

**What Perspectives Are Missing in the Discussion of Women Entrepreneurship Policy ?
-The Gender Gap in Entrepreneurial Activity in Japan and Challenges from the Perspective
of Women's Entrepreneurship Support at the regional (prefectural) level-ⁱ**

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Introduction

Research on women entrepreneurs in Japan began with a focus on elucidating the lives and realities in domestic labor and self-employment studies, and since the late 1990s, the focus has shifted to the creation and development of women entrepreneurs (Kawana and Hironaka 2016:12-13). In response to the increased attention to women's entrepreneurship in recent years, there has been a recent surge in research on women's entrepreneurship, which has been accompanied by an increasing number of previous studies clarifying the actual situation of women entrepreneurs in specific regions.

There are two major streams of previous research on women entrepreneurs from an economics perspective. One is the labor economics approach, which views entrepreneurship (self-employment) from the perspective of women's careers, and the other is the mainstream economics (including management studies) approach, which views entrepreneurship as a business entity or a business entity in an ecosystem. The former often extracts factors of success or failure by tracing the path of individual entrepreneurs and self-employed individuals (Kazumi and Kawai 2018; Lee 2020; Kazumi 2022), while the latter are often econometric analyses based on key entrepreneurship-related data from the Global Entrepreneurial Monitor (GEM hereafter), the Japan Finance Corporation (JFC), and other government statistics (Takahashi's series of studies; Suzuki 2013; Matsuda and Tsuchiya 2017; Kato 2022; etc.). However, the former focuses only on one gender (mainly women), while the latter focuses on business entities that transcend both genders, and thus lacks sufficient perspective on where the differences in entrepreneurship between men and women originate. In contrast, the "Women's Entrepreneurship Report," published biennially by the GEM, summarizes the characteristics of women's entrepreneurial activities that emerge from a comparative analysis of gender-specific statistics. While this report is useful for understanding international comparisons of entrepreneurship by gender, it is insufficient for a detailed analysis based on the economic and social structure of individual countries (i.e.,

ⁱ This paper is based on Junko Tatei (2024) *Nihon no Kigyō Katsudō no Danjokan Kakusa to Hi Sandai Toshiken no Jyōsei Kigyō Shiensaku (The Gender Gap in Entrepreneurial Activity in Japan and Women Entrepreneurship Policy in Non-Big Three Metropolitan Area [KFAW Working Paper Vol.2023-1])* with some additions, revisions, and reconstructions.

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Japan) because it covers all participating countries at different income levels.

The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to fill this gap. Specifically, first, using the gender gap in GEM figures as a clue, we will learn where Japan stands in terms of women's entrepreneurial activities by comparing Japan with other countries, and identify what is behind the sluggish growth of women's entrepreneurial activities in Japan and what perspectives have been overlooked in previous discussions. To preempt the conclusion, we will clarify that the existence of unpaid work (care work) is one of the factors that seem to create the gender gap in entrepreneurship, and that this perspective is either lacking or, even if it is in view, is discussed as a women-specific issue, i.e., as a women's issue. We will also clarify that this leads to the reproduction of a fixed division of gender roles, and that the entrepreneurial environment is a harsh one for women. Second, the case of Okayama Prefecture, which ranks in the middle of prefectures in terms of entrepreneurship, will be used to draw implications for measures to support women's entrepreneurship, especially at the regional (prefectural) level.

Characteristics of Women Entrepreneurs in Japan

According to the reference material “The Current Situation Surrounding Women” (2016) prepared for the first meeting of the “Women's Entrepreneurship Support Team” of the Collaborative Conference for the Promotion of Gender Equality in 2015, the significance of entrepreneurship has three components: (1) economic revitalization and high growth potential of new entrepreneurship, (2) job creation, and (3) the social diversity that entrepreneurship creates. It then identifies the following as the main characteristics of women's entrepreneurship: (1) although the ratio of “entrepreneurs” is lower than that of men, the ratio of “would-be entrepreneurs” has been increasing since 2002; (2) compared to men, women tend to start businesses in the “lifestyle-related services and entertainment” and “education and learning support” sectors; (3) they start businesses with relatively low costs and personal funds; and (4) the main reasons for starting businesses are that they can work at their own discretion regardless of their gender and age (Gender Equality Bureau, Cabinet Office 2016: 2-8).

