic Empowerment

### Individual-level Empowerment Evidence at Work

#### *Income as a Base for Economic Empowerment of Women*

For economic empowerment, we first need to examine if a member has received a substantial income. The fundamental question for the analysis of women's empowerment is if and to what extent women have gained through WCO work. Annual income levels (per member) of Hokkaido WCO members ranged from 180,000 yen to 1,730,000 yen in 2003, with a mean of about 602,000 yen. Mean income of members has increased from 479,782 yen in 2001 to 589,256 yen in 2002, and to 688,205 yen in 2003<sup>1</sup>. The average annual income level of the respondents' spouses is more than six million yen. Thus, the average annual income earned by WCO members is slightly higher than the equivalent of one month of their husbands' income.

#### *Are WCO wages low?*

Income size merely tells us the overall amount acquired. It is important to examine the wage rate and weekly working hours. Survey data shows a minimum two hours worked and a maximum 50 hours worked per week, with a mean of 18 hours. Working hours differ with the type of WCO. For example, those employed in food boxes and catering services,

and contract work for the consumer club co-operative have longer work hours because these services have regular customers and many of the members have to work together. On the other hand, elderly and home care, and childcare services have shorter working hours, allowing members to manage their time much more flexibly. Data on working hours and income show the average hourly wage rate (see Table 1) at WCOs in Hokkaido is just over 700 yen per hour. The lowest wage rate is found in food catering services with less than 400 yen and the highest wage rate is found in elderly care services with 824 yen. The minimum hourly wage rate in the service sector in Hokkaido is 638 yen, while for a convenience store clerk it is around 700 to 800 yen. Thus, the wage level at WCOs is slightly lower than that offered by part-time work, which is considered an alternative in terms of job opportunities for women.

Table 1. Average Hourly Wage Rate by Type of WCO in Sapporo (yen/hour)

Type of WCO	Average Hourly Wage Rate
Food	366
Elderly care	824
Childcare	662
Contract services	703
Handmade craft/Recycling shops	688
Planning/Editing	633
Others	760
All (average)	709

#### *Tax Policy and Women's Empowerment Horizon: Effects of Income Tax System and Women's WCO Work*

The Japanese income tax system has had an influence over women's participation in the labour market, effectively forming a barrier for women. It encourages women's income base to be limited in order to be eligible to claim the tax deduction on the spouse's income. Before 2004, there were two types of spouse deduction — normal and special. If a husband, assuming he is the main income earner in his household, claims his wife as a dependent, he can deduct up to a maximum of 760,000 yen from his taxable income. His wife should not earn annual income of more than 1,030,000 yen — the ceiling for this tax deduction — otherwise, the husband would become ineligible for the deduction. Survey data shows 70 per cent of women members have decided not to earn more

<sup>1</sup> The data used here includes 76 samples that have more than three years of wage data.

than 1,030,000 yen annually. Hence, working with WCOs is a comparable choice to part-time work for women. Respondents were also asked if they changed their dependent status after they started working with WCOs. By cross-checking dependency status before and after joining WCOs, it was found that 34 respondents out of 100 who used to be claimed by their husbands as dependents for income tax calculation, ceased to be so.

### *Skill Development as Part of Women's Empowerment*

That women have not made many gains in expanding their technical skills is implied by the relatively low number of respondents who have obtained qualifications since joining WCOs. The only exception is the one-quarter of members who have earned qualifications as elderly care specialists, a requirement when providing services under the national elderly care insurance scheme. However, many women might have acquired management and business skills with WCOs, which they either may not realise or do not regard as technical skills. The survey has also presented some positive evidence regarding women's empowerment as managers of WCOs. Several questions were asked to evaluate this point. First, in response to the question "Do you think your opinion and ideas with regard to the management of your WCO are valued?", more than 70 per cent of the respondents thought their views were important for better management of their WCOs. Second, the question "Do you feel that you are participating in the management of WCOs?" yielded responses confirming that more than 70 per cent of respondents felt that they played an important role in their WCOs' management.

