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MASTER'S THESIS

**Negotiating life: Young women and reproductive decisions  
in Japan**

Master's Degree Programme in Gender Studies

School of History, Culture and Arts Studies

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## Abstract

The issue of the low birth rate, *shōshika*, has been centralised around in reproductive politics of Japan. With the fear of population and economic crises, the Japanese government has been promoting fertility education especially towards young women. The fertility education promoting marriage, pregnancy, and childbirth during the 'appropriate' reproductive ages is influenced by the Japanese family ideology and gender roles which are reinforced by the Japanese legal, welfare, and corporate structure. In addition, due to the severe economic stagnation, the neoliberalist welfare system has been encouraging women to provide care work for their family as well as to contribute to the labour market under unsecured and unstable irregular employment.

Having this social, political, and economic context, this MA thesis studies what factors contribute to reproductive decision-making of heterosexual women in their 20s in Japan and how they make their reproductive decisions and life plans. For data collection, I conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with seven heterosexual women in their 20s who lived in Japan. By applying Foucauldian theory of biopolitical governmentality, I analysed how young women interacted with social norms and practices related to women's reproductive behaviours and life paths in Japan. This study also focuses on the process of negotiation conducted by the research participants for their reproductive decision-making. The results of the study show that the research participants conducted internalisation, critique, and negotiation when making their decisions on reproduction. In addition, most of the participants obtained a sense of agency for their reproductive choices and life plans through the meaning-making process. It also shows the possibility for the application of biopolitical governmentality to individual experiences in gender and feminist studies especially in the context of Japan or East Asia.

*Keywords:* gender studies, feminist studies, reproductive politics, reproductive decision, fertility, population decline, governmentality, biopolitics, negotiation, neoliberalism, Japanese welfare system, Japanese family ideology, gender roles, motherhood, ideal life paths, life decision, young women, Japan, East Asia

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## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
Acknowledgements.....	3
1. Introduction.....	6
1.1 The beginning of this research .....	6
1.2 Research aims and research questions .....	8
2. The context of reproductive politics and women’s roles in Japan.....	9
2.1 The welfare and corporate system reproducing the Japanese family ideology and women’s roles .....	9
2.2 The reproductive politics in the era of <i>shōshika</i> .....	16
3. Theoretical framework.....	27
3.1 Biopolitical governmentality.....	27
3.2 Governmentality, bio-power, and biopolitics in gender and feminist research .....	28
3.3 Applying biopolitical governmentality to the reproductive politics in Japan .....	31
3.4 How power works with individuals in biopolitical governmentality.....	34
4. Methodology.....	36
4.1 Data collection.....	36
4.2 Analysis methods .....	38
4.3 Research ethics.....	39
5. Analysis.....	41
5.1 The life paths imagined as ideal in the current Japanese society .....	41
1) The idea of ‘happy family’ – a heterosexual couple with biological children.....	42
2) The normalised life paths to follow – childbirth after marriage .....	49
3) Emerging ideas against dominant norms and practices of family with children .....	51
5.2 Knowledge about women’s bodies and reproductive health.....	54
1) The ideal time of pregnancy and childbirth – healthy bodies for healthy babies.....	55
2) Women’s bodies as resources to produce offspring.....	61
3) Information excluded from knowledge – stigmatisation of menstruation and contraception .....	64
5.3 The notion of motherhood in the neoliberalist welfare system in Japan.....	71
1) The need of engaging in work after becoming a mother for financial reasons.....	71
2) Self-management on work-family balance due to inadequate welfare support .....	75
3) Additional meaning-makings for decisions on lifestyles after childbirth .....	81
6. Discussion.....	86
6.1 Discussion on research findings and the Foucauldian theoretical framework.....	86

6.2 Limitations of this MA thesis and suggestions for future research.....	89
7. Conclusion .....	92
Bibliography .....	93
Appendices.....	105
Appendix 1: Interview Participant Characteristics Table Summary.....	105
Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet (Japanese).....	106
Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheet (English Translation).....	110
Appendix 4: Interview Guide (Japanese).....	114
Appendix 5: Interview Guide (English Translation).....	118
Appendix 6: Recruitment Post (Japanese) .....	121

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 The beginning of this research

This research project explores what factors contribute to reproductive decision-making of heterosexual women in their 20s in Japan and how they make their reproductive decisions and life plans. My research interest comes from my own experience as a woman in her late 20s who grew up and has worked in Japan. I used to feel social pressure to get married and to give birth to my first child by the age of 30. This was because having children outside marriage would be a disadvantage both legally and socially. It was also because giving birth to children during my 20s would be ideal for health reasons due to risks of advanced age childbirth as well as physical strength for childrearing with the expectation that mothers would be the one to take care of children all the time. In addition, social discourse of a threat to becoming *arasaa* (a concept to describe people around the age of 30, especially people in the late 20s) seemed huge to me. The term '*arasaa*' can be used for any gender, but when the word is used to describe women, it contains whole concepts of women's life decisions including marriage, childbirth, and career. Often, being *arasaa* is more negatively mentioned if women are unmarried. Pregnancy and childbirth of women's first child seems to have been delayed to the early 30s in recent years due to more women getting married later than before (Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, 2022). However, because the concept of *arasaa* connected to marriage and fertility had been promoted excessively on media including magazines, TV dramas, and films, it had brought normalisation of putting pressure on *arasaa* women in daily conversations with friends and colleagues for my generation. In terms of fertility, I remembered that my female senior colleague once confessed to me that she was taking infertility treatment and enthusiastically gave her advice to consider trying egg-freezing whilst I would be producing healthy eggs. With the public discourses around age and fertility, I have been feeling pressured to plan my own life by considering the timings of pregnancy and childbirth if I would like to have biological children in the future. Furthermore, I have noticed that my female friends around my age in Japan often talk about their concerns on 'a biological time limit' so it motivates me to conduct a deep analysis on how young women in Japan perceive and negotiate with situations on reproduction surrounding them.

At the same time, it has been difficult for me to imagine a bright future to raise children in Japan due to inadequate social and financial welfare support for childrearing as I have recognised the government prioritising care for the elderly rather than investing in the younger

generation. Due to the continuous severe economic stagnation since we were born, people in their 20s, including myself, have never experienced national economic growth, and the standard of living for younger generations has been continuously declining. With less possibility to receive a satisfying amount of income compared to what older generations experienced, I have got the impression that it has been getting normalised for mothers to go back to work soon after childbirth and to devote herself constantly to managing childrearing and housework whilst adjusting their work schedules.<sup>1</sup> It seems to require too much hard work and sacrifice of mothers' lives without family, community, corporate, or social support in the current neoliberalist welfare structure and gender roles deeply embedded in society. In this circumstance, I wonder how these social, political, and economic factors would be influential to young women's reproductive decision-making in my generation with social pressure to give birth to children in the context of rapid population decline in Japan.

