



## Time for Housework and Time for 'Oshigoto'

Masae Yuasa

### ► To cite this version:

Masae Yuasa. Time for Housework and Time for 'Oshigoto'. Time & Society, 2006, 15 (2-3), pp.215-232. <10.1177/0961463X06066951>. <hal-00571016>

**HAL Id: hal-00571016**

**<https://hal.science/hal-00571016v1>**

Submitted on 1 Mar 2011

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



HAL Authorization

# **Time for Housework and Time for 'Oshigoto'**

## **Japanese housewives in a network business**

**Masae Yuasa**

---

**ABSTRACT.** This article investigates the time use and consciousness of a group of housewives working for Maple, a Japanese network business organizing 200,000 housewives all over Japan. The three years of fieldwork show that the invisible time organization of the housewives has been a vital obstacle to their business success. However, the article argues their time organization does not derive from static gendered time consciousness but it is rather produced and reproduced at the local level, through ideologies, discourses and practices. **KEY WORDS** • employment • housewives • Japanese women • Multi-level Marketing • time

### **Introduction**

Edward Hall (1983: 24–5), in his book, *The Dance of Life: The Other Dimension of Time*, argues that the system of time, whose rules are outside conscious awareness, is one of the basic building blocks of culture. M (monochronic)-time and P (polychronic)-time are major patterns of cultural-specific time systems: M-time schedules events as separate items (one thing at a time) but P-time involves several things at once. In M-time, the schedule commands and dominates people, but P-time respects people and relationships more than the schedule. Hall says that these two time systems are logically and empirically distinct and never mix, like oil and water; however, 'all cultures with high

technologies' incorporate the two time systems, in each way (p. 58). According to him, Japan is an interesting example: Japanese are polychronic when looking and working 'inward', but monochronic when dealing with the outside. But puzzling for outsiders might be the definitions of 'in' and 'out', which move and change in the highly situational Japanese culture (p. 215). Consequently, the Japanese shift from one world to the other literally from moment to moment. However, this article will describe the struggles of a group of Japanese housewives who cannot shift their time organization from one to the other.

Hall's analysis reveals a distinctive feature of Japanese time management, a shifting between different time organizations from one situation to the other. However, this argument is unsatisfactory on the following two points. First, his description of Japanese culture is rather monolithic without mentioning different types of time management in different social groups. Second, his analysis is rather static, underestimating local dynamics which produce and reproduce specific ways of time organization.

This contribution investigates the time use and consciousness of a group of housewives working for Maple (pseudonym), a Japanese network business organizing 200,000 housewives all over Japan. Although the volume of sales of Maple has recently declined, it has attracted many housewives who cannot get satisfactory jobs in the current Japanese labour market. The three years of fieldwork, whose details I will explain later, show that the invisible time organization of the housewives has been a vital obstacle for their business success: they are trapped in their familiar time organization and cannot shift smoothly to the other. This seems to be a rather common problem discerned among working women in many cultures. According to Hall (1983: 52–3), 'M-time is male time and P-time is female time', and the dominant time system adds another source of trauma and alienation for women. However, the article explains that the time inflexibility of the housewives does not derive from static gendered time consciousness but it is rather produced and reproduced at the local level, through ideologies, discourses and practices.

The group of housewives studied in this article is so distinctive that their experiences can not be generalized. However, some insights from the fieldwork might clarify a dimension of Japanese time organization at the beginning of the millennium.

### **Maple, a Network Business Which Attracts Japanese Housewives**

Network business is the Japanese term for a Multi-level Marketing (MLM) system, which invites individuals to become sales persons without formalized employment relations and simultaneously expands sales network by asking those individuals to invite other individuals to join the network. It started in the

USA in the 1930s and was imported to Japan in the 1960s. Since then the Japanese market for the business has grown to about 12 billion dollars in 2002, which is ranked as the second largest market after the USA. The top three popular products are cosmetics, underwear and supplements, which are all consumable goods periodically purchased mainly by women (*Economist Weekly*, 2003: 20).

Biggart (1989: 67–9) argues that network business is, in spite of its long history, accommodating changing social and economic conditions in the USA. It appeals especially to female workers who were expected to work outside the home due to changing social values in the 1980s. In the network business, women can schedule their work according to their family needs, and also they can remain free from the ‘glass ceiling’ which often prevents them from reaching the top status and income in the bureaucratic work organization. As one American executive of direct selling put it, the great threat to his business is the improvement of working conditions for women in ordinary businesses (p. 11). There is some similarity between the situation of American women in the mid-1980s and that of Japanese women now.