### *Expansion of Women's Political Interests and Actions*

Empowerment can also be assessed by changes in political orientation and action before and after participation in WCOs. More than 80 per cent of respondents indicated that they now pay more attention to politics and close to 30 per cent of those said that they are now very actively participating in politics. There is no comparable data available for this figure; however, given the low voting rate found widely in Japan, this

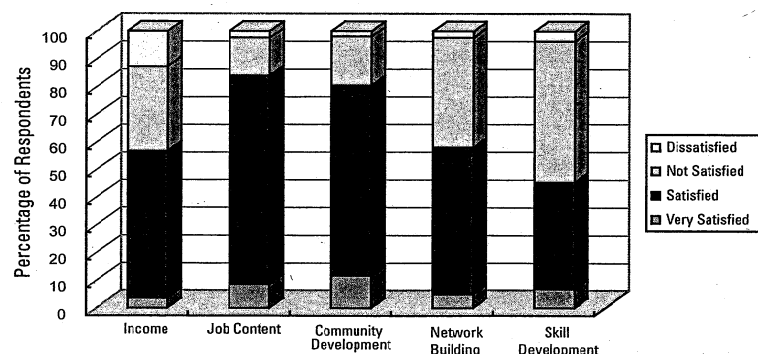
group's activeness in the political sphere appears to be high. This might be closely related to the tie-up between WCOs and the consumer club co-operative, which is also very active in politics<sup>2</sup>.

### *Overall Satisfaction for WCO Members*

Most respondents were very positive about their working experiences with WCOs. Job content and community development are clear reasons for satisfaction, as indicated by upwards of 70 per cent of respondents. Income level, network building and skills development yield somewhat lower levels of satisfaction (Figure 3). However, even with such limited accomplishment in terms of income size and skills development, these women have managed to change their positions at home, which will be shown in the next section. The survey asked how long members would like to continue working with WCOs. More than 60 per cent of the respondents indicated that they would like to continue their work as long as possible, while only a few per cent said that they would like to change jobs immediately. This supports the above evidence that members are largely satisfied with WCOs. Although the majority of members would like to continue working with WCOs, they have expressed some problems which may affect that continuity. Management of WCOs, lack of sleeping time and lack of governmental support for WCOs are listed as the major hurdles. Low recognition of WCOs and domestic work burden are also referred to as important factors.

<sup>2</sup> In Hokkaido, eight consumer club co-operative members are representatives in local assemblies. In Sapporo, six women members of the consumer club co-operative are elected officials.

Figure 3. Overall Satisfaction with WCOs



### Individual-level Empowerment Evidence at Home

#### Usage of Members' Earned Income

Empowerment can be assessed by the usage of members' earned income. Fifty-two per cent of respondents indicated that they allocate their income for allowances for themselves, followed by 42 per cent who allocate it for savings for themselves. More than one-third of the respondents use their income for food for their family and more than one-quarter of the respondents use it for school expenses for their children.

Table 2. Spending Patterns of Members' Earned Income at Home

Expense Items	Share of Income Allocated to Item by Respondents (%)	Monthly Average Earned Income Spent on Item by Respondents (Yen)
Food expenses	38.2	30,420
Utility expenses	5.5	15,555
Medical expenses	3.0	11,800
Educational expenses	27.9	33,326
Allowances for self	52.1	15,520
Allowances for children	9.1	9,833
Savings for family	9.7	18,750
Savings for self	42.4	32,778
Loan repayments	5.5	54,722
Other expenses	3.6	16,100

To learn more about the decision-making process regarding the use of their income, we need to look at the distribution of each individual's earned income. As shown in Table 2, more than 30,000 yen was allocated for loan repayments, savings for self, food expenses and educational expenses. Then, the question that remains is whether this income has influenced their positions and power in their households. It is important to look at evidence of possible effects on the social and political roles and position of women. Furthermore, the survey investigated who is the main contributor to different types of household expenditure among couples. As shown in Table 3.1, income earned by women members of WCOs, after they joined WCOs, was used for food expenses for the family. This indirectly confirms a slight increase in the women's voice in food purchases. Similar results are shown for other expenses (see Table 3.2 for educational expenses).

Table 3.1. Income Sources for Food Expenses at Home (Share of the Total Number of Respondents)

	After Joining WCO				Total
	Husband's Income Only	Joint (Mainly Husband's)	Joint (Mainly Self)	Self-income Only	
Before Joining WCO					
Husband's Income	59.2%	35.8%	1.9%	3.1%	100.0%
Joint (Mainly Husband's)	3.6%	92.8%	3.6%	0.0%	100.0%
Joint (Mainly Self)	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Self-income Only	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Table 3.2. Income Sources for Educational Expenses at Home (Share of the Total Number of Respondents)

	After Joining WCO				Total
	Husband's Income Only	Joint (Mainly Husband's)	Joint (Mainly Self)	Self-income Only	
Before Joining WCO					
Husband's Income	63.5%	29.7%	2.7%	4.1%	100.0%
Joint (Mainly Husband's)	6.3%	81.1%	6.3%	6.3%	100.0%
Joint (Mainly Self)	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Self-income Only	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%

### Women's Awareness of Current Social Issues in Japan

Female members have shown an increased awareness in current social issues in Japan since joining WCOs. More than 80 per cent of those who did not have any interest at all in the issue of lower birth rates now have at least some interest in the issue. Similar raised social awareness is shown for issues such as ageing, unemployment and education.