Since I started my journey to study gender and feminism at my bachelor's study, I began to question why women are always blamed for the issue of the low birth rate in Japanese society when the environment for reproductive work is not that attractive. Encountering feminist literatures introducing utilisation of women in reproductive politics for nation-building (Fassbender 2022; Ginsburg & Rapp, 1991; 1995; Miura, 2015; Ogino, 2008; Repo, 2015; Ueno, 2017, 2021; Yuval-Davis, 1997), I became interested in exploring this further in relation to women's experiences in my generation in the context of Japan. I find that Foucault's theoretical framework of governmentality, bio-power, and biopolitics (Foucault, 1978, 2008, 2009) would be helpful for my research analysis on women's perceptions, thoughts, and decision-making on reproduction as it sheds lights on entangled power relationships between the personal and the social. By applying Foucault's ideas of power, knowledge, truth, and critique (Foucault, 1980, 1995, 2007), I would like to identify how women in their 20s internalise social norms and negotiate with surrounding environments for their own life decisions on reproduction in current Japanese society where biopolitical governmentality is exercised.

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<sup>1</sup> In some countries, access to childcare services is considered as a family right. For example, seven EU countries provide a granted place at day-care centre or family day-care for parents at the end of their parental leave in the scheme of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) (European Commission, 2019). In Japan, childcare is not considered as a citizens' right in the national welfare scheme which relies on women to provide care work (Miura, 2015; Takeda, 2018; Ueno 2017, 2021). It brings hardships for mothers to receive day-care service due to inadequate public childcare support (see Nishina, 2018; Yamaura, 2020).

## 1.2 Research aims and research questions

The aim of this research is to explore what factors would contribute to reproductive decision-making of women in their 20s in Japan and how they make their life decisions related to reproduction. My research focuses on women in their 20s because of excessive social promotion targeting women around these ages to engage in marriage and childbirth, as previously introduced. In addition, as Japanese reproductive politics is constructed based on a family model of heterosexual marriage with biological children, I decided to study experiences of heterosexual women who live in Japan for my research. My research questions are the following:

- 1) What social norms and practices related to reproduction are young women expected to follow in current Japanese society?
- 2) How do heterosexual women in their 20s consider their own life decisions related to reproduction? Do they internalise dominant norms and practices or is there a point of critique?
- 3) In their decision-making, how do heterosexual women in their 20s conduct the process of negotiation (defined in Chapter 3.4) in the current political, economic, and social context?

It has been studied how the Japanese reproductive politics exercises its power through governmentality and biopolitics from the macro-lens by scholars in various academic fields such as gender and women's studies, medical anthropology, family sociology, and Japanese studies (Fassbender, 2016, 2022; Miura, 2015; Ogino, 2008; Takeda, 2005; Ueno, 2017, 2021). However, the study on women's individual experiences and reproductive decisions has not been fully explored in relation to the biopolitical governmentality of the Japanese reproductive politics to verify the theories in Japan or in East Asia. Therefore, this research attempts to fill the research gap of micro-level studies in a Japanese context by studying how women consider their life decisions related to reproduction in a specific political, economic, and social context in Japan through the lens of biopolitical governmentality. By doing so, I hope to contribute to the scholarship of application of Foucauldian theory of biopolitical governmentality in practice in gender and feminist studies, specifically in a Japanese context. In addition, I hope that my research will contribute to bringing insights on improvements for women's sexual and reproductive health and rights in Japan's future.



## **2. The context of reproductive politics and women's roles in Japan**

To identify what might be influential to young women's reproductive decisions, I will introduce the welfare and corporate structure constructing women's roles in Japan and its relation to Japanese reproductive politics. When looking at reproductive politics in Japan, it is greatly entangled with the Japanese family ideology embedded in the legal, welfare, and corporate system in Japan. The Japanese family ideology was newly formed when the constitutional monarchy was established in the Meiji era, and it has been maintained to support the current welfare and corporate structure as well as the legal family system of Japan.<sup>2</sup> Having this context, the welfare and corporate system reproduces the Japanese family ideology and gender roles, and it constructs women's positionality in current national politics. Due to its construction, gender roles and reproductive politics are structural issues in Japan. In this scheme, social, political, and economic factors interconnectedly contribute to reinforcing norms and practices which people are expected to follow (Foucault, 1978, 1980, 2008, 2009) for their lives and reproductive decisions. Therefore, in this chapter, I will first introduce the welfare and corporate system which reproduces the Japanese family ideology and women's roles under the neoliberalist government to show its influence on Japanese reproductive politics in current times. Following this, I will explain how the current reproductive politics utilises the family ideology and centralises women as a solution for the low birth rate to combat the national issues of population and economic decline.

### **2.1 The welfare and corporate system reproducing the Japanese family ideology and women's roles**

The Japanese welfare system is intertwined with the corporate system as well as the legal family system, and the Japanese family ideology and its women's roles have been reproduced. When looking at the Japanese welfare system, spending on child-related expenditures is remarkably low. According to the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW), social security expenditures for the year 2023 budget were the following: Pension 44.8%, Medical care 41.6%, Elderly care 10.1%, Children/Childrearing 7.5%, etc. (MHLW, n.d.). Expenditures

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<sup>2</sup> Although the Meiji government declared the establishment of a constitutional monarchy, the emperor was recognised as a god and the government was meant to represent the imperial will under the Meiji Constitution (Hein, 2009). It was replaced by the Japanese Constitution which was ratified by American officers in 1946 and came into force in 1947 under the Occupation after World War II (Hein, 2009). Despite the ratification of the constitution, the Japanese family ideology remains influential to the current political structure (Chapman, 2019). Although Japan is considered as a democratic country under the Japanese Constitution, Japan's politics has been largely dominated by one conservative party, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), in the post-war period (Liberal Democratic Party, n.d.).