In addition to this, Fujii and Kanaoka (2014), who analyzed data from the JFC Research Institute's “2013 Survey of New Business Startups (Special Survey),” point out the following. Namely, (1) about 60% of the respondents say they “do their own housework and childcare. (2) Female entrepreneurs target female consumers and employ women. (3) Looking at the percentage of entrepreneurs who are “in the black” by the elapsed time of entrepreneurship only, the percentage of female entrepreneurs who are “in the black” is initially lower than that of male entrepreneurs, but exceeds it at the four-year mark (Fujii and Kanaoka 2014:30-31; 35-38).

In summary, women entrepreneurs (1) bear a heavier burden of housework and childcare than men, and although the ratio of women entrepreneurs is lower than that of men, the ratio of women entrepreneurs who wish to start a business is not low. (2) With low personal funds, they often employ women and provide goods and services for women, and many of them start their own businesses in the fields of “lifestyle-related services and entertainment” and “education and learning support. (3) Sustainability tends to be higher than that of male entrepreneurship when limited to entrepreneurship that survives a certain period of time.

Gender Gap Changes in entrepreneurship based on GEM data

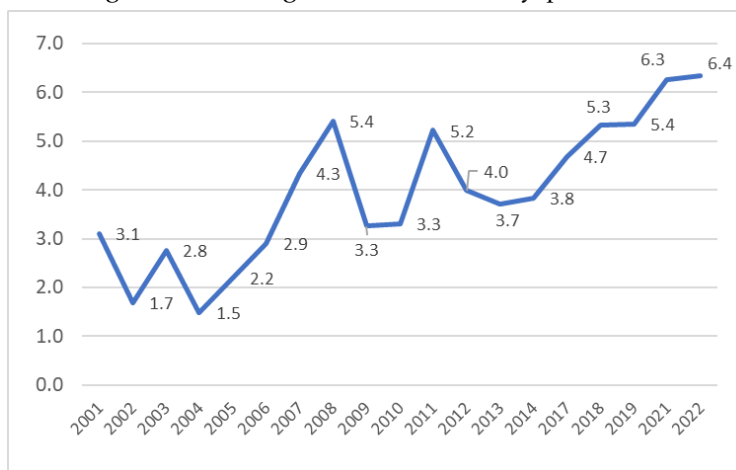
The difficulty in properly capturing entrepreneurship has been pointed out by Takahashi (2009: 2-5), Suzuki (2013: 18), and others. For example, the “self-employed” item in the Basic Survey of Employment Structure is generally used as a statistic indicating entrepreneurship in Japan. However, since the survey is conducted every five years, it is not possible to identify trends between surveys, and the same subjects are excluded from the next survey. Looking at the self-employed, including such issues, there were 5.11 million self-employed persons as of 2022, representing 7.6% of the total number of employed persons. The ratio of self-employment of men to women (female self-employed/male self-employed) is 0.4, but this ratio has remained almost unchanged since 1997. Looking at the ratio of self-employed to employed persons of both sexes from 1997 to the present, both male self-employed and female self-employed have shown a downward trend, from 14.2% to 10.1% and from 8.4% to 4.6%, respectively. Thus, the percentage of self-employed persons among those who have occupations is declining for both men and women.

The Japan Finance Corporation's “Survey of New Business Startups,” a survey of new business startups in Japan, is also often used as a statistic to show entrepreneurial trends in Japan, but the survey targets users who have been screened and financed by the corporation. There was also the issue of entrepreneurial activity not being able to be followed continuously without a separate panel survey (Suzuki, 2017:93). Despite these limitations, according to the “FY2022 Survey of New Business Startups,” the percentage of women among business startups has been increasing every year, and in FY2022, 24.5 % start-ups by women compared to 75.5% for men was the highest level since the survey began (JFC Research Institute, 2022).