Maple is a successful Japanese network business set up in 1975. In 2003, it was ranked as the fourth largest network business in Japan with 39 billion Japanese yen annual sales (*Economist Weekly*, 2003: 28). It sells mainly female underwear and cosmetics, emphasizing the quality, conformability, and functionality of their products. Their customers, are mostly housewives in their 30s and 40s, who seem to tolerate the rather frumpy or unfashionable design of Maple’s products. Although its volume of sales has been gradually decreasing along with the shrinking Japanese apparel market since 1999, the number of independent distributors, most of them housewives, has continued to increase. In 2005, about 200,000 housewives worked for Maple all over Japan.

Maple’s marketing network consists of four different statuses. If a consumer has bought Maple’s products totalling more than 10,000 Japanese yen (75 euros), she can become a ‘mate’ and get products cheaply at 75 per cent of the normal price. Then if she decides to start her own business, she will be called a ‘business mate’ and join a group, which her recruiter, normally a distributor, is in. The group is headed by an ‘agent’, who becomes her ‘mother’ agent, and distributors in the group become her ‘sisters’. Although she will have many sister distributors who help her as mentors, her recruiter will maintain a certain responsibility for educating and training her. After about a four-month training period, she is almost automatically promoted to the position of a ‘distributor’, who can buy products for as cheaply as 60 per cent of the normal price. However, for distributors, rising to the top position and becoming an agent is not easy. If she wants to become an agent, she has to meet two targets. One is her own sales and the other is the sales of her junior members whom she herself recruited and trained. Combining both, she and her juniors have to sell more

than 15,000 euros worth of products (400 brassieres of Maple's average price range) for three consecutive months.

Maple's popularity among these housewives seems peculiar to outsiders. One of the top sales distributors I interviewed earned just 1500 euros a month, which is less than the average income of Japanese female full-time workers. Another distributor who worked an average 40 hours weekly earned just about 500 euros every month. The manager of Maple's PR office clearly admitted that Maple was not suitable for those who wanted to 'earn a lot' (Interview, 26 April 2004). However, the low wage of the distributors seems to be compensated for by the high wage of the agent.

Many distributors said that they aimed to become agents. The agent is the icon of success, driving a Mercedes and building a new house. It is said that they earn 7.5 thousand euros per month. In the conversations of distributors, a 1 million yen a month salary is often heard. However, there are no data for this. One agent talked about her own earnings of around 0.7 million to 0.8 million without directly selling products herself. Another agent earned around 0.3 million just after she became an agent. It depends on the scale of their network. Some set up their own company. In 2005, 524 out of 2237 agents had their own company. It is an incredible achievement for any woman in the Japanese society, where female business owners, including those with no employees, are just 2.8 per cent of all working Japanese (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2002). Even among legislators, senior officials and managers, only 9.9 per cent are women (UNDP, 2004: 221). The success stories of agents are always put in the programmes of their business meetings, lectures and seminars. However, only less than 1 per cent of distributors manage to become agents.

### **How I Joined Maple: Research Methodology**

I gained access to Maple through a former high-school classmate. I formally started my research in February 2002. My former classmate invited me to her 'tea party' and I was introduced to her sister distributors as a 'mate', the lowest status of the network, as her former classmate, and also as a lecturer of a university 'studying' about Maple. Since then, I have joined their try-on parties, meetings and tea parties organized by her or her sister distributors, where I also met and talked with her mother agent, her sister distributors and 'mates' who were consumers and candidates for business members. I also joined various events, such as an overnight seminar at a luxurious hotel, organized by agents and the company. Other than these business-related occasions, I had the chance to talk with distributors and agents personally, being invited to dinners, a house-warming party and other meetings. In addition, my former classmate frequently visited me in the evenings. We also often discussed various issues on the phone.

I conducted formal interviews with a female employee and a male manager of the PR office of Maple at the headquarters in April 2004. I also interviewed one of the top sales agents who does her business mainly in Hokkaido and a distributor who has done business in three different regional blocks. Furthermore, I conducted a survey of time use, asking 10 distributors, whom I know well, to record their time use on any consecutive two days. I designed my survey after the National survey 'Basic Research on Social Life' (*Shakai Seikatu Kihon Chōsa*), issued by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications. Based on their records, I interviewed the distributors individually, which took from two to three hours each.

### How Housewives Work for Maple

Maple appeals to 'freedom' (*jiyū*) as one of characteristics of the business; Maple business is 'a free-style job which you can do any place you like at any time you like' (Maple, 2003: 19). According to my time survey, the working time for ten housewives varied from zero to eight hours a day. They could easily skip business meetings due to family commitments, school events, neighbourhood events or even the bad mood of their children. One person who claimed to work an average of eight hours per day did not work at all on the day of her children's annual sports festival, *undōkai*. The other, who said she worked an average of three to four hours, did not work at all on the day she attended two meetings organized by her children's school and her neighbourhood association. However, they confessed to difficulties in recording their own working time.