for Children/Childrearing include education and school, medical fees related to pregnancy and childbirth, child welfare service, child-related allowance, and others (MHLW, 2005). The main reason why spending on the welfare support related to reproduction and childcare is so low is because the Japanese welfare system is constructed based on the idea that family should primarily provide care work (Miura, 2015; Ochiai, 2005; Ueno, 2017, 2021). ‘Family’ in this welfare scheme expects a family model based on the Japanese family ideology which in turn is constructed based on the Western virtue of Christianity as well as Confucianism, which consists of a male-breadwinner, a housewife, and children, so it is most of the time women who are expected to provide care work for their families (Miura, 2015; Ochiai, 2005; Ueno, 2017, 2021). It links to the legal family registration system, *Koseki-seido*, as the Japanese welfare system considers family as a unit for tax providers and welfare recipients. Under *Koseki-seido*, only heterosexual marriage is approved to be registered as family legally (Chapman, 2019). Applying this system as a base, the welfare and tax system works under the assumption that a wife and underage children are regarded as dependent family members to a husband (Chapman, 2019). The welfare system is entangled with the Japanese corporate system as well. This is because the welfare system relies on corporations to provide welfare benefits to regular employees and their dependent family members under the neoliberalist government (Dalton, 2017; Ochiai, 1997, 2005, 2019; Ogasawara, 2016; Ueno, 2021). Due to the influence of the welfare structure to the corporate structure, the employment system and working environment have an element of gender in their structure. Therefore, the corporate system reinforces the family ideology to sustain the current welfare structure relying on women to pay for the cost of care under the situation of the national population and economic declines. It shows that the Japanese family ideology supports the Japanese legal, welfare, and corporate structures as well as that the legal, welfare, and corporate structures are intertwined to reinforce the Japanese family ideology.

As previously introduced, the Japanese family ideology has been embedded in the welfare and corporate system, and gender roles expecting women to engage in reproductive work have been reproduced by this structure. The Japanese family ideology seen in the current society was heavily influenced by the family system, *Ie-seido*, which was newly introduced by the Meiji government in the Civil Code in 1898 (Chapman, 2019; Ochiai, 2014). According to Ochiai (2014), the patriarchal family structure of *Ie-seido* was formed by political authorities at the time by referring to the Confucianist family model derived from China, but Confucianism had not been too influential to the Japanese people for all classes at the national level before. In

fact, *Ie-seido* was not fully following the Confucianist ideology as women were seen as reliable and intelligent, being able to take care of their family members unlike the women's position in the Confucianist society (Ochiai, 2014, 2019). For example, *ryōsai kenbo*, the concept of 'good wife and wise mother' derived from Europe, was propagated as an idealised woman (Ochiai, 2005, 2014) although it is often considered as the Japanese traditional virtue of women's roles in current Japanese society. Such import of the European ideology was promoted because the Meiji era was when Modernisation, also known as Westernisation, took place rapidly. As it was common for women to work and to engage in family business or family matters before the Meiji era, a women's role of being responsible for care work in the private realm was new to the Japanese society (Ochiai, 2014). Ochiai (1997) calls this phenomenon as 'housewifization' (p. 19), and it became normalised for women to become a housewife.<sup>3</sup> This might be surprising for most of the Japanese people because the Japanese family ideology tends to be propagated as traditional in contemporary Japan.<sup>4</sup>

Although abolishment of *Ie-seido* was enforced in the revision of the Civil Code in 1947 due to the Occupation by the U.S. after World War II, the Japanese family system called *Koseki-seido* continues to exist until today. With the revision, marriage became to be considered as the agreement of both a husband and a wife rather than the wife becoming part of a husband's family, but it remains to be based on a family model, which is a heteronormative married couple with biological offspring (Chapman, 2019). Therefore, legal marriage is only accepted for heterosexual couples and either member of a couple must become the head of a family whilst the other must change their surname, most likely the female counterpart even today, because a woman was expected to be removed from her own family and to move into her husband's family under the previous family system, *Ie-seido*. Although *Ie-seido* was abolished when the Civil Code was revised in 1947, its patriarchal characteristics are still found in legal and social structures. Furthermore, a child is expected to be registered under married biological parents in *Koseki-seido* and the registration of a child outside marriage causes many difficulties (Chapman, 2019). The legal structure does not approve other types of families such as same-

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<sup>3</sup> During 1955 and 1975, with the decrease of the infant mortality rate leading to a smaller number of children in one household, it was idealised that mothers would provide care and affection to each child by managing their lives to put their children at centre (Ochiai, 2005). This strengthened the gender division of labour which expected women to become a housewife, and a certain life course appeared for women as they began to give birth to a similar number of children at similar ages (Ochiai, 2005). At the same time, towards 1975, a new trend was seen where middle-aged married women began to return to work for part-time after completing their long period of childrearing (Ochiai, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> The Japanese family ideology constructed in the Meiji era was orientalised and traditionalised by the Japanese government to propagate the idea that the family existed for the nation (Ochiai, 2005, 2014).

sex marriage, marriage with different surnames, and having children outside marriage.<sup>5</sup> The family ideology and legislation formed in the past remains in today's society, as seen in the welfare and corporate structure. Considering this, family formation and women's behaviours outside what is constructed by the political structure might be stigmatised socially, and it might be influential to women's life decisions related to reproduction.

When looking at the construction of the current welfare and corporate system based on the family ideology, the neo-liberalist reform was the main contributor to the gendered structure of the labour market and the welfare system based on the family ideology in Japan. After experiencing the rapid economic, political, and social changes post-war, the Japanese welfare system had been developed through policy reforms in the 1980s (Ochiai, 2019). According to Dalton (2017) and Ueno (2021), the welfare reforms started during the 1980s had been led by a male alliance of politicians, bureaucrats, and employers as well as male labour unionists. Intertwined with the corporate system, the family system was constructed as a male breadwinner model expecting a nuclear family consisting of a husband to work as a devoted full-time employee, a housewife to be responsible for care work, and a few children (Ochiai, 1997, 2005, 2019; Ueno, 2021). The family ideology of a heteronormative married couple with biological children was rebranded as the nuclear family model, which was again from the influence of the West, under the welfare reforms. It was utilised to achieve the aim of the government to reduce the cost of care work under the influence of economic decline due to the oil shock in 1973 (Ochiai, 2005).