**Table 4.1. Level of Members' Awareness of "Lower Birth Rates Issues" (Share of the Total Number of Married Respondents)**

		After Joining WCOs			Total
		High Awareness	Some Awareness	No Awareness	
Before	High Awareness	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
joining	Some Awareness	20.9%	78.3%	0.8%	100.0%
WCO	No Awareness	17.4%	65.2%	17.4%	100.0%

**Table 4.2. Level of Members' Interest in "Community Development" (Share of the Total Number of Married Respondents)**

		After Joining WCOs			Total
		High Interest	Some Interest	No Interest	
Before	High Interest	87.0%	13.0%	0.0%	100.0%
joining	Some Interest	25.6%	74.4%	0.0%	100.0%
WCO	No Interest	18.2%	54.5%	27.3%	100.0%

### Women's Views on Their Empowerment

Our survey with members of WCOs included some open-ended questions to see if they found any noticeable changes in their lives after they joined WCOs. In this section, we summarise findings of the three questions to show qualitative evidence of positive changes in women's empowerment in their daily lives.

Around one-third of the respondents answered the question, "Did you notice any changes in your life after you started working with WCOs?" The narrative answers show the following keywords as major changes realised by women members: increase in family support; looking refreshed; and expressing one's views.

The following is a quotation from a narrative response: "At the beginning of my work with WCOs, my family, my mother and mother-in-law, did not support me very much. Rather, they asked me to stop working outside the home, since they were concerned the quality of my housework would deteriorate. Even my husband suggested I look for a part-time job with a supermarket. However, after five years of my working experiences as a workers' collective member, my children fully support me and I now can tell my opinions to my husband, mother and mother-in-law. They are no longer against my work."

Most of the respondents emphasised the democratic nature of workers' collectives when asked, "In your opinion, what is so unique about workers' collectives?" The narrative answers show repeated mention of the following keywords: democratic management; horizontal relationship and no hierarchical pressure; and respect for own opinions and ideas.

One respondent wrote, "A WCO to which I belong is a small one, but we discuss and decide every little thing. Through this way, I always feel very satisfied to be a member of the WCO." Another woman wrote, "There are no hierarchical relationships among the members in my WCO. We learn together and solve problems together."

The question, "Do you have any suggestions or requests to the public sector (local and/or central) based on your experiences as a WCO member?" yielded responses from more than one-third of respondents, with the following as keywords: requests for the city government; income tax system revisions; and revisions of *Kaigohoken*, an elderly care insurance scheme.

One woman included the following narrative response: "I think there are many elderly living alone nowadays, but they have no support from the government. We need to think what more we could do for such people." Another wrote, "I do not know much about policy issues. But I hope to have some kind of social safety net from the government to workers." Finally, one respondent expressed her concern that "After the elderly care insurance was introduced in Japan, our society is now inclined to rely on insurance rather than be independent of helpers' assistance."



## Organisational-level Evidence of Women's Economic Empowerment

### Basic Characteristics of the Hokkaido WCOs

We will first look at some key characteristics of the WCOs sampled. WCOs in Hokkaido include those that run food boxes and catering services, elderly and home care, childcare, contract work for consumer club co-operatives, handmade and recycling shops, and planning and editing services. These services are common among WCOs in Japan (see first section). Almost one-third of the Hokkaido WCOs provide services in elderly care, an area where service provision is on the increase in Japan because of the recent introduction of the elderly care insurance scheme, *Kaigohoken*. WCOs engaged in food boxes and catering service and childcare services are the next most common types of WCOs, and these three combined cover more than 70 per cent of the WCOs in Hokkaido. Depth of experience of WCOs in Hokkaido can be evaluated by the number of years in operation. A survey of representatives of WCOs indicates more than half started their groups at least five years ago (before 1999), with the oldest one in 1986 just after the Hokkaido WCO association was established. Impressively, more than 90 per cent of the WCOs are still operating. The age range of members is wide, but concentrated in the mid and late 40s. There are obvious age differences based on the WCOs business type. For instance, both food boxes and catering services and elderly care WCOs have older members (average age around 49 years old), while childcare and contract services with the consumer co-operative have younger members (average age around 43 years old). This could reflect members' interests and the kinds of skills they have.

### Main Reasons for Establishing WCOs

WCOs were started because founding members wanted to work and because of their strong interest in making a social contribution. Income earning is the third most popular reason for starting a WCO. Interestingly, the fourth main reason is to form a women's group. Indeed, some female members expressed how flexible and comfortable they felt working in a women's group. This suggests there might be significant differences in management between male-initiated and female-initiated organisations.