These women often do two things at one time. For example, they deliver their products to their customers on the way to fetching the children after school. They get orders from customers on their mobile phones while helping their children to do homework. Furthermore, they are not sure how to demarcate their work from other activities. For example, school parent-and-teacher meetings and neighbourhood gatherings are places for networking, which could become a source of future business. Therefore, the definition of work time is very fluid and depends on the subjective view of each housewife.

Similarly, it is not easy to define the exact job contents for Maple's distributors. Among the many types of network businesses, Maple is categorized as a 'home-party system' like Tupperware. However, there is no standardized manual for training or their work. Each agent has her own style and encourages her juniors to find their own style for selling and recruiting most effectively. Distributors are free to organize their own jobs. They can ask (and also are asked by) their mother agent or sister distributors to help with parties, but there are no obligation or specific duties. However, there are still some core jobs which all business members do. They are try-on parties, re-visits, and tea parties (Maple, 2003: 13).

The try-on party is said to be the most fundamental among the three. Distributors invite a group of people to their home or their friend's house. They encourage customers to put on Maple's products and experience the value. The main objective is getting orders or selling products. For this purpose, a friendly and relaxing atmosphere is important: some serve a home-made cake with tea or coffee and others prepare small presents for a Bingo game for fun. If all the participants know each other very well, they show themselves in underwear and enjoy testing the hip-raising or breast push-up effects of the products. The try-on party should be followed by another important job: re-visits or personal visitations. Maple employees are encouraged to keep in contact with customers and get new orders.

Other than selling products, distributors have another important job: recruiting. A tea party is organized for recruiting new business members. It does not directly influence the income of distributors but is a precondition for their promotion. Distributors who have difficulty recruiting by themselves ask their sister distributors or mother agent to help them to recruit new members at the tea party. Also it is regarded as an important place for 'self-improvement' for the distributors themselves (Maple, 2003: 13). Appealing to the attractiveness of Maple and convincing newcomers to join in, the distributors themselves reconfirm their own starting point and motivation. Without any formal employment relations or much financial reward, motivating workers seems to be the very key for Maple's business.

### **The Tea Party Motivating Housewives**

There is an 82-page handbook, called *Maple Business Information*, whose first six pages are used for three poetic messages with beautiful pictures (Maple, 2003: 13). They are 'Do you love your current self?'; 'Didn't you give up your dreams?' and 'Tomorrow you can shine more'. In the tea parties which I have joined, those messages were sent in many forms to distributors and effectively motivated the housewives.

#### **Do you love your current self?**

On Saturday afternoon (9 March 2002), I was invited to a tea party organized by one of my friend's sister distributors, Mari. Her house was a newly built two-story house in a tract-house development [*danchi*]. Classical music softly filled her spacious living room beautifully coordinated in natural wood colours. Occasionally, the cheerful voices of playing children came from upstairs. Eight women sat comfortably on the floor around the table. They were four distributors and four mates including me. A cup of tea was served to each with some

cookies and chocolates. The tea party was roughly planned in advance by the distributors, and they, in turn, chaired the party. The chairperson started the meeting by asking each of us to share a good point about ourselves as a self-introduction.

Distributors cheerfully and fluently answered with funny episodes or interesting experiences. Knowing the question in advance, they could have prepared for it and, anyway, it was a familiar question which they had already answered numerous times. However, it was not easy for the newcomers like me to answer. One newcomer said that she liked her active character: she always goes out, meets friends and has fun. Then one distributor asked about how she managed the cost of going out. The mate admitted the significant expenses. Then she started to explain why she went out, complaining about the frequent company transfers of her husband that prevented her from getting jobs. The distributors let her speak out, asking questions about her situation and her problems. It was like peer-counselling. They listened to each other and gave advice to each other. But the difference from peer-counselling was their direct and indirect suggestions encouraging them to join the business.

Being asked about what they liked in themselves, the newcomers had a clearer recognition of their uncomfortable situation, problems, or ambiguous anxiety, if they had any. They were then encouraged to re-conceptualize them as issues of the self. The key might be that changing oneself is much easier than changing the environment. For this self-change, dreams have a central role to play.

### **Didn't you give up your dreams?**

One tea party (6 March 2002) started with self-introductions telling about each person's dreams. Their dreams varied from concrete to abstract, such as going to Disneyland with their family or getting the freedom to do whatever they wanted whenever they wanted. My ex-classmate said her dream was becoming an agent and giving lectures to distributors. However, she, one day murmured to me on the phone, 'Housewives cannot have even a dream [*shufu wa yume saemo moten no yo ne*]. I myself, to be honest, do not know what my dream is. That's why I have problems to push myself furthermore into work' (Interview, 25 October 2003).<sup>1</sup>

Her problem seems to be shared with many, especially newcomers. At another tea party on 22 February 2002, one distributor, looking back at the very beginning of her business, said:

When I was asked about my dream, I was embarrassed because I could not think of any, although I replied just 'going traveling'. But joining Maple I found my dream. That is to work actively without retirement until the age of 80. I have heard of an 80-year-old lady still working in Maple. That is so great, isn't it?