Although the nuclear family model was derived from the Western nations, a Japanese characteristic was added where it expected male workers to devote themselves to their company, and in return, they would receive benefits of secured employment for their lifetime, promotion by working years, and welfare covering their families (North, 2012; Ogasawara, 2016; Ueno, 2021). Male career track workers are required to overwork for long hours and to accept random relocation instead of receiving secured employment until mandatory retirement and welfare benefits for their family (Dalton, 2017; Ogasawara, 2016; Ueno, 2021). This employment and welfare system is called 'Japanese style management' (Ueno, 2021, p. 17). Male workers' loyalty to their companies was rationalised by assumption that their wives would be responsible

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<sup>5</sup> This is due to strong opposition by politicians of the LDP, the conservative party ruling Japan for more than 60 years in total since the year of 1955 (Liberal Democratic Party, n.d.). For example, at the budget meeting of the House of Representatives, Prime Minister Kishida showed his hesitant attitude towards the law amendment for same-sex marriage and marriage with different surnames because it would 'change family ideology, value, and society' (*Kishida shushō*, 2023).

for their households and care work (Dalton, 2017; North, 2012; Ueno, 2021). Although there was a growing tendency by the late 1970s that middle-aged married women started part-time work after finishing the extended period of childrearing, the government aimed to promote women to stay in marriage as a housewife so that the welfare system cutting the cost of care work would be sustained. It reinforced a life course of women to become a housewife, give birth, raise children, and then do part-time whilst prioritising housework (Ochiai, 2005). To show benefits of becoming a housewife, protection of housewives was added to the welfare system in forms such as receiving increased spouse's share of inheritance and getting exemption from insurance fees, pension fees, and tax (Ochiai, 2005). However, Ueno (2021) points out that such exemption rather benefits their husbands and corporations by making married women earn less amount income rationalised by these aforementioned benefits (Ueno, 2021; see also Tsutsui, 2015). A further reason for its rationalisation is that family is defined as a unit for self-supporting under the welfare regime (Miura, 2015; Ochiai, 2005).

Around the same time, due to strong international pressure to working on gender equality, the Japanese government enacted the Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEOL) in 1986 to encourage corporations to employ female workers (Ueno, 2021). However, when looking at it closely, the law emphasises 'equal opportunity for labour participation' both for men and for women, but it does not promote gender equality (Takeda, 2018; Ueno, 2017). It does not guarantee gender equal employment for same positions and for same treatment. Only if women are in a same job position as men, they can claim fair treatment under the EEOL. From this rationalisation, Japanese corporations created a non-career track called *ippanshoku* to hire unmarried women to work as administrative support roles until they would get married whilst naming a career track for male corporate warriors as *sōgōshoku* for differentiation (Miura, 2015; Ogasawara, 1998; Ueno, 2017). This was because both the government and corporations did not want to break the existing structure of employment and welfare system based on the male-breadwinner family model with the Japanese style management. Therefore, full-time employment system for women had been developed separately to hire women only as non-career track workers with a premise of their primary roles as caregivers within family (Miura, 2015; Ogasawara, 1998; Ueno, 2017). With the fortune of experiencing a rapidly growing economy in the late 1980s, which was right after the welfare reforms took place and the EEOL was established, the corporate and welfare system based on the male-breadwinner model relying on women to provide care work was sustained successfully. As a result, women continued to leave their work after marriage and childbirth, became a housewife, and then

participated in the labour market again as a part-time worker after their children were grown up (Ochiai, 2005). Thus, the law enforcement was not effective to change the gender division of labour and the family ideology.

Since the 1990s, Japan has been experiencing an economic depression and a rapid population decline resulting in the decline of the working population. Japan's economic stagnation has been continuing for the past 30 years until today after experiencing the economic bubble bursts in 1991, which is called, 'lost 30 years' (Kubota & Yamamoto, 2023). In addition, the working population in Japan has been shrinking for 12 consecutive years as of the year of 2022 (*Japan's Population Falls*, 2023). To combat these issues, the Japanese government started encouraging more women to participate in the labour market (Dalton, 2017; Miura, 2015; Takeda, 2018; Ueno, 2017, 2021) and the double income family model started to be promoted (Takeda, 2018). However, the gender division of labour and welfare structure remained to be unchanged (Dalton, 2017; Miura, 2015; Schoppa 2006; Takeda, 2018; Tsutsui, 2014; Ueno, 2021). Due to masculinised working culture requiring high levels of devotion to the company, including excessive overtime working hours and relocation for regular employment, more women started working under irregular employment to make it compatible with care work (Dalton, 2017; Schoppa 2006; Ueno, 2017, 2021).<sup>6</sup> This irregular employment includes different types such as part-time, contract, and dispatched, and it provides less pay, less stability, and no welfare benefits in return for less devotion. The state's declining economy and inadequate welfare situation have been maintained by sacrifices of women to provide care work for family members and to work flexibly with inferior benefits and treatment (Schoppa, 2006; Mira, 2015; Ueno, 2017, 2021).

The situation got especially worse after policy implementation aiming for promotion of women's labour participation by Abe's second administration from 2014 to 2020 (Dalton, 2017; Miura, 2015; Takeda, 2018; Ueno, 2021). The prime minister at the time Abe Shinzo proposed the extensive economic strategy called 'Abenomics' in 2013, including promotion of women's labour participation as one of the most important policies of the national growth strategy. In 2014, the Abe government established *Subete no Josei ga Kagayaku Shakai Zukuri Honbu* [Headquarter to Create a Society in Which Every Woman Shines] and introduced *Subete no Josei ga Kagayaku Seisaku Pakkēji* [Policy Packages for Every Woman to Shine]

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<sup>6</sup> With the national economic situation, the Japanese government had loosened regulations for irregular employment (Tsutsui, 2015). This had accelerated corporations to hire women under irregular employment rather than regular employment whilst protecting regular employment for male employees with requirements for their devotions (Dalton, 2017; Schoppa, 2006; Tsutsui, 2015; Ueno, 2017, 2021).

(Cabinet Secretariat, n.d.). The focus of the policy packages was on promotion and visualisation of the women's labour participation rate especially in managerial positions whilst including other goals such as expansion of the number of nursery schools and day care services, skill trainings and networking for women, reduction of long working hours, awareness raising of men's participation for housework and childcare, and support for marriage, pregnancy, and childbirth. In 2015, the Act on the Promotion of Women's Active Engagement in Professional Life was approved for social and corporate institutions to submit their plans and goals for supporting female workers at workplace and information related to it (Ministry of Justice, Japan, n.d.). However, it only requires companies to show their efforts without any penalties if failing to reach their goals and does not include information about the gender pay gap (Ueno, 2017). In terms of childcare, the shortage of nursery schools and day care centres had been a serious issue, which is called *taiki jidō mondai* [the waitlisted children problem] because of saving social costs for childcare support (Yamaura, 2020). In fact, it is not uncommon that mothers need to take care of their children all day without any family, including husband, or community support, which is called *wan ope ikuji* [one-operation childrearing] (Yamaura, 2020). Therefore, the issue of struggling to get their children into nursery school affects mothers' lives. In 2016, during the Abe's economic policy implementation, the 'Go to Hell Japan!' controversy was brought up, starting from a furious blog entry by an anonymous mother whose child's application to nursery school got declined (Yamaura, 2020). Abe received a question about this matter at the House of Representatives Budget Committee session and refused to confirm the issue due to anonymity of the writer (Yamaura, 2020). This led to a huge backlash by the public, mainly mothers who had similar experiences, and resulted in a social media movement, petitioning, and protests (Yamaura, 2020). As a result of this attention brought at the national level, the Abe administration later announced plans to solve the issue and set a goal to reduce the number of the waitlisted children to zero for his policy. It was reported that the number of the waitlisted children had been decreasing, but it was most likely due to change of the criteria of cases counted as the 'waitlisted children' and exclusion of the 'potentially waitlisted children' (*Tokutei no en kibō*, 2019).