This is supplemented by Figure 1 and Figure 2 based on the GEM. Figure 1 shows Japan's ratio of start-ups (TEA). The most significant feature of Japan's TEA is that it is low compared to other developed countries. However, despite its low level, its TEA has been increasing, and the ratio has quadrupled (6.4) since 2004, when it was at its lowest level (1.5). Takahashi (2021) points out that the gap in TEA between Japan and other advanced economies had been narrowing until the Lehman Shock in 2008, but after the Lehman Shock, the labor market environment deteriorated due to the impact of the economic recession,

which led to an increase in the entrepreneurship ratio in other countries, widening the gap with Japan (Takahashi 2020:10-12; 2021:7).

Figure 1 Changes in TEA ratio in Japan (%)



Source: Created based on GEM data (<https://www.gemconsortium.org/data>) .

※Data not available in 2015, 2016, 2020.

Figure 2 Gender disparity in TEA ratios (female/male) (%)

W/M	2012	2013	2014	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Japan	0.3	0.6	0.2	--	--	0.4	0.6	0.4	--	0.5	0.4
South Korea	0.2	0.4	--	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.5
Taiwan	0.7	0.5	0.7	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.9	0.7	0.8	--	0.6
Finland	0.5	0.6	0.7	0.5	0.7	--	--	--	--	0.7	--
France	0.7	0.5	0.6	--	0.5	0.4	0.8	--	--	0.8	0.7
Germany	0.6	0.7	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.6	0.9	0.6	0.6
Sweden	0.6	0.6	0.4	0.5	0.7	0.6	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.6
United Kingdom	0.5	0.7	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.7	0.8	0.7
United States	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.6	0.7	0.6	0.8	0.9	0.8	0.9	0.9

Source: Based on each year of “GEM Global Report”.

Figure 2, on the other hand, looks at the same period in terms of the ratio of men to women. What this shows is that the ratio of female to male entrepreneurship (TEA) has been sluggish. Overlaying these figures, we can summarize as follows.

First, Japan's entrepreneurship ratio has been rising steadily since 2001, albeit at a low level. However, looking at TEA by gender in Japan, even in 2022/23, only the male TEA is growing, with 3.6 for women compared to 9.1 for men, while the female TEA has stopped rising since 2018/19. Therefore, this growth in the entrepreneurship ratio was achieved by an increase in the male entrepreneurship ratio only. Second, a comparison of the gender gap with other countries shows that since 2001, other countries have increased their entrepreneurship ratios while narrowing the gap, albeit with small changes, while Japan's entrepreneurship ratio has grown while widening the gap between men and women.

Next, let us look at the motives for starting a business. While there are a variety of motivations for starting a business, GEM distinguishes two types. These two reasons are “entrepreneurship to take advantage of business opportunities (opportunity motivated type)” and “entrepreneurship out of necessity due to lack of other jobs (necessity motivated type).” Prior research has indicated that as the stage of economic development progresses, entrepreneurial activity shifts in weight from “necessity motivated type” to “opportunity motivated type” (Takahashi 2007).

In many countries, women tend to be more likely than men to engage in entrepreneurship out of necessity (GEM 2020:20), although this can be taken as a relative indicator of the degree to which both motivations are stronger. Japan is one of the countries with such characteristics. The trends from 2012 to 2018, when comparisons can be made, show that the proportion of necessity-based entrepreneurship among women in Japan is slightly higher than that of men, and that this proportion has remained virtually unchanged for nearly a decade.

In addition, eight factors affecting individual entrepreneurs and the country (region) were compared. The GEM assumes that there are two major factors affecting the level of entrepreneurial activity: individual attitudes toward entrepreneurship and the environment surrounding entrepreneurship (Suzuki 2013; GEM 2023), with individual attitudes (“business opportunity recognition”, “knowledge, ability, and experience”, “role models”, and “fear of failure”) and the environment surrounding entrepreneurship (“reputation as a good career choice,” “reputation for entrepreneurship,” “reputation as a social status,” and “media attention”), which are represented by a total of eight indicators (Suzuki 2013:27).

