

## **Postwar Japanese Retail Business and Gender : Focusing on Female Self-Employed Owners**

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The purpose of this paper is to examine the position of women self-employed owners in the retail industry in postwar Japan. When the self-employed owners of retail businesses were broken down by gender, the percentage of women was consistently around 30% from the late 1950s through the 2010s. From the late 1980s onward, the retail industry was dominated by corporate firms, and self-employment itself shrank significantly, although the percentage of self-employed women still remained constant. The women self-employed owners can be typified into four categories. The four categories are: (1) business succession from the husband, (2) business succession from a parent or older brother, (3) new business start-up triggered by the bereavement of the husband, and (4) new business start-up while the husband is still alive. In the type of (1), the woman herself was a family employee in a store owned by her husband and took over the management upon his death. However, since gender issues affected the acquisition of skills, including repair and processing, it appears that in many cases the wife was forced to change businesses if she could not replace her husband's role. The type of (2) was a pattern in which women took over the family business in the form of business succession when there was no male relative available to succeed to the family business. In the type of (3), retail business was started by mothers who became mothers and their children, and many of them obtained loans under the mother-child welfare system to start their own businesses. In type (4), many of them started their business while their husbands were working in other occupations, and they were motivated to start a new business for the purpose of earning additional income or because they loved the business. Retail operations by women self-employed owners were small in size, and the income earned from these operations was distinctly lower than that of men. This was largely due to gender inequality in financial preparation and skill acquisition, as well as time constraints due to the inescapable burden of housework, childcare, and other care responsibilities. Women have long been excluded from decision-making in shopping district organizations, and the causes of this exclusion should also be examined in light of the nature of these women self-employed business owners.

Key words: small retail trade, shopping district, business succession, entrepreneurship by women, welfare for mothers and children

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