Abe's policy for 'every woman to shine' ended up compromising some aspects achieving gender equality, such as reduction of the gender pay gap, improvement of long working hours, and more support for care work. However, it was expected by several scholars and intellectuals because of scepticism towards conservative Abe's administration to conduct women's empowerment, recalling that Abe was strongly against promotion of gender equality for

protecting ‘traditional’ family ideology during his first administration from 2006 to 2007 (Kano, 2018; Takeda, 2018). As a result, it did not improve the environment for women and barriers remained for those trying to work under regular employment as the social, cultural, and political structure continued to expect women to become a mother and to engage in care work (Takeda, 2018; Ueno, 2021). Although the female labour participation had increased since the implementation, more than half of female workers were under irregular employment which would provide no career development, less paid salaries, less stabilities, and no benefits for social security (Takeda, 2018; Ueno, 2021). In addition, the increasing number of working mothers is often due to inevitable economic struggles rather than empowerment of women (Yamaura, 2020). Due to long-term economic stagnation, women have been exploited to bare both burdens as caregivers and as the cheap labour force (Takeda, 2018; Ueno, 2017, 2021; Yamaura, 2020).

Women’s lives get highly impacted by political, economic, and social factors especially in relation to their social responsibility for reproductive work. As previously discussed, the family ideology expecting women to provide care work has been centralised in construction of the welfare and corporate system in Japan, and the reproduced gender roles are intertwined with the current reproductive politics. These aspects are important for my research to understand the political, economic, and social context influencing on situations surrounding young women’s lives and their reproductive decision-making.<sup>7</sup> Having this welfare and corporate system as a background, I will introduce the current reproductive politics which are strongly influenced by the population decline, severe economic stagnation, and the family ideology in Japan in the next section.

## **2.2 The reproductive politics in the era of *shōshika***

Japan has been experiencing population decline since the 1970s and the issue of a super-ageing society with a low birth rate has been widely recognised and discussed. In fact, Japan has been the top ageing society in the world with over 21% of population of the age 65 and above since 2007 (World Bank, n.d.). With the fear of welfare and economic crisis caused by the drastic population decline, the Japanese government has been strongly promoting low birth rate countermeasures, *Shōshika Taisaku*, since 1990 when the government introduced the fact that

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<sup>7</sup> Under the neoliberalist welfare and corporate structure putting hardships on women to be hired under regular employment after childbirth without adequate public childcare support, there are more burdens put on single mothers who need to provide both financial support and care work for their children by working for longer hours with less income (Saito, 2020). Therefore, it is difficult for women to make their reproductive decisions to have children solely by themselves without a male presence, including becoming single mothers.



the birth rate dropped to the lowest on record in 1989 as ‘the 1.57 shock’ (Ohashi, 2017). It has been considered that this was when Japan entered the era of *shōshika* [the low birth rate]. When looking at how politicians see the issue of *shōshika*, the Japanese reproductive politics has been centralising women as a solution by promoting them to fulfil their roles as wives and as mothers derived from the family ideology supporting the current social welfare system. There have been many cases reported on the news media about LDP politicians’ speeches mentioning women’s roles for the low birth rate countermeasures. For example, the previous Prime Minister Mori said, ‘it is in fact problematic to take care of women who do not give birth to any children by tax’ at the debate session about *shōshika* in 2003, and the previous Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare Yanagisawa mentioned women as ‘reproductive machines’ at the LDP meeting in 2007 (*‘Mataka’: Seijika ‘shussan’*, 2019). Additionally, in 2019, the previous Prime Minister Aso mentioned, ‘it is problematic not to give birth’ at his debrief session about governmental affairs (*Aso-shi ‘Kodomo o*, 2019). In addition, recently, scholarship exemption for people who return to their hometown to get married and who give birth to children was proposed by Eto Seiichi, who is Chairperson, Research Commission on Declining Birth Rate Countermeasures of the LDP, at the LDP meeting in 2023 (*Kekkon/shussan de*, 2023). As these politicians have been placed in important roles related to *Shōshika Taisaku* in the government, it shows excessive political promotion of women’s reproductive roles as a means to combat the low birth rate, or the population decline and the economic stagnation in a wider lens. This has been reflected by the national countermeasures and pronatalist policies against the low birth rate.

Reproductive politics has been entangled with political motivation to strengthen the nation by utilising the Japanese family ideology since the Meiji era in Japan. For example, during wartime, the Japanese family ideology was orientalised and traditionalised by the Japanese government to propagate the idea that family existed for the nation (Ochiai, 2005; 2014). In this logic, the term, *Okuni no tame* [for the sake of the nation], was often emphasised to promote population policy with the national slogan of *Umeyo fuyaseyo* [beget and multiply] to strengthen the nation power (Fassbender, 2022; Norgren, 2001; Ogino, 2008; Takeda, 2005). Under the population policy, the government encouraged people to get married by offering some benefits for married couples, and the ideology of motherhood was constructed to give birth and to raise healthy children for the nation (Norgren, 2001; Ogino, 2008). This is similar to the current reproductive politics to promote marriage and childbirth, especially targeting young women, as a countermeasure against *shōshika* to combat the national issues of population and economic decline. The difference is that there is an emphasis on individual

happiness in the current reproductive politics due to negative remembrance of the wartime *Umeyo fuyaseyo* slogan (Fassbender, 2022; Ohashi, 2017), but several scholars have pointed out that there is strong political intention to achieve the national aim of population and economic growth behind the promotion of personal happiness in the current Japanese reproductive politics around the issue of *shōshika* (Fassbender, 2022; Ohashi, 2017; Suzuki, 2017).