Being asked about dreams, housewives seemed to feel embarrassed about being without any particular dreams. This question allowed newcomers to reflect on their own everyday life and indirectly asked about any 'problems' which alienated them from their dreams. They were encouraged to have dreams and to realize them. Dreams are regarded as a driving force behind changing oneself.

### **Maple leads you to meet a beautifully shining 'another you'**

At the tea party, distributors often talked about their own stories of how they were changed by Maple. Some showed photographs taken before joining the business in order to visualize how they had changed. However, for many, there is no plausible relation between their dream and the business in Maple.

Among my interviewees, seven out of ten aimed to get the status of agent. But they regarded success in Maple rather as a springboard for realizing their dreams, such as doing volunteer work or opening a counselling room, which had no relation to selling underwear. They said that they wanted to become agents in order to gain the financial foundation for realizing their dream. All of them regarded that becoming an agent is not the goal but rather a tool for realizing their dreams which some do not know yet.

Maple targets women who are not happy about their social environment and encourages them to have dreams in order to change themselves and shine more. The messages also tell them that Maple can help this process. But it muddles up the four different issues of self-change, contributing to others, realizing their own dream and success in Maple's business. It also confuses means and objectives. But the contradictions of these four objectives are not openly questioned by housewives. Various 'experiences' and success stories of their seniors effectively confine the question and hide the contradictions – or housewives might not dare see them because they do not have other options anyway.

### **Why Did Housewives Join Maple? Social Desire of Housewives**

In my interviews, I asked 10 distributors about how they entered the business and what their objectives were at that time. Although they listed multiple reasons, their motivation to earn money was not the primary one except for one distributor. Furthermore, no one is attracted by the content of Maple's jobs, selling underwear in a network business: some confessed to having a rather negative image of selling underwear and also of network business.<sup>2</sup> Without many positive reasons, they were still attracted to Maple. The main reasons given are categorized into two groups: dissatisfaction about being housewives and about being workers. Both experiences did not give them enough recognition and self-esteem.

My former classmate said, 'I was so desperate to escape from home' (Interview, 25 May 2005). She was not allowed to go out by herself without the permission of her husband and stayed at home where her father-in-law, who regarded women as only for 'cooking and sex', kept the power. Another joined Maple when she started to question the meaning of performing as a good housewife. It was also the time when her relationship with her husband was becoming strained (Interview, 18 May 2005). She said that her husband, a successful entrepreneur, regarded her as a housemaid. In fact, later her legitimacy as a housewife was completely denied by her family members; her husband and two children left her, forcing her to divorce. Another woman joined Maple when she felt stuck behind as her youngest son entered primary school. It is a common 'empty-nest syndrome'. Without taking care of children there were not many jobs for her. Yet another person explained that her reason for joining Maple was that she could not find any meaning in being a housewife, whose job has nothing 'creative' and does not allow her to express 'herself' (Interview, 20 May 2005). She had tried various part-time jobs but felt the same.

Eight out of ten women gave their disappointing work experiences as a reason for joining Maple. Two worked as menial part-timer workers and felt 'no future' (*sakiga nai*), and no proper reward (Interview, 23 May 2005). They also felt the physical limitations of their jobs, making *bento* (lunch boxes) at a factory at midnight after their children went to bed. Two other ex-part-timers said, 'I cannot express myself' (*jibun ga dasenai, watashi rashiku nai*) in menial jobs: the output is the same although the workers are different (Interview, 20 May 2005).

Another woman challenged herself to get a more rewarding job than simple menial work. After her youngest daughter entered a primary school, she decided to take a qualification in medical knowledge. With hard work, she successfully got the qualification; however, after three job interviews she realized her efforts were in vain because she had no one at home to take care of her sick children instead of her (Interview, 13 May 2005). Even those who had a passion and pride towards their vocation could not pursue their career as full-time workers. They were cases of a piano teacher and an ex-primary school teacher. In both cases, they quit their jobs because of miscarriages and 'guilty' feelings about 'killing life' (Interview, 19 December 2003). They could not be satisfied with ordinary part-time jobs and thus joined Maple.

Those housewives felt bitterly empty, or sad, without proper recognition from others. Maple seems to have fulfilled those housewives, giving them enough recognition and approval which they desired. Before explaining how it did so, I will describe the general situation of Japanese housewives, which shows that the lack of proper recognition from others is not a private problem for a limited number of Maple workers, but rather a structural one for Japanese housewives at the beginning of the new millennium.