## Evidence of Women's Empowerment Through Management of WCOs

### *Increases in Membership, Turnover and Capital*

Data on staff numbers over time show that membership has grown (Figure 4). On average, a WCO was established with around nine persons and has grown to 14 persons now. There are differences across the various WCO business types, indicating which have been successful. Elderly care and childcare services, as well as contract work with the club co-operative, have all increased not only their membership numbers but also turnover. After over 20 years of development of WCOs in Hokkaido, only four of the 30 WCOs surveyed have male members, indicating the success of female managers at WCOs.

WCOs' turnover has grown by 33 per cent from 9.52 million yen per annum in 2001 to 12.7 million yen in 2003, as indicated in Figure 5.

When the WCOs were first established, an average of 560,000 yen was invested by members. This has increased by 86 per cent and now exceeds one million yen.

Figure 4. Membership Growth (by Type of Business)

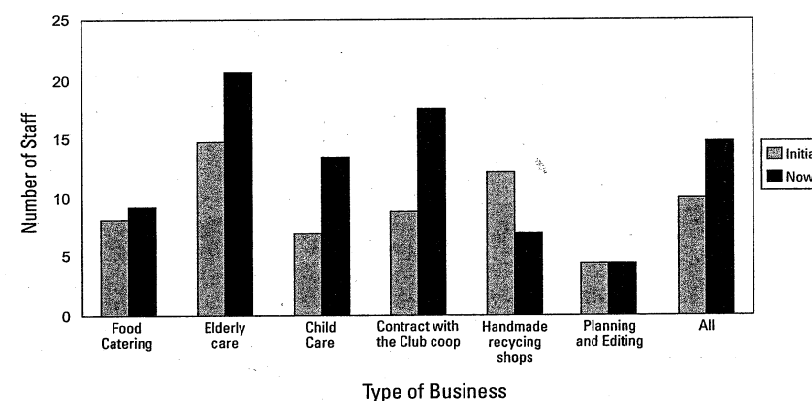
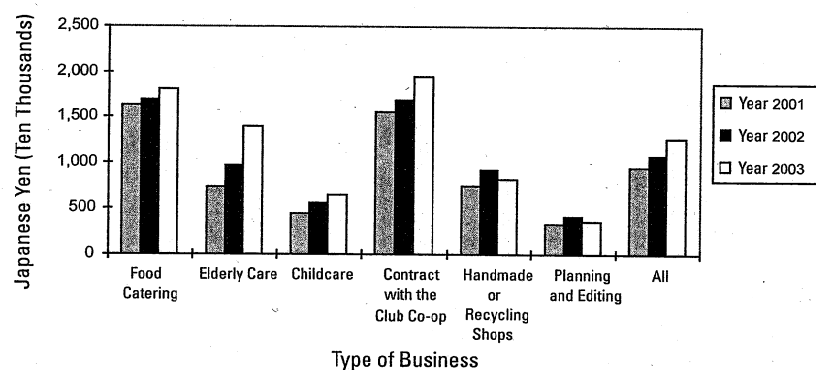


Figure 5. Business Turnover (by Type of Business)



### Organisational Management and Development

Unlike working for companies as part-time workers, members of WCOs are expected to involve themselves in the management of their WCOs. It is important to see how this participatory management has been implemented. A survey of representatives found that 70 per cent of WCOs involve all members in the establishment of their business plan and decisions. This is unique and differs from usual practices in the private sector. Interestingly, some members became interested in joining WCOs precisely because of the participatory manner in which WCOs are managed.

### Impacts of WCOs: Client Base

One of the salient features of WCOs in Hokkaido lies in the types of clients. More than 85 per cent of respondents listed ordinary citizens as their primary clients. Given the type of business WCOs are engaged in, such as elderly care and childcare, you would expect many of their clients to come from the public sector, which could offer better stability in management terms. However, the public sector has not consigned WCOs for their work, mainly because of the way in which WCOs are registered. The issue of legalisation of WCOs could be considered a limiting factor for WCOs in Hokkaido today.