For the recent few decades, discussion from a perspective of reproductive health and rights has been excluded from Japanese reproductive politics. For women's health policies, the term 'reproductive health and rights' has been eliminated and sex difference has been emphasised under the influence of *Shōshika Taisaku* (Tsuge, 2016; Ohashi, 2017).<sup>8</sup> This trend has been getting stronger year by year. In 2015, the revised version of *Shōshika Shakai Taisaku Taikō* [Outline of the Countermeasures Against the Low Birth Rate Society] proposed to include a new countermeasure, which was to promote education of 'medically and scientifically correct knowledge of pregnancy and childbirth' (Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, 2015, p. 9). However, the government has promoted only selective information as propaganda towards women to plan their pregnancy and childbirth, which is called 'fertility education' (Fassbender, 2016, p. 139) and 'life plan education' (Yui, 2021, p. 375). Soon after the revision of *Shōshika Shakai Taisaku Taikō*, the government published *Kenkōteki na seikatsu o okuru tameni (Heisei 27 nendo ban)* [To live a healthy life (For the year 2015)] which was the supplementary health education textbook for all high school students, and it included *Josei no ninshin no shiyasusa no nenrei ni yoru henka gurafu* [a graph of the likelihood of getting pregnant by women's age] in the section about *raifu plan* [life plan]. It was criticised by professionals and intellectuals that there was intentional falsification of the graph to put a peak at twenty-two years old which was followed by a sharp decline after that age (Fassbender, 2016, 2021; Nishiyama 2017a, 2017b; Takahashi, 2017; Tanaka, 2016, 2017). Reported by The Mainichi Shimbun, one of the major newspapers in Japan, the government apologised for the incorrect graph and distributed a replaced graph, but it remained to be considered as inappropriate (Nishiyama 2017a). Furthermore, under the section of 'life plan', there was a model case of a woman called *A-kosan* whose life plan was to get married far before the age of 30, to consult about childbirth at

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<sup>8</sup> Discussion of reproductive health and rights was once brought up and was included in women's health policies around the 1990s due to international influence including the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo and the World Conference on Women in Beijing (Tsuge, 2016). However, as the population issue was getting more serious since the 2000s, the term 'reproductive health and rights' was removed from policy documents and discussions (Tsuge, 2016).

the time of marriage, to start considering the number of children after marriage, and to make an effort to engage in childrearing whilst working after the age of 30 (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology [MEXT], 2015, as cited in Fassbender, 2016; Nishiyama, 2017a). Moreover, there was a misleading explanation in the textbook that ‘the number of people having a trouble with infertility had increased’ with a graph showing the increasing number of infertility treatment cases where multiple answers could be selected by the same person (Tsuge, 2017b). On top of this, there was modification of data to exaggerate the value of having biological children. For a graph showing answers to ‘What does presence of children mean to you?’, the numerical values of the ratios who answered ‘*ikigai, yorokobi, kibō*’ [what fulfils one’s life, joy, hope]<sup>9</sup> and ‘*mushō no ai o sasageru taishō*’ [a subject to give unconditional love] were higher than the original data (MEXT, 2015, as cited in Suzuki, 2017). According to the textbook, women were encouraged to plan their childbirth by considering that the appropriate age for pregnancy is during their 20s because ‘it is very important for men and women to think about their life plans based on their own will in order to lead a happy life’ (MEXT, 2015, as cited in Fassbender, 2016; Nishiyama 2017a).

It was found that the promotional content about pregnancy and childbirth with falsification of data was published with support by nine professional associations including Japan Society of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Japan Association of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, and Japan Family Planning Association (Nishiyama 2017a). The textbook aiming to provide ‘medically and scientifically correct knowledge of pregnancy and childbirth’ received harsh criticisms by the public. Being aware of the problematic promotion of pronatalist education, Nishiyama Chieko, lecturer of gender and women’s studies, and Tsuge Azumi, professor of sociology with a speciality in medical anthropology, established *Kōkō Hoken Fukukyōzai no Shiyō Chūshi Kaishū o Motomeru Kai* [Society Demanding the Withdrawal and Call-Back of the Complementary Health Teaching Material for High School Students] with members of academic scholars. They organised an emergency meeting and submitted letters of inquiry to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, the Cabinet Office, and associations and professionals related to this matter. However, the textbook was not revised until the end of the next school year.

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<sup>9</sup>According to the Cabinet Public Affairs Office (2022), *ikigai* is a Japanese concept referring to a passion that gives value and joy to life, but it is difficult to put direct translation in English. There are various ways for English translation such as ‘what fulfils one’s life’ and ‘a reason for living’.

The promotion of fertility education is found not only in school teaching materials but also in materials published by the local governments and mass media. According to Fassbender (2022), media coverage of *ninkatsu* [active pursuit of pregnancy] has been increasing since 2011 with the idea of creating an appropriate age for women's pregnancy. Information about 'egg-ageing', risks of advanced age childbirth, methods for becoming fertile, and infertility treatment is flooded on TV programs, fashion magazines, newspapers, and the internet to encourage young women to draw their life plans for the timings of marriage, of pregnancy, and of childbirth during 'appropriate ages' for reproduction (Fassbender, 2022; Tanaka 2017; Tsuge, 2017b; Yui, 2021). The media promotion of *ninkatsu* has been supported by the government to spread 'the correct knowledge of pregnancy and childbirth' and by biomedical business stakeholders to make profits from reproductive technologies (Fassbender, 2022). In addition to fertility education, the current reproductive politics based on *Shōshika Taisaku* focuses on support for marriage and childrearing as well. There is political intention to encourage women to get married and to give birth during their 20s through promotion of 'marriage support' (Minagawa, 2017). Marriage is considered necessary for childbirth as it can be seen from fertility education including education and awareness-raising of family roles in *Shōshika Taisaku* (Minagawa, 2017). At a prefecture level, local governments have conducted the Positive Campaign for Marriage and Childrearing which aims to spread 'the positive information about married life and starting a family towards young people' (Suzuki, 2017, p. 88). Rather than improving the legal and welfare system putting burdens on women, it merely promotes positive images towards marriage and a life with biological children. It shows that the reproductive politics around the issue of *shōshika* is conducted with the aim to reinforce the Japanese family ideology of heteronormative marriage with biological children for sustaining the existing neoliberalist welfare structure.

The government problematises a life without children when promoting the information about fertility and infertility although it is important to include education for elimination of discrimination and oppression against people who do not have any children (Suzuki, 2017). In promotion of 'correct knowledge of pregnancy and childbirth', infertility is often introduced as a threat which would steal happiness from one's life, and thus, there is a negative discourse that infertility or a childless life should be avoided (Fassbender, 2022; Suzuki, 2017; Tsuge, 2017b). By this logic, the Japanese government has been promoting infertility treatment since the 1990s by increasing its welfare support with expansion of coverage by the national health insurance gradually (Tsuge, 2016; 2017b). Tsuge (2016) argues that the government subsidises

new reproductive technologies and infertility treatment under the name of countermeasures against the declining birth rate and that it hides promotion of reproductive health and rights. In 2021, the government introduced *Funin Yobō Shien Pakkēji* [Policy Packages for Support of Infertility Prevention] for women's promotion in the labour market and for gender equality (Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, et al.s, 2021). It includes all kinds of women's reproductive health services such as cervical cancer screening, HPV vaccination, support for menstrual health issues, and awareness raising about reproductive health under the name of infertility prevention. The current politics of reproduction in Japan has been focusing on women's fertility as a solution for the national population and economic growth and has eliminated possibilities for people to form various types of families which would not follow the mainstream family model introduced previously.