### Japanese housewives at the beginning of the new millennium

Becoming a full-time housewife is still a dominant life course for Japanese women. Although the rate of female employment has been increasing, about 70 per cent of working women quit their jobs when they have their first child (Imada, 2004: 4). After their children enter school, many re-enter the labour market but most of them work as 'part-timers'. Japanese 'part timers' are often described as a 'social rank' (*mibun*), working as long as full-time workers with unstable annual contracts and less payment (Inoue, 2001: 109–10). The number of part-time workers has tripled in the last 20 years and many of them are allocated to the responsible core work of the company; however, their working conditions have not improved. In 2002, among 12 million part timers, 70 per cent were women, mostly housewives, who earned hourly just 65 per cent of what full-time female workers did, although they earned 80 per cent of full-time female workers in 1975 (JILPT, 2005: 3).

Yamada (2001) describes Japanese housewives, including part timers, as those who have no control over their own living standard, little recognition from others and also limited psychological pride, all of which depends not on their own efforts and work (domestic chores) but on the income of their husbands. However, this 'unstable and irrational' social role of housewife was a model during the period of rapid economic growth after the war, with the hope for a better future with the gradually increasing income due to institutionalized practices of lifetime employment and the seniority wage system for their husbands (p. 176).

The situation has changed since the 1970s. The crisis triggered by the first oil shock frustrated the expectations and hopes of housewives; the wages of their husbands stopped rising as much as they had been. However, it was not until the end of the so-called bubble economy in 1992 that the Japanese housewife system faced the most significant challenges with the mounting risk of unemployment and decreasing income of their husbands (Yamada, 2001: 180). Furthermore the legitimacy of housewives is now in question.

Recently Japanese media revealed the comments of a government tax commissioner in an official meeting. He described housewives as 'strange lifeless people' who do not give birth but just 'hang around with money' (Ministry of Finance, 2005). This comment is rather extreme but the legitimacy of housewives has been radically undermined politically. The 'standard' model family for legislation changed from a single-income family to a double-income family in 2000 (Imada, 2004). The new model is applied to the Law of Promoting Helping Measures for Bringing up Future Generations which passed the Diet in 2003. The predicted labour shortage has become another factor pushing women to work. There is also strong pressure to abolish the tax and pensions system which encourages women to stay at home as housewives. Policy makers no

longer encourage women to stay at home to be good mothers (MHLW, 2003: 193–4).

The 12 million Japanese housewives are not only facing a mounting financial risk but losing the legitimacy of their social role. This has made housewives one of the worst losers in the process of the current re-organization (Yamada, 2001: 181). Although housewives working for Maple were not much interested in the intentions of policy makers or the direction of tax or pensions reforms, all felt a desire to change their situation from being full-time housewives or part-time worker/housewives.

### **Maple Constructs the Time of Housewives**

The dream to become an agent is too distant to attain for many. Nevertheless, the company has prepared various small dreams and objectives in the form of campaigns or contests. These reachable objectives encourage distributors to sell more and give them a feeling of achievement. Setting a certain period of time, these short-term objectives keep them busy. Although housewives are free to organize their own work schedules and there are no obligations or assigned duties, they seem to depend greatly on these campaigns to set their work pace. They include a one-month contest for selling new products, or recruiting new members, or a two-month contest for the number of try-on parties each distributor organizes. However, the biggest annual contest is a campaign for overseas travel. Those who have sold products beyond a certain level are invited to an overseas workshop free of charge, or for a majority at a reduced price.<sup>3</sup> For example, in 2002, 4800 distributors went to Hawaii.

In the overseas annual workshop, Maple prepared a fabulous party for the prize-winning ceremony. It did not fail to surprise the distributors. It rented the Palace de Versailles in France and Disneyland in California as venues, inviting famous Japanese actors or singers as the guests. Housewives wore evening dresses with flashy make-up. They were away from their families and treated as 'VIPs' by Maple's male staff and the staff of the travel agency. They said that it was one of the biggest events in their lives. But it was especially so for those who mounted the winners' platform with music and a spotlight. My former classmate who was on that winners' platform told me that it gave her tremendous power and confidence (Interview, 4 March 2002).

It is not only the case of the overseas workshop where Maple prepares a showy commendation ceremony. In even small campaigns organized by its regional offices, they created the occasion of giving housewives power and confidence. An agent from Hokkaido told me that getting 'recognition' and being 'praised' were incredible 'new' experiences for housewives (Interview, 6 April 2004). Imamura (2000: 69), a Japanese social theorist, claims that the desire for

approval, recognition or esteem from others is a very basic desire which underlies any interactions among human beings. Sociologists have recognized this type of reward as being as important as financial reward for work (Door, 2005: 65). These social rewards seem especially attractive for the housewives joining Maple. Maple knows it and has tapped their desire effectively, in the process motivating them to work.