Looking at the comparable years 2018-2021, Japanese women have lower levels of “business opportunity recognition,” “knowledge, ability, and experience,” and “role models” than other countries, as well as an extremely low percentage of respondents who say they “have the knowledge, ability, and experience necessary to start a new business,” compared to men (GEM 2010; 2019; 2022). The lack of confidence in their business abilities is evident. Notably, despite the strengthening of measures to support women in starting their own businesses in recent years, women's confidence in their “knowledge, ability, and experience” has not been fostered, but rather has regressed significantly.

Recent Changes in Measures to Support Women Entrepreneurs

Support for entrepreneurship and business startups in Japan did not take off in earnest until 1999, when the Small and Medium Enterprise Basic Law was revised to provide startup support to those wishing to start their own businesses. According to Takahashi (2020), when the SME Basic Law was enacted in 1963, the government considered SMEs to be “too small and too many,” so when the Small and Medium Enterprise Agency was established, its

purpose included the phrase “those in the preparatory stage of starting a business,” but it was not included in the policy scope of the Basic Law. Following the amendment, support for entrepreneurship and business startups began in earnest with the addition of the phrase “promotion of business startups” as one of the SMEs support programs (Takahashi 2020: 9).

In January 2014, the Law for Strengthening Industrial Competitiveness came into effect. With the aim of promoting business startups in the region, this law “provides full support for efforts by municipalities to establish a business startup support system in cooperation with private business startup support providers, with the cooperation of the relevant ministries and agencies as well as the national government. Each municipality approves a “start-up support business plan” based on the “implementation guidelines for start-up support programs” provided by the government, and implements start-up support in cooperation with private start-up support providers (Mitsubishi UFJ Research and Consulting 2023:2).

In 2018, the Industrial Competition Enhancement Law was amended and the phrase “business start-up support programs” was changed to “business start-up support, etc. programs”, thus expanding the scope of business start-up support to include not only those who have already started business activities, but also the dissemination of enlightenment concerning entrepreneurship towards those who are not interested in starting a business (Takahashi 2020:16-17; 2021:14-15).

Currently, there are small and medium-sized business support centers in 47 prefectures and 13 ordinance-designated cities nationwide, where small and medium-sized business operators can consult on management issues, financing, and other matters, and support for business start-ups is also provided at these centers.

In 1996, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (then the Ministry of Labor) held a study group to examine measures to support female entrepreneurs, but in recent years, as mentioned above, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) has taken the lead in implementing such measures. In addition to this, in recent years, there has been a movement to accelerate support for women entrepreneurs due to the increasing promotion of women's activities. The following is a narrow focus on recent developments.

First, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), as part of its policy to promote women's activities in business, established a nationwide network of support for women entrepreneurs in 10 locations from FY2016 to FY2019, mainly through local governments, financial institutions, etc. In 2020, the networks established in the previous year were combined into “My Entrepreneurship Support Groups” (the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry served as the secretariat) to share information and know-how among the support networks and to foster entrepreneurial awareness among women on a nationwide scale. In 2021, the “Running Together Support Program for Women Entrepreneurs” was launched. In this program, “My Entrepreneurship Support Group” members collaborated to provide

companionship and support to women who are preparing to start their own businesses.

In terms of the relationship between regions and women entrepreneurs, reflecting the growth strategy of the Kishida Cabinet, which advocates “New Form of Capitalism,” the fiscal 2023 measures include a Regional Women's Activity Promotion Grant to provide consultation and support for the development of female digital human resources and entrepreneurs, and a Digital Garden City National Initiative Grant to provide support for local governments to support migrants and businesses to solve regional issues by utilizing digital technology (Gender Equality Bureau, Cabinet Office 2022:252). In this way, women's entrepreneurship is positioned as one of the key actors in growth strategies and regional development.

Support for Women's Entrepreneurship at the Prefectural Level: The Case of Okayama Prefecture

As a prefecture-level case study, we focused on Okayama Prefecture. The reason for using Okayama Prefecture as a case study is that in the “business startup rate by prefecture,” it ranked 16th in FY2015 and 22nd in FY2020, indicating that it has a relatively high number of startups, which may serve as a benchmark when discussing the situation in the typical non-metropolitan areas.