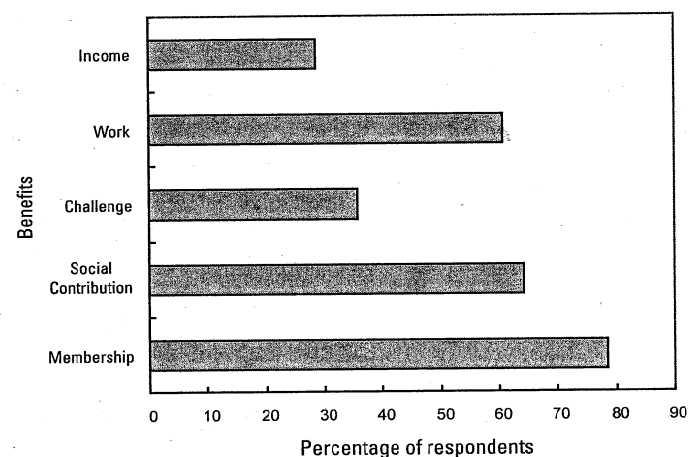
### Democratic Self-management Groups

Many women join WCOs because they are attracted to the management style. Members evaluated the atmosphere of the internal meetings as very open and friendly. Surprisingly, close to 90 per cent of the respondents said that they can discuss anything freely with their WCO colleagues at WCO meetings. In addition, when asked if and to what extent they were aware of the management situation at their WCOs, almost 80 per cent of the respondents said they knew management-related information.

### Overall Assessment of Start-ups of WCOs

Representatives of WCOs in Hokkaido positively evaluated the set-up of their own WCO. Major benefits for the set-up are shown in Figure 6. Although the start-up of WCOs can be equivalent to the start-up of a business entity in the private sector, representatives of WCOs confirm social network building and their direct contribution to society through their work. Work as a WCO member is significantly different from work as a part-timer for a retail store.

Figure 6. Benefits of WCO Start-ups



### Future Issues and Challenges

As shown in Table 5, WCOs have recognised that business expansion is critical for the continuation of their organisation. Also, recruitment is another serious agenda item for many WCOs. This is somewhat related to the low level of public recognition of WCOs. In fact, almost half of the members listed low wages as the most serious problem with WCO work, which representatives of WCOs now interpret as a need for business expansion.

WCOs are faced with the issue of building their members' technical and business skills. Only one-quarter of WCOs provide regular training opportunities for their members. Members are also concerned about how they can develop their technical skills themselves. As was shown previously, very few members have obtained qualifications of any kind, apart from the elderly care certificate.

Another serious issue raised frequently in the members' survey is the issue of social security for WCOs. Only six out of 28 (the total surveyed was 30) WCOs in Hokkaido have their own social security programme, while the rest have no protection<sup>3</sup>.

Table 5. Future Issues for WCOs (Share of the Total Number of Respondents)

	Member Increase	Member Training	Business Expansion	Low Recog- nition	Member Commu- nication	Social Security Programme
Very Serious Issue	29.6%	22.3%	55.6%	7.7%	22.3%	29.6%
Serious Issue	22.3%	29.6%	11.1%	42.3%	18.5%	33.3%
A Problem	29.6%	48.1%	25.9%	42.3%	48.1%	22.3%
Not a Problem	18.5%	0.0%	7.4%	7.7%	11.1%	14.8%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

<sup>3</sup> WCOs in Kanagawa, initiated by the Kanagawa WCOs Association, have established their own social protection fund, considered the most advanced form of a self-help-style safety net for WCOs in Japan.

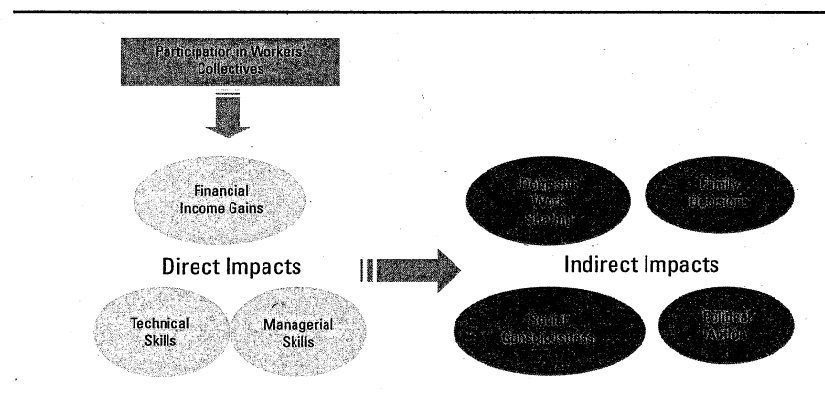
### PRELIMINARY EXPLORATION OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT MEASUREMENT

In this paper, we have focused on the case of WCOs in Hokkaido based on first-hand survey work with selected members of the WCOs. A major goal of our endeavour is to evaluate women's economic empowerment by developing indicators. In order for one to do this, initial data is needed; however, in most cases, such data is not easily available, partly because women's empowerment processes start unexpectedly. However, this case study has gathered various subjective data on some changes in women's domestic responsibility, household expenses allocations, usage of one's income and own interests, and concerns before and after joining WCOs. The following represents an exploration of a method that might be useful to measure some progress made by women who have their own income.