Although the government aims to encourage women to give birth, political and medical structure for childbirth remains to be improved as it does not accommodate women's rights to obtaining various reproductive choices. One such example is inadequate access to painless childbirth with low percentages of medical institutions providing painless deliveries with epidural anaesthesia. In 2020, only 8.6% of delivery cases were through painless childbirth and only 26% of medical institutions provided painless deliveries with epidural anaesthesia (MHLW, 2020). In addition, painless childbirth using epidural anaesthesia is not included in the national healthcare insurance coverage. This inadequate access to painless childbirth is related to positive discourses around natural childbirth with pain in Japanese society (Tanabe, 2006; 2019). Childbirth pain is often perceived positively as 'happy pain' that it brings a joy to encounter with their own babies by women who have experienced childbirth (Tanabe, 2006; 2019). In addition, childbirth pain is often associated with becoming a good mother who can take a good care of her own child with love (Tanabe, 2006, 2019; Yoshida, 2008). Therefore, there are cases that family members including pregnant women's husbands, mothers, and husbands' mothers, believe that experience childbirth pain is natural and necessary (Tanabe, 2006). According to Tanabe Keiko who is a scholar of medical anthropology and midwifery, this construction of ideology associating childbirth pain and motherhood comes from *Ie-seido* as women built their status within their husbands' families only by how much they endured childbirth pain (Takasaki, 2022). In fact, childbirth pain is considered what women can naturally endure and what only women can overcome by men including pregnant women's husbands and male medical practitioners (Tanabe, 2006). This leads to opposition to painless childbirth by family members as well as reluctance to it by medical practitioners. Entangled

with this social belief valuing childbirth pain, contraction and childbirth pain are often considered associated in a medical scene, and thus, there are medical practitioners who believe that natural birth is better than epidural labour (Tanabe, 2006; Yoshida, 2008).<sup>10</sup> Although the number of painless childbirth cases has been increasing slightly in recent years (Takasaki, 2022; Tanabe, 2019), there is stigmatisation of painless childbirth in the social and political structure of Japan. It shows one aspect of the Japanese reproductive politics and medical studies which have not considered women's rights and well-beings for reproduction outside the idea of motherhood idealised by the family ideology.

The exclusion of women's rights on reproductive health can be seen in other aspects as well. Despite the promotion of fertility information to educate women about pregnancy and childbirth with 'correct knowledge', other types of information related to reproductive health and rights have been stigmatised and have been excluded from sex education and media coverage such as reproductive choices and rights, gender identities and sexualities, sexual intercourse, abortion, contraception, and diversified family types (Fassbender, 2022; Fu, 2011; Hirose, 2013; Ohashi, 2017; Tanaka, 2016). In the high school health education textbook discussed previously, there were only two short sentences each to mention contraception and abortion (MEXT, 2015, as cited in Fassbender, 2016) and negative aspects of abortion were emphasised in addition to lack of information about reproductive choice and rights, sexual violence, diversified family types, and sexualities (Ohashi, 2017). In *Josei no Kenkō no Hōkatsuteki Shien ni Kansuru Hōritsuan* [The Law Bill for Comprehensive Support for Women's Health] submitted to the House of Representatives in 2014 and 2016, there was no mention about contraception and abortion as well as information about women's reproductive rights and choices (Ohashi, 2017). During 2001 and 2003, there was the 'sex education bashing campaign' (Fu, 2011, p. 908) or the 'gender-free bashing campaign' (Hirose, 2013, p. 675) against the spread of gender-free education and extreme sex education (Fassbender, 2016; Ohashi, 2017). It started from criticism from Yamatani Eriko, who was a Diet member, against the sex education booklet for middle school students, *Love & Body Book for Puberty*, insisting that it was too extreme sex education (Hirose, 2013; Ohashi, 2017). The booklet included content about female-led contraceptive methods such as contraceptive pills to prevent undesired pregnancy and legal situation of abortion, but Yamatani argued that it only

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<sup>10</sup> In addition to the social and medical belief valuing natural childbirth with pain, there are various medical structural reasons for the difficult access to painless childbirth with epidural anaesthesia such as a personnel shortage of medical practitioners including obstetrician-gynaecologists and anesthesiologists (Tanabe, 2019).

mentioned positive aspects of contraceptive pills. In the next year, the booklet was forced to go out of print. In addition, in the same year, liberal curriculum including contraception, reproductive organs, and same-sex relationships with visual materials for handicapped students at Nanao Special Education School attracted criticisms by members of the assembly and 102 teachers were punished by the Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education as a result of the survey conducted for examining sex education at special education schools in Tokyo (Fu, 2011; Hirose, 2013). It was later in 2009 when the punishment was judged as too extreme and illegal by the Tokyo District Court (Tokyo MX, 2009).

The denunciation of sex education continued after the affair of Nanao Special Education School.<sup>11</sup> With the continuous opposition against sex education in the political context, education about reproduction and family has been conducted in a small part of other types of education such as health education and moral education, and its focus is fertility education and sexually transmitted diseases by avoiding specific information about sexual intercourse and how to use contraception (Fassbender, 2022; Hayashi, 2022). According to Fu (2011), sexually transmitted diseases especially focusing on HIV are utilised as a threat to young people not to engage in practicing sex before marriage and teenage pregnancy, which reinforces the ideology to connect sex with marriage and childbirth. Since the Meiji era started, women had been expected to become either an obedient good wife who was not supposed to show sexual interests unrelated to reproduction or a prostitute to fulfil male desire whilst men had been allowed to engage in sexual activities with multiple women including concubines and prostitutes (Fu, 2011). Therefore, sex education, especially for women, remains to be concerned about the repression of female sexuality. It seems that the government is reluctant to educate women with correct knowledge about reproduction which might guide women's decisions not to follow expected life paths with marriage and childbirth.