Support for small and medium-sized businesses in each prefecture and ordinance-designated city is provided by the local small and medium-sized business support center. In the case of Okayama Prefecture, this is the Okayama Prefecture Industrial Promotion Foundation (hereinafter referred to as “Industrial Promotion Foundation”), an affiliated organization of Okayama Prefecture. Support for business start-ups is provided by a variety of entities, including the prefectural government, municipalities, chambers of commerce and industry, and financial institutions, but also there are overlapping programs such as business start-up cram schools. In Okayama Prefecture, a consortium of the prefectural government, municipalities, chambers of commerce and industry, and financial institutions has been established as the “Business Founder Support Group” to ensure that such projects are mutually facilitated. The group is promoting support that leaves no stone unturned by holding regular meetings to share information and jointly organizing events.

Regarding support for women's entrepreneurship, the Okayama Prefecture Women's Business Startup Support Center was established on June 9, 2015 within the Center for the Promotion of Gender Equality (commonly known as the “With Center”). The aim is the promoting women's business startups and making their vitality a driving force for new growth in the local economy. This is a system to provide comprehensive support for female business startup applicants and entrepreneurs through the placement of specialized consultants (two days a month) to provide business startup consultations, as well as over-the-counter

consultations (web, face-to-face, telephone, e-mail) at the Industrial Promotion Foundation, and holding business startup cram schools and seminars. Specifically, the center serves as a general contact point for female entrepreneurs in Okayama Prefecture, providing information on the national, prefectural, and municipal levels to those who are unsure where to turn for advice, and connecting them to the appropriate department. The Management Support Department of the foundation is in charge of dispatching expert consultants and holding schools and seminars on business startups.

Based on the “Annual Reports”: from 2015 to 2021, the foundation’s past achievements can be confirmed-214 women have participated in the Women's Business Start-up Mini Seminar, of which 67 were already entrepreneurs at the time of the seminar and 44 started their own businesses after the seminar (21% start-up rate). The results from 2002 to 2021 of the “Business Start-up Seminars” (officially called “Mini Business Start-up Seminars by Sector” and “Business Plan Preparation Training”), which are open to both men and women, show that out of 366 participants, 97 had already started their own business when they took the course and 74 started after the course (a start-up rate of 20%). Compared to these figures, the percentage of female entrepreneurs is quite high. The foundation has several staff members who are certified as incubation managers, which indicates that they are qualified to provide companionship support to companies, and they are available for both male and female clients.

The author observed the first start-up by field school for FY2023, which was held on August 5, 2023. Although the program is open to the entire Okayama Prefecture, the actual participants are those who can commute to the Okayama Prefectural Library (Kita-ku, Okayama City), and most of them are from Okayama City, Kurashiki City, and surrounding municipalities.

The total number of participants was 25, of which nearly half (10) were women. They ranged in age from their 20s to 60s, with women in their 30s to 50s. The participants came from a variety of backgrounds, but all were currently living in Okayama Prefecture. The level of entrepreneurship of the participants varied from those who were planning to start their own business and were there for networking to those who had already started their own business and wanted to acquire specific knowledge. The types of businesses they wanted to start were also diverse, based on their life experiences. One of the characteristics of the seminar was that not a small number of participants were qualified counselors, consultants, or advisors who wanted to eventually start their own businesses.

Figure 3 Overview of Women Entrepreneurs Interviewed

Company	A	B	C
Established date	August 2, 2021 (as Limited Company) (Established in 2017)	January 1, 2017	August 1, 2019
Paid-in capital	1 million yen	na	na
Type of industry	Jewelry production and sales	Sales of Japanese tea and processed Japanese tea products	Metal manufacturing (welding and cutting)

Source: Based on the author's interview.

In addition, the author interviewed three female entrepreneurs who received support from the Okayama Industrial Promotion Foundation. Of particular importance are their statements regarding the existence of collaborators and their abilities, knowledge, and experience in entrepreneurship. This section focuses on these two items.