After coming back from Hawaii, a distributor said:

I have said that my objective was becoming an agent. But to be honest I could not even have a concrete image of becoming an agent. But now I feel that my objective is going to Canada next year. It is very concrete. I now think I can reach my dream, achieving a concrete objective every year. (Interview, 4 March 2002)

I also heard that an agent said, to 'just simply follow the campaigns, then you can become an agent' (Interview, 6 April 2004). These discourses indicate that the work time constructed by various campaigns can bring business success. However, that is doubtful. If they want to become agents, they need to sell more products and recruit more people than those campaigns expect. But many have stopped pushing themselves further. The series of campaigns organizes the work of the distributors, whose target becomes joining the trip or mounting the platforms. Satisfied with the social reward, they have lost the chance to become agents. In order to become agents and realize 'success', they need their own concrete planning and scheduling to attain the objectives. However, it is not easy for them. Here time becomes the issue.

### **Time for Entrepreneurs and Time for Community**

Maple (2003: 21) confirms that its business members are not employees but entrepreneurs. It is especially so for those who want to become agents. Imamura (1994: 89–96) argues that entrepreneurs (not managers) cannot emerge without modern time consciousness. It is a combination of 'anticipating an unpredictable and uncertain future' and 'projecting' something to the future – the core of this attitude is transforming the 'now' (pp. 70–82). It also requires the development of a modern autonomous self through self-enactment and self-discipline. This modern self is also a target of a 'project'. The modern self should be improved by self-discipline, according to moral principles, a kind of plan, enforced by oneself (pp. 86–9). However, those women working for Maple seem to have difficulty adapting themselves to the modern time consciousness. They did not have much experience of accomplishing their own aims by self-planning and self-discipline. Furthermore, their strong desire for approval and recognition seems to limit their ability to learn to do it.

Maki (1981/2003: 43) argues that future orientation is a consequence of two

other characteristics of modern time consciousness, nihilizing and abstract time, which have originated from the merging of two evolving distinct cultures: one is anti-naturalism culture, like Hebrewism, and the other is urbanized society, like Hellenism. When people have become independent and alienated from both nature and *Gemeinschaft*, they have lost the origins and meaning of their lives both in the present and in the past. This pushes them to look to the future which could possibly give them meaning of their lives (p. 93).

Then what are the features of time in non-modern societies embedded in their nature and community?

Anthropologists record various time organizations in non-modern society, such as the cow clock among the Nuer and corn time for the Moshi. The Nuer says, 'I will come back at the time of milking cows'. For the Nuer, time is the conceptualization of various coordinated activities done in parallel in a community (Maki, 1981/2003: 39, 84–5). Their time is very concrete, coordinating acts of members of a community who work together in an environment where they live together. Their time does not fly away but rather keeps coming back, embedded in nature whose time swings like a pendulum between morning and night, life and death, and among the seasons. Its eternity lies not in the future but in the past. With this cyclical conception of time, people are not much interested in the future.

The life of Japanese housewives at home is based on 'community', their family members. Their jobs cannot be individualistic and highly depend on the activities of other members of the family. Housewives are not necessarily busy all the time, but their time is marked by small jobs such as time for making *bento* (boxed lunches) for their children, time for waiting for their children after school, time for sending children to after-school activities, the time for fetching a drunken husband from the near-by bus stop. They also have to be ready to attend to sudden needs from family members, such as the sudden fever of their children. They are expected to work according to the desires of other family members, targeting their satisfaction. There is no space for their own 'project' or a modern autonomous self with self-enactment and self-discipline. Their time is fragmented by those small jobs and plans of other members of their family (Kato, 2004: 151).

Their time was also once deeply embedded in nature but now it has gradually disembedded. In previous generations, they could not give birth according to clock time, but now medical technology makes it possible. Some mothers decide the nursing time for their baby according to clock time. Time for washing clothes was once related to the weather and sun movement. But it is no longer so with washing machines and dryers. Time for cooking was also related to the movement of the sun which controlled the time of the activities of family members. However, the activities of family members have been disembedded from nature and individualized, resulting in even more fragmentation of the time of

housewives. For example, one distributor, whose ten-year-old eldest daughter is a member of a girls' volleyball club, prepared a snack for her daughter at 5 pm, cooked dinner for her and her sister at around 9 pm after the volleyball practice of the eldest, and she herself waited for her husband to have dinner at 11 pm on three of her weekdays.

In my fieldwork, I found similar community-based time organization among Maple's distributors. They did not have much housework, but they worked for the new community constructed by Maple's network. Their time was marked by various meetings and small commitments, but they were not really coordinated or planned to realize their long-term objectives.

