

EDITORIAL

Another tradition fading

A recent Cabinet Office survey shows a considerable shift in the views of male-female roles over the past decade.

Nowadays, more than 50 percent of Japanese men oppose having women stay at home solely as housewives. Yet, with so many women now working full and part time, it is surprising that nearly 44 percent of men still favor the traditional role.

In 1979, the percentage supporting women's traditional house-bound role was 72 percent, and only 20 percent disagreed with that. In 1992, the ratio had increased slightly to 30 percent against house-bound wives. If this trend continues, in the next 10 years or so, the numbers reflecting new attitudes are likely to climb even further. Of course, that depends on the economy, which is one of the prime reasons for this change in long-held beliefs.

After the "bubble" years, it became a necessity for many families to have two incomes to cover the bills. With ongoing change in family structures, especially the higher divorce rate, having a wife stay at home without working became an expensive luxury.

It is not all economics though, as social attitudes emerged that not only allow women to work but encourage them. Male pride in supporting a family has gradually modified as women have entered the workforce in increasing numbers. Marriages have been postponed until later, and sometimes forever. More long-term work positions have opened up for women, so they can establish something more than just tea-pouring careers. Clearly women not only need to work but want to work.

Finding the right balance between family and career, though, continues to be a challenge. The same survey found women giving priority to family over career, while men put careers first. This attitude has barely changed in three decades. Also

unchanged was the fact that women cook meals 85 percent of the time. Perhaps the measure of who usually cooks meals — husband or wife — might be a better gauge of whether traditional roles are really changing. The day may yet come when these surveys disappear altogether and individuals can freely decide life priorities regardless of gender.

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