First, regarding the presence of collaborators, each of them responded as follows.

Company A: *My husband supports me in business, childcare, etc., and my sister works as an employee at the same company.*

Company B: *My own father was self-employed and had low resistance to entrepreneurship. When I told my family about my decision to start a business, everyone around me, including my parents, supported me. However, the family spread the financial risk by having my husband work as a company employee and myself as an entrepreneur. Although I basically manage the business on my own, I consult with my husband, when developing new products and deciding on management policies.*

Company C: *In addition to working with my husband, I receive referrals and orders for my office store through the network of business associates I established at my previous job.*

Next, we asked the respondents about their ability, knowledge, and experience in starting a business.

Company A: *I believed that the best way to start a business was to work for a stable company when I graduated from college, and I found a job at a publicly listed company. After that, I left my job and went to Australia to study, where I learned the know-how of entrepreneurship through the used car sales business and management of a shared house in Australia. In 2021, I participated in a business plan contest for female entrepreneurs in the Chugoku region in Japan and won a special award.*

Company B: *I was able to move into a local venture office after my business plan presentation was accepted. After moving into this office, I made more entrepreneurial acquaintances. Through repeated challenges, such as participating in various contests, I have developed my business plan presentation skills and expanded my circle of acquaintances and supporters in the entrepreneurial field while improving my visibility.*

Company C: *After attending a vocational school, I worked at an ironworks company, where I was in charge of a wide range of administrative, personnel, and sales tasks. As a result of this business, I had an association with a tax accountant. Since the establishment of the company, I have also been engaged in on-site work such as welding.*

Discussion

In light of the above chapters, we would like to consider the reasons why the population of successful women entrepreneurs exists but remains small in terms of what has been overlooked in the conventional discussion. To preempt the conclusion, a key to this point may be found in what is considered “challenges specific to women” (Gender Equality Bureau, Cabinet Office 2019:55).

In the “Survey of Women Entrepreneurs, etc.” conducted by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) in promoting its policies, “balancing housework, childcare, and nursing care (71.4%)” and “lack of knowledge and expertise in management (53.2%)” were cited as the top issues recognized by 154 entrepreneurship support organizations as being specific to women. The report concluded that because women are easily affected by life events such as marriage, childbirth, and nursing care, and it is difficult to separate business from these events, women entrepreneurs need “a partner with whom they can consult on both public and private matters,” “a supporter who can give advice,” and “support for household chores and childcare” etc. (EY Advisory Inc. 2016:43, 56).

The Gender Equality Bureau, Cabinet Office, Government of Japan's White Paper on Gender Equality in 2019 also points out that for women, in addition to business skills, it is important to learn to prepare for entrepreneurship while considering life plans, and to learn to acquire business skills through the “Programs for Developing Vocational Practical Skills,” taking “issues specific to women” into consideration (Gender Equality Bureau, Cabinet Office, 2019:55). In other words, public surveys and white papers have taught that women need support to improve their “knowledge, ability, and experience” in business while “balancing housework, childcare, and nursing care” in starting their own businesses. In fact, these recommendations have led to an increase in the number of seminars and entrepreneurship

schools for women throughout Japan. However, while there is no doubt that this is the right direction to take, it is clear from the high percentage of respondents to the survey that the biggest challenge in starting a business is not so much “knowledge, ability, and experience” as it is the overwhelming burden of “balancing work with housework, childcare, and nursing care.

The three female entrepreneurs discussed in this paper have family members who work at the same place or receive generous support from their families, and can be regarded as successful cases in which they are able to “balance housework, childcare, and nursing care” relatively well. Having secured such stability, they have improved their “knowledge, ability, and experience” through practice.

Although it is true that only women can give birth, and that women bear more of the burden of housework, childcare, and nursing care, “balancing housework, childcare, and nursing care” should not be a “challenge unique to women.” The problem lies in the assumption that “balancing housework, childcare, and nursing care” is trivialized as a challenge unique to women and that women entrepreneurs should receive support to overcome this challenge individually.