The women who work for Maple phone each other often, talking about their private issues. They visit each other even at midnight after their children go to bed. One distributor told me that she went to see her mother agent because she was always cheered up by her (Interview, 6 August 2005). Another distributor said she talked with her mother agent an average of two to three hours on the phone every day (Interview, 20 May 2005). Yet another distributor happily spends hours listening to the private problems and complaints of her juniors. She also organizes Friday dinner meetings with her junior distributors and their children. Their enlarged social/business network multiplied the social occasions which had no direct relation to sales opportunities. They joined various events, parties, and piano concerts of children, invited by customers or sister distributors.

A distributor told me that she enjoyed working because she liked taking care of her juniors, although her sales did not increase at all. She regarded her worries and anxieties as signs of her love. She said, 'I can remember how much I enjoyed bringing up my children.' Maple seems to have given her new 'children' after her real children had grown up. Also agents whom I met all regarded developing others as the very attractiveness of Maple's work.

This 'community work' – taking care of others – is also very much encouraged by Maple's official discourse. The owner-president and founder of the company gave a message in the *Maple Business Information* (Maple, 2003):

Maple is the work whose objective is *hitozukuri* (literally 'making people') through excellent products and a unique business system . . . In order to promote success we first empower ourselves and contribute to others and society through *hitozukuri* without pursuing immediate profits. (p. 10)

Maple's company mission also says, 'we have to contribute to developing people who join our business, while developing products which contribute to women's beauty and health' (p. 9). In an interview, Maple's manager in the PR office emphasized that the identity of Maple is in human relations, not in making money (Interview, 26 April 2004). In fact, contributions and devotion to others by distributors mean a cost-free sales-promotion tool as far as the company is concerned.

Those discourses certainly give housewives the impression that working for others is the way to success in business. This message is welcomed by many who desire recognition and approval from others because contribution or giving (not exchange) is the way to gain social reward, prestige and recognition. However, the time organization for that 'community work' is not compatible with the time for projecting the future. Housewives in non-modern time cannot have modern time consciousness.

Maki's earlier distinction between modern and non-modern time is parallel to Hall's M-time and P-time which I described in the introduction of this article. Hall (1983: 45) says the two systems are like oil and water – they don't mix: 'M-time is male time and P-time is female time; M-time dominates official worlds but in the home P-time takes over' (p. 52).

In my interviews, I was struck by the fact that nine out of ten housewives did not feel any time pressure. Before the interviews, I presupposed that they might feel a lack of time because of various campaigns within set periods of time and also their objective for becoming agents with their family responsibilities. But no one complained of a lack of time. They said that they had enough time. One interviewee explained that work for Maple was not a matter of time. It is true that more working time does not necessarily assure selling more. However, their relaxed attitude seems to contradict their words claiming to want to become 'agents'. This puzzle seems to relate to the two time systems. Putting emphasis on community and human relations, they are pulled towards the polychronic end of the time spectrum. Their claim of 'having enough time' relates to the P-time concept. Hall (1983) says: 'For polychronic people, time is seldom experienced as "wasted", and is apt to be considered a point rather than ribbon or a road, but that point is often sacred' (p. 46). Stressing involvement of people and completion of transactions they have strong consciousness of time when things happen but they are less conscious of time when nothing happens. This time consciousness that values people devalues schedule (p. 53). In fact, the housewives did not make concrete time schedules for becoming agents.

Although they talked about their dreams, I never heard that their dreams were materialized as concrete plans with timetables. But making concrete plans means disturbing their housework and community work, and contributing to others, which rewards them socially. Also nine out of ten interviewees said that they had enough leisure or spare time. Although many talked about becoming an agent, they did not really calculate the risk. But risk calculation for the future is a very modern attitude and also the very condition of a modern 'project'.



## Conclusion

The housewives jokingly describe their jobs as '*oshigoto*'. The honorific 'o' is not usually attached to '*shigoto*' (work) and is associated with stereotypical 'cultured feminine' speech. It sounds like a hobby or a job lacking serious commitment to earn money. But, it seems to me that their '*oshigoto*' are strongly motivated by social desire, seeking recognition, self-esteem, confidence, and pride. Listening to their stories, I realized how their social desires had been frustrated in their experiences of being housewives or part-time workers. Their efforts were not fully recognized either at home or at their workplaces.

Maple skillfully uses those social desires of housewives, putting housewives into a time framework constructed by various campaigns and contests. Their strong social desire, coupled with Maples's official discourse of 'contributing to others' also encourages those housewives to stay within their familiar time organization, which contradicts the time organization of entrepreneurs. In this time framework, they fail to attain 'success' or achieve their self-proclaimed goal. It is good for Maple to keep relatively fewer agents and a majority of distributors in terms of their profits. Although the housewives are busy taking care of each other, they still sell or buy products because their own discourses make it difficult for them to separate business from their social relations: selling and buying become mutual commitments as a part of their relations.