#### Empowerment Measurement: Construction of Composite Indices for Women's Economic Empowerment

Economic empowerment can be assessed by looking at the increase in one's income level. An important issue arises in terms of the side effects or second-hand impacts of such economic empowerment in strengthening one's position at home, in the community and in society in general. Empowerment can be measured by a composite index or points, which describes what one has accomplished since taking some concrete action such as joining the labour market. When we construct such composite index points, we should be aware that there are different types of empowerment impacts, including gains in the physical realm (household domestic chore sharing among family members); financial realm (use of income for self and/or family); political realm (voice against others or decision-making power); social realm (active in social issues and gender concerns); and so on. We view economic empowerment as the essential and necessary factor to rise in the non-economic or indirect empowerment of women as shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Impacts-flow of Women's Economic Empowerment Over Non-economic Empowerment



The composite index is a measurement of the total empowerment impact, which combines direct and indirect impacts seen from women's economic empowerment, as shown in Figure 7. In our survey, respondents were asked about:

- **Domestic work sharing** — Changes in domestic work sharing for cooking, cleaning the house, washing and drying clothes, daily shopping and so on.
- **Household expenses sharing** — Whose income was spent on family expenses such as food, utility payments, medical expenses and others.
- **Household decision making** — Who decides family matters like hospital selection, goods purchases, estate-related issues, and leisure and travel decisions and so on.
- **Social consciousness** — Their interests and concerns on current social issues, including the lower birth rate, ageing population, education issues and community development.
- **Gender consciousness** — Their views on gender issues such as women's political participation and gender division of work in Japan.

Respondents were asked to select the choices applicable before and after joining a WCO. For instance, in the case of cooking at home, respondents would select one of the four options regarding who cooks at home since they joined:

1. Respondent only
2. Respondent is main provider and others now assist
3. Others are now main provider(s) and respondent assists
4. Others cook

This method tells us if there has been any change in terms of domestic work provision and we can calculate such changes by subtracting one from the other. Similarly, we can construct points based on the survey data. We have six categorised types of women's empowerment as shown in Table 6. For construction of the six indices, only paired data was used.

Table 6. Defined Components of the Six Composite Score Indices

Composite Indices	Components of Indices
1. Change in domestic work sharing	Cooking House cleaning Washing and drying Garbage disposal Daily shopping
2. Change in common household expenses sharing	Food expenses Utility expenses Medical expenses Family savings
3. Change in own income	Own savings Own allowances and expenses
4. Change in household decision making	Hospital decisions Land/House purchase decisions Durable goods purchase decisions Leisure and travel decisions
5. Change in gender consciousness	View on gender division of work View on women's political participation
6. Change in social consciousness	View on lower birth rate View on ageing society View on education View on unemployment issues View on community development

All indices were calculated by adding up points of change for all components listed in Table 6. For instance, points of change for cooking, cleaning, shopping and garbage disposal were first calculated and then all the points were added up to create a composite score for the domestic work sharing dimension.

Based on distributions of the composite indices for domestic work sharing, less than half of the respondents maintained the same domestic sharing patterns before and after joining the WCOs in Hokkaido. The results also clearly show that about ten per cent of the respondents experienced significant changes (more than five points) in work sharing at home. Similar distributions are shown for all six composite scores.

## Analysis of Women's Economic Empowerment Composite Indices

### Significant Gaps Based on Members' Characteristics

It is important to examine if this data is useful to measure impacts of economic empowerment. First, some gaps in the scores were verified by sorting the respondents by certain characteristics, an important way to see the empowerment effects of working with WCOs. Then, we will see if there is significant correlation among the six indices.

The average scores of the six indices were compared based on: (i) the number of years of WCO work experience; (ii) dependency, (iii) husbands' income level; and (iv) members' age. The results are shown in Table 7.

A clear difference can be found in responses when comparisons on the length of work experience with WCOs are drawn. The longer the members work with WCOs, the more support they receive from family members in sharing the domestic burden (see Table 7.1 and 7.2). More importantly, the two tables show women's empowerment from the physical side of work to a financial base and on to their own views on gender. The husband's income level has no significant impact on the average scores (changes in the six different aspects of women's empowerment). This implies that husbands, regardless of income status, have not differentiated their roles and responsibilities, and suggests how strongly patriarchal views have persisted among Japanese men (Table 7.4). However, as Table 7.3 shows, those who are dependent on their husbands' income claim a low level of domestic work sharing support and a low level of household expenses sharing. These findings might suggest how seriously and strongly Japanese tax policies have impacted women's ability to empower themselves at home, ultimately stunting women's collective empowerment at society level.