The theoretical framework envisioned by GEM captures entrepreneurship within an entrepreneurial ecosystem. An entrepreneurial ecosystem is defined, according to Stam and Spiegel (2016), as “a set of interdependent actors and factors coordinated in such a way that they enable productive entrepreneurship within a particular territory” (Stam and Spiegel 2016:1). Rather than the previous model of entrepreneurship that focused solely on individual practices, this concept takes a broader perspective, incorporating the role of social, cultural, and economic actors and institutions in the process of entrepreneurial activity (Dodd and Anderson 2007; GEM 2023).

In this model, entrepreneurship is a general mainstream growth model based on the assumption that entrepreneurship is an entity that contributes to job creation and national (regional) economic growth. The actor in this typical mainstream growth model is assumed to be a “rational economic person” who does not need to take care of child rearing or nursing care, and is not involved in “reproduction,” which is necessary for human beings, and such parts are “black boxed” (Kuba 2002:27). In other words, in line with this model, women entrepreneurs do not fit well into the “rational economic person.” What we need to do is not to reproduce support that attributes responsibility to individuals based on this mainstream model, but to question these assumptions themselves.

For example, Kuba points out that care work such as child rearing and nursing care does not contribute to the increase in “economic welfare (utility)” of mainstream economics, such as income and earnings, but is an important factor contributing to the increase in human “economic welfare” (Kuba 2002:40). She also emphasizes the need for a model that breaks

away from the “traditional male employment model” as follows.

The process of both women and men participating in the labor market must not be a process of expanding the ‘traditional male employment model’ for women, but on the contrary, a process of changing the existing male employment model (Kuba 2002:48).

Feminist Economics is a school of economics that pays attention not only to paid work but also to unpaid work, including care work, and does not only aim to achieve economic growth as an achievement goal. This feminist perspective is also necessary when discussing women's entrepreneurship. In other words, the traditional model needs to be modified to a model that targets the achievement of wellbeing, incorporating family, reproduction, and care, regardless of gender, and the support measures needed for each stage of business growth.

Such a restructured model would also allow women to more effectively acquire the “knowledge, skills, and experience” necessary for entrepreneurship. The fact that the three women entrepreneurs in this report were able to survive the Covid-19 disaster and continue to operate their businesses relatively smoothly to date is due in large part to their management efforts. However, it could also be said that their business success is due in part to the fact that they were able to focus more on improving their “knowledge, ability, and experience” in business because they were able to receive unpaid work support from their families.

Implications

In recent years, policies to support entrepreneurship have been associated with words such as “growth strategies,” “start-ups,” “economic growth,” and “regional development,” and have been heavily tinged with support for “start-ups that contribute to national (regional) economic growth. At the same time, however, the number of people starting their own businesses as small shop owners on the web site, freelancers, sole proprietors, crowd workers, and other so-called “independent self-employed” has been increasing in recent years. While these self-employed workers can create work beyond their local area with an Internet environment and on their own, they are also vulnerable due to the lack of (or inadequate) organizational and legal labor protection. Supporting entrepreneurship with a priority on increasing the number of entrepreneurs without restructuring the social policy system into a “work and family compatibility support” model will only lead to the creation and expansion of a precarious layer of employment in society.

What is needed at the local level is not support for only the “elite” of entrepreneurship through “selection and concentration,” but instead support for the creation of a safety net that enables the “masses” to take up entrepreneurship again and prevents the creation and expansion of an unstable employment layer. In recent years, there has been an increase in

new support and initiatives from the private sector, such as start-ups aimed at supporting female entrepreneurs and start-ups that incorporate flexible work styles that facilitate women's work. It will be important for the private sector and the public sector to complement each other to support entrepreneurship, and at the same time, for the national and local governments to rebuild the social policy system. In the immediate future, while proceeding in the above direction, it will be necessary to develop a third-party organization to evaluate and monitor policies on a regular basis so that policies are not trivialized into “individualization of problems” and “individualization of responsibility.” An example is a local version of the Monitoring and Impact Study Expert Committee established by the Gender Equality Bureau of the Cabinet Office to monitor and evaluate policies and their impact.

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