



March 18, 2008

Oxford Round Table "Women in the Modern World  
: The Struggle for Equality"

Individualism  
as a solution for achieving  
gender equality  
in Japanese society

Itsuko Dohi

(Kobe Shoin Women's University, Japan)

1

My main idea

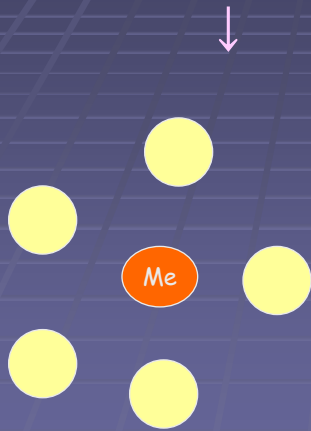
If optimal state of  
individualism and collectivism  
among interpersonal areas (individual,  
couple, group, society) exists,



gender equality is possible.

2

## Definitions of individualism and collectivism



Individualism is a social pattern that consists of **loosely linked** individuals who view themselves as **independent** of collectives.

3

## Definitions of collectivism



Collectivism is a social pattern consisting of **closely linked** individuals who each see themselves **as part of** one or more **collectives**.

4

## Hofstede's research (1967, 1973)

- Subject: 110,000 employees at IBM in 53 countries
- Focusing on the values of work, family, and society
- Estimated the degree of individualism - collectivism for every country.

5

Japan was high **collectivistic** score  
of the spectrum  
among **industrial countries**.

Ranking of score	Country	score
Individualistic	1 USA	91
	2 Australia	90
	3 GBR	89
	4 Canada	80
	4 Holland	80
.....		
	22 Japan	46
.....		
Collectivistic	53 Guatemala	6

6

## Are Japanese collectivistic ?

- Japanese are eager to belong to groups, identify with their group, and put pressure on each other to conform.
- Sociologist Ida : "Japan is a **couple unit** society" "**forced marriage** society"



7

## Japanese **collectivism** seems to cause **gender inequality**

Even if women get paid less than men, it is considered acceptable, because in a couple unit, **husbands earn money for their wives.**



The Japanese **wage differential** between the sexes is very large

8

Full-time working hours are long.



It would be very difficult for married women with children to be full-time workers.

9

The Japanese couple-unit society is not desirable for male and female personalities

- Masculinity includes self-extended factors.
- Femininity includes human-relation factors.

10

## Sex-typed couple

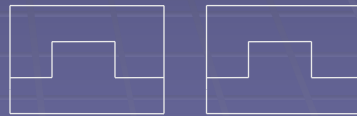
Male has masculinity  
Female has femininity



V.S.

## androgynous couple

both of them have  
masculinity and  
femininity



11

The Japanese family has been becoming *socially individualistic*

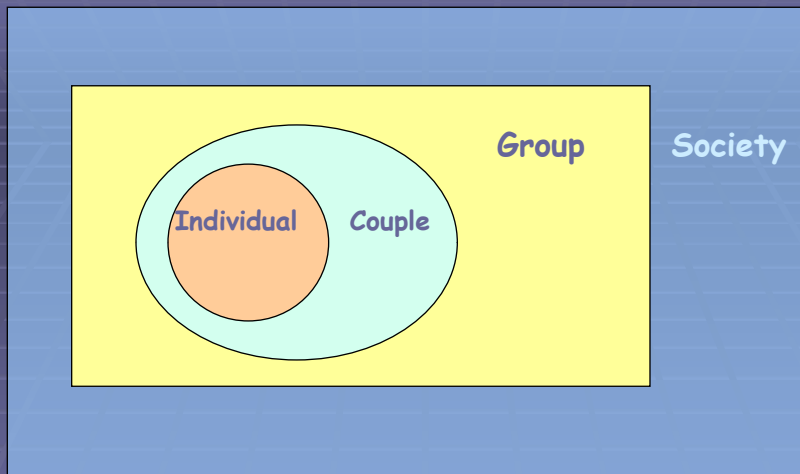
- Divorce rate has been rising.
- People are getting married at a later age.
- More men and women are remaining single.

12

## Individualistic tendency is also apparent psychologically.

- Couples are **not** "One mind , one body" .
- Couples are eager to have their **own accounts** to spend money in their own way.
- Couples want to have their **own private rooms**.

13



- My original model of 4 interpersonal areas

14

In contrast, social systems are still collectivistic.

- Identical surnames of married couples
- Differential wages between sexes increasing
- Insufficient day- care services
- Tax deductions for dependents

15

Japanese should accept that we can't return to a collective society any more.

- Japanese are losing traditional human relationships; communities are collapsing.
- Family size is growing smaller.
- Divorced wives can get their own pension.

16



## Which individualism is better, vertical or horizontal ?



( e.g.)  
U.S.  
France

Low equality  
Different from others  
Market democracy

17

## horizontal individualism



( e.g.)  
Sweden  
British Labor party

High equality  
Same as others  
democratic socialism

18

**Vertical** individualism seems to  
be **masculine**,

while

**horizontal** individualism seems to  
be **feminine**,

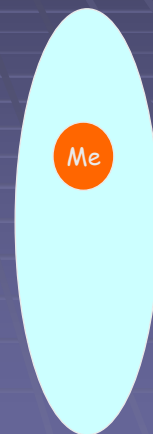
19

Japanese society seems to be  
**vertical collectivism**.

- Sex-roles are very strict.
- Work is more important than family for men.



The characteristics of a  
masculine society



20

Japanese people should be androgynous.

- Androgynous personality is the basis for an individualistic society.



The boundary between individuals and couples will be moderated.

21

In addition, Japanese society should conform to the individualistic tendency.

- e.g.) in the workplace, discrimination between single workers and married workers, full-time workers and part-time workers should be eliminated.



The boundaries between public and group will be moderated.

22

I am looking for co-editors for my project.

- I hope that some of you are interested in this topic,  
and that we will be able to share our ideas and research.

23

My plan is to do a consciousness survey concerning individualism - collectivism, gender equality, and social policy.

Thank you!