**Table 7.1. Comparison of Average Scores by Members' Attributes (by Years of WCO Work Experience [*three years as the dividing line*])**

	WCO Experience (Years)	Number	Average Scores
1. Change in Domestic Work Sharing	More than or equal to 3 years	166	1.7155
	Less than 3 years	76	0.8421
2. Change in Common Household Expenses Sharing	More than or equal to 3 years	113	1.2124
	Less than 3 years	73	0.8082
3. Change in Own Income	More than or equal to 3 years	84	3.5119
	Less than 3 years	64	2.5469
4. Change in Household Decision Making	More than or equal to 3 years	104	0.1846
	Less than 3 years	69	0.0870
5. Change in Gender Consciousness	More than or equal to 3 years	112	0.5714
	Less than 3 years	75	0.4000
6. Change in Social Consciousness	More than or equal to 3 years	107	1.7477
	Less than 3 years	74	0.9324

**Table 7.2. Comparison of Average Scores by Members' Attributes (by Years of WCO Work Experience [*four years as the dividing line*])**

	WCO Experience (Years)	Number	Average Scores
1. Change in Domestic Work Sharing	More than or equal to 4 years	101	1.7921
	Less than 4 years	91	0.9011
2. Change in Common Household Expenses Sharing	More than or equal to 4 years	97	1.2577
	Less than 4 years	89	0.8315
3. Change in Own Income	More than or equal to 4 years	73	3.5890
	Less than 4 years	75	2.6133
4. Change in Household Decision Making	More than or equal to 4 years	89	0.2270
	Less than 4 years	84	0.0595
5. Change in Gender Consciousness	More than or equal to 4 years	97	0.6186
	Less than 4 years	90	0.3778
6. Change in Social Consciousness	More than or equal to 4 years	93	1.8710
	Less than 4 years	88	0.9318

**Table 7.3. Comparison of Average Scores by Members' Attributes  
(by dependency status)**

	Dependency Status	Number	Average Scores
1. Change in Domestic Work Sharing(*)	Dependent on husband's income	164	1.2439
	Not dependent on husband's income	28	2.1071
2. Change in Common Household Expenses Sharing(**)	Dependent on husband's income	163	0.9018
	Not dependent on husband's income	23	2.1304
3. Change in Own Income	Dependent on husband's income	128	3.2500
	Not dependent on husband's income	20	2.1000
4. Change in Household Decision Making	Dependent on husband's income	151	0.1404
	Not dependent on husband's income	22	0.1818
5. Change in Gender Consciousness	Dependent on husband's income	161	0.4845
	Not dependent on husband's income	26	0.6154
6. Change in Social Consciousness	Dependent on husband's income	155	1.3677
	Not dependent on husband's income	26	1.6923

\* Significant at 1% level. \*\* Significant at 5% level.

**Table 7.4. Comparison of Average Scores by Members' Attributes (by Husband's Income Level [six million yen per year as the dividing line])**

	Husband's Income Level	Number	Average Scores
1. Change in Domestic Work Sharing	More than or equal to 6 million yen per year	60	1.3667
	Less than 6 million yen per year	119	1.3445
2. Change in Common Household Expenses Sharing	More than or equal to 6 million yen per year	57	1.2456
	Less than 6 million yen per year	118	0.8983
3. Change in Own Income	More than or equal to 6 million yen per year	43	2.8605
	Less than 6 million yen per year	94	3.2766
4. Change in Household Decision Making	More than or equal to 6 million yen per year	51	0.1765
	Less than 6 million yen per year	111	0.1279
5. Change in Gender Consciousness	More than or equal to 6 million yen per year	57	0.4737
	Less than 6 million yen per year	117	0.4872
6. Change in Social Consciousness	More than or equal to 6 million yen per year	56	1.4464
	Less than 6 million yen per year	112	1.4196

**Table 7.5. Comparison of Average Scores by Members' Attributes  
(by Members' Age [50 years old as the dividing line])**

	Age (years)	Number	Average Scores
1. Change in Domestic Work Sharing	More than or equal to 50 years old	91	1.4396
	Less than 50 years old	100	1.3200
2. Change in Common Household Expenses Sharing	More than or equal to 50 years old	86	0.9186
	Less than 50 years old	99	1.1818
3. Change in Own Income	More than or equal to 50 years old	71	2.5352
	Less than 50 years old	76	3.5395
4. Change in Household Decision Making	More than or equal to 50 years old	76	0.2526
	Less than 50 years old	96	0.0625
5. Change in Gender Consciousness	More than or equal to 50 years old	87	0.4023
	Less than 50 years old	99	0.5960
6. Change in Social Consciousness	More than or equal to 50 years old	82	1.2927
	Less than 50 years old	98	1.5306