Maple, as a network business, exploits the social network for its business, transcending the boundaries of private/public, paid/unpaid, and production/reproduction. In order to be successful, workers have to calculate and plan for their performance, regardless of the situation. It means modern time or M-time throughout their everyday life. Despite the 'contributing to others' ideology, the required M-time for success in Maple is self-centred planning for which 'bottom line' is money: it is difficult to imagine that one sells more than 100 brassieres per month, only by thinking of others and contributing to others. Various discourses and ideology hide this simple fact and few distributors seem to fully understand this point. This coherent self-centred M-time is certainly new not only for housewives but also for a majority of Japanese, who combine the two different time frames from moment to moment. Then is it an exceptional case of Maple requiring M-time throughout one's own everyday life?

It seems to me that many Japanese now struggle to adopt self-centred M-time for survival, under the situation where more Japanese are individualized by being pushed out from their *Gemeinschaft*, company and home, which are getting more unstable because of neo-liberal institutional reforms by the government since the second half of the 1990s.

## Notes

This study was supported by the Hiroshima City University Grant for Special Academic Research. An early version of this article was presented in the 11th International Conference of the European Association for Japanese Studies held in Vienna in September 2005. I am especially grateful to Brigitte Steger, an organizer of the session and the Editor of this special section, who gave detailed comments which helped me to improve the article. I would also like to thank Carol Rinnert who kindly checked my English and gave comments.

1. The interviews for this research were all conducted in Japanese. All quotations have been translated by the author.
2. First, the network business has not received full recognition in Japanese society (*Economist Weekly*, 2003) and people confuse between network business and illegal pyramid business which often deceptively names itself as network business. Second, there is also a widespread feeling of resistance towards selling underwear. In the conversation, I heard several times distributors jokingly called Maple 'underpants seller' in their story of how they first conceived Maple.
3. The period of campaigns changed from time to time. It had been three months for a long time but was extended to eight months in 2002.

## References

- Biggart, N. (1989) *Charismatic Capitalism*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Door, R. (2005) *Hataraku to Iu Koto* (New Forms and Meanings of Work in an Increasingly Globalized World). Tokyo: Chuukoh Shinsho.
- Economist Weekly* (2003) 'Netowaku Bijinesu Daikenkyu' (Studies on Network Business), 26 August.
- Hall, E. (1983) *The Dance of Life: The Other Dimension of Time*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Imada, S. (2004) 'Tomobataraki to Ikuji no Chōwa o Mezashite' (Aiming for the Harmony of Dual Income and Child-care), *Business Labor Trend* 1: 2–5.
- Imamura, H. (1994) *Kindaisei no Kōzō* (Structure of Modernity). Tokyo: Kōdansha.
- Imamura, H. (2000) *Kōeki suru Ningen* (Homo Communicans). Tokyo: Kōdansha.
- Inoue, N. (2001), 'Sengo Nihon no Rōdōshijō Seisaku no Tenkai to Jendā' (The Transformation of Japanese Labour Market Policies After the Second World War and Gende)], in E. Takenak (ed.) *Rōdō to Jendā*, pp. 103–39. Tokyo: Akashi Shoten.
- Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training (JILPT) (2005) 'Fair Treatment of Part Timers and Full-time Workers', *Business Labor Trend* 1: 2–5.
- Kato, E. (2004) *The Tea Ceremony and Women's Empowerment in Modern Japan*. New York: Routledge Curzon.
- Maki, Y. (1981/2003) *Jikan no Hikaku Shakaigaku* (Comparative Sociology of Time). Tokyo: Iwanami.
- Maple (2003) *Maple Business Information*. Kobe: Maple.
- Ministry of Finance (2005) 'Minutes of 37th Basic Issues Subcommittee Government Tax Commission', 27 May. Available at: <http://www.mof.go.jp/singikai/zeicho/gijiroku/b37kisoa.htm>

- Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) (2003) *White Paper on Women's Labour*. Tokyo: JIWE.
- Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (2002) *Shūgyō Kōzō Chōsa* (Structure of Employment). Available at: <http://www.stat.go.jp/data/shugyou/2002/kakuhou/zuhyou/z010.xls>
- UNDP (2004) *Human Development Report*. Oxford: UNDP.
- Yamada, M. (2001) 'Keikoku! Sengyo Shufu wa Zetumetusuru' (Warning! Full-time Housewives Become Extinct), *Bungeishunju* 2: 174–81.

MASAE YUASA is an associate professor in the Faculty of International Studies, Hiroshima City University, Japan. ADDRESS: Hiroshima City University, 3-4-1, Ozuka-higashi, Asaminami-ku, Hiroshima 731-3194, Japan.  
[email: [yuasa@intl.hiroshima-cu.ac.jp](mailto:yuasa@intl.hiroshima-cu.ac.jp)]