### Correlation of the Six Composite Scores: Is the Economic Index Related to Other Indices?

Lastly, we wanted to see if and to what extent the six score indices correlate with one another. As Table 8 shows, economic empowerment points (shown in the changes in own income factor) correlate weakly with all five indices. This suggests this might be a good proxy to assess if there is any progress made on women's empowerment at home. In order for us to explore further effectiveness of this method, it would be ideal to gather data from a control group such as married women who had not worked since they got married.

Table 8. Correlation Among the Six Composite Indices

		1. Change in Domestic Work Sharing	2. Change in Common Household Expenses Sharing	3. Change in Own Income	4. Change in Household Decision Making	5. Change in Gender Conscious- ness	6. Change in Social Conscious- ness
1. Change in Domestic Work Sharing	Person's coef.	1.000	0.236(**)	0.231(**)	0.134	0.204(**)	0.333(**)
	Stat. Prob.		0.001	0.005	0.083	0.006	0.000
2. Change in Common Household Expenses Sharing	Person's coef.	0.236(**)	1.000	0.284(**)	0.186(*)	0.090	0.165(*)
	Stat. Prob.	0.001		0.001	0.016	0.234	0.032
3. Change in Own Income	Person's coef.	0.231(**)	0.284(**)	1.000	0.234(**)	0.187(*)	0.218(*)
	Stat. Prob.	0.005	0.001		0.007	0.027	0.011
4. Change in Household Decision Making	Person's coef.	0.134	0.186(*)	0.234(**)	1.000	0.113	0.156
	Stat. Prob.	0.083	0.016	0.007		0.151	0.052
5. Change in Gender Conscious- ness	Person's coef.	0.204(**)	0.090	0.187(*)	0.113	1.000	0.672(**)
	Stat. Prob.	0.006	0.234	0.027	0.151		0.000
6. Change in Social Conscious- ness	Person's coef.	0.333(**)	0.165(*)	0.218(*)	0.156	0.672(**)	1.000
	Stat. Prob.	0.000	0.032	0.011	0.052	0.000	

Note: "Person's coef." is an abbreviation for the person's coefficient. "Stat. Prob." stands for statistical probability.

\* Significant at 1% level. \*\* Significant at 5% level.

## CONCLUSION

We have examined workers' collectives and workers' co-operatives from the viewpoint of women's economic empowerment in Japan. In particular, we have paid attention to the case of Workers' Collectives in Hokkaido and carried out primary data collection and analysis. Through our fieldwork, including the surveys and field visits, we have found clear evidence of empowerment of women through economic participation in Japan. We have examined the case of Hokkaido WCOs and we now have evidence of economic and non-economic empowerment.

First, women obtained an income source that they now can control themselves. Women with income from their WCO work have formed their income base by increased savings and expenditures on goods. Second, women have empowered themselves in decision making in the household before and after their participation in WCOs. At the household

level, women have gained an economic space that they can control, partly because of the increase in women's income base against their husbands and other family members. Third, at the society level, women increased the number of social issues they were conscious of and, in some cases, their active engagement in politics.

Although women's WCOs and workers' co-operatives have presented such progress in terms of women's empowerment at the individual, household and society levels, some caveats need to be made. Most of the women who have participated in women's WCOs are from middle and upper household income level families. Also, many are members of consumer club co-operatives, which tend to be sensitive to social issues as a group. This implies that the women who needed to join the labour market, especially after Japan went into economic recession, were not the majority of women who expanded their power by joining WCOs and workers' co-operatives. One reason might be low wages, which they could accept if their family base was stable. This is a big challenge for WCOs and workers' co-operatives to grow further in Japanese society in the future. Lack of legal support to recognise WCOs as a group engaging in community business is another serious issue. This issue needs to be followed up to tackle the recognition issue in Japan of workers' collectives and workers' co-operatives as an alternative social sector in Japan.

Lastly, empowerment is a rather broad-based concept to measure one's growth economically and non-economically. We have attempted to show one simple measurement by constructing a composite index for women's empowerment, though this is very much primitive in its form. Interestingly, it shows us that economic empowerment seems a necessary condition for non-economic or indirect empowerment effects to be realised. This could help us to further explore the development of indices of women's empowerment.

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# A Gender Agenda: Asia-Europe Dialogue 3

Economic Empowerment for  
Gender Equality

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