The political reluctance of promoting women's reproductive health and rights can be seen in legislation and policies for abortion as well. Abortion has been criminalised since the Criminal Abortion Law was passed in 1907 until today with some exemption for cases applied by the Maternal Protection Law which allows abortion for protection of maternal health physically or

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<sup>11</sup> The Project Team for Fact-finding Investigation About Excessive Sex Education and Gender-free Education was established in 2005 with having Abe Shinzō as chairman and Yamantani as bureau chief, and they opposed to include the word 'gender' in the Basic Plan for Gender Equality by insisting to protect family ideology and gender roles which were considered 'traditional' (Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office, 2005).

financially (Norgren, 2001).<sup>12</sup> Although development of a legal system for abortion was fast during the time of population control, the progress of abortion technology seems to have stopped after the fertility rate started declining (Ogino, 2008; Takeda, 2005).<sup>13</sup> In Japan, Dilation and Curettage (D&C) is still the main method for abortion, sometimes with the combination of vacuum aspiration, (*Abortion Care Guideline*, 2022) although D&C is considered as an unsafe abortion method by World Health Organization [WHO] (*Abortion Care Guideline*, 2022). In addition, safe abortion is not easily accessible as vacuum aspiration is expensive and is limited in use (Safe Abortion Japan Project, n.d.). For medical abortion, the first abortion pill got approved finally at a health ministry panel on 21st April in 2023 and is waiting for final approval at the time of writing this MA thesis (Benoza, 2023). However, there are still concerns about accessibility such as cost and prescription process (Benoza, 2023).

In addition to the legal framework of abortion, there is political reluctance to improve accessibility of female-led contraception. The mainstream contraceptive method is male condom in addition to small percentages for the usage of IUD, oral contraceptive pills, and sterilisation (Matsumoto & Yamabe, 2010). Implant, patch, diaphragm, vaginal ring, and contraceptive injection are not available (#nande naino, n.d.-a, Matsumoto & Yamabe, 2010). It took about 40 years for contraceptive pills to get approved (Hirayama, 2018; Ogino, 1999), and Japan was the last country to approve contraceptive pills within the member states of the United Nations (Hirayama, 2018; Tsuge, 2017a).<sup>14</sup> Even after approval, it is still difficult to access oral contraceptive pills with a discourse that oral contraceptive pills would release women's sexuality to be out of control (Hirayama, 2018) with concerns about safety of the usage of the oral contraceptive pills and the low birth rate (Norgren, 2001; Ogino, 2008; Takeda,

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<sup>12</sup> The Maternal Protection Law was enacted in 1996, renamed from the Eugenic Protection Law with revision to eliminate eugenic components (Norgren 2001; Ogino, 2008). The Eugenic Protection Law was enacted in 1948 to legalise compulsory abortion of people with genetic diseases to maintain healthy population by decreasing the size of population with 'harmful' inherited diseases (Norgren, 2001; Ogino, 2008; Takeda, 2005). The enforcement of the Eugenic Protection Law was not proceeded without controversies, but some women's groups prioritised another purpose proposed by the government, which was to legalise abortion and sterilisation to protect maternal bodies if pregnancy and childbirth would be dangerous for maternal health (Norgren, 2001). It was protested by groups of handicapped activists requiring the elimination as the main purpose of the law remained to legalise involuntary abortion and sterilisation of the 'eugenically inferior' (Norgren, 2001, p. 77), and the elimination of the eugenic part was decided with the influence of international pressure and the establishment of the 1993 Standard Law for the Disabled.

<sup>13</sup> The idea of population control was introduced during the Occupation, where the population policy of Japan drastically shifted its focus to producing less population with better quality (Norgren, 2001; Ogino, 2008; Takeda, 2005). Abortion technology and legislation were developed much faster than contraception (Fassbender, 2022; Hirayama, 2018; Norgren, 2001; Ogino, 1999, 2008; Takeda, 2005), and Japan was the first country to legalise abortion in the world with the establishment of the Eugenic Protection Law (Hirayama, 2018).

<sup>14</sup> In contrast, male Viagra got approved after six months of consideration (Ogino, 1999).



2005).<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the historical context of seeing contraception as something against the natural order might be a contributing factor.<sup>16</sup> However, as Fassbender (2022) points out, reproductive technologies for infertility treatment are accepted to encourage women to fulfil ‘naturalization and retraditionalization of motherhood’ (p. 202). In this context, the cost of oral contraceptive pills is much higher than other developed countries for the purpose of contraception and it is still required to be prescribed by a doctor (Hirayama, 2018). Oral contraceptive pills which are also known as hormonal pills are approved for national health insurance, but it is only for menstrual issues, excluding the purpose of contraception.

On top of this, there has been a long debate on accessibility to emergency contraceptive pills. Currently, emergency contraceptive pills are available only with prescription by a doctor, but with its emergent characteristics, requests and policy proposals to approve sale of emergent contraceptive pills at pharmacy have been submitted by the citizen project called *#Kinkyū Hininyaku o Yakkyoku de* (Kinkyū Hininyaku no Yakkyoku deno Nyūshu o Jitsugen Suru Shimin Purojekuto, n.d.). Due to the inadequate access to various abortion and contraceptive methods, it has been criticised that only certain types of knowledge are selected for promotion of women’s reproductive health and the power is exercised to control women’s bodies and reproduction for the political aims in the era of *shōshika* (Fassbender, 2016, 2022; Ogino, 2008; Ohashi, 2017; Nishiyama, 2017a, 2017b; Norgren, 2001; Suzuki, 2017; Takeda, 2005; Tanaka, 2016, 2017; Yui 2021).

In this chapter, I introduced political, economic, and social context which construct the current politics of reproduction in Japan. The family ideology of heteronormative marriage with biological children which was formed in the Meiji era has been embedded in the legal and welfare structure to construct the current gender roles to put social responsibility of reproductive work on women. With severe economic stagnation and population decline for the past decades, women are expected to provide themselves as the exploitative labour force as well as the resource for reproduction. All factors are entangled deeply and have constructed the environment where young women are positioned in contemporary Japan. What has been discussed in this chapter is crucial to understand social norms and practices that have been

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<sup>15</sup> In post-war, there has been opposition against contraception, especially contraceptive pills, due to various concerns by difference actors (Norgren, 2001; Ogino, 2008; Takeda, 2005). It included concerns about safety of contraceptive pills, about monopolisation by medical professionals for economic interests, about the birth rate decline, and about release of women’s sexuality.

<sup>16</sup> By idealising the Western ideology of family derived from Christianity, which considered the nature of sexual intercourse between a married couple as natural, contraception and abortion were criticised as opposing to the nature of human beings since the Meiji era (Ogino, 2008; Takeda, 2005).

reproduced, in which political, economic, and social context contribute to the current reproductive politics. It is necessary to analyse how young women conduct negotiations with situations surrounding them and make their life decisions related to reproduction for my research.

### 3. Theoretical framework

#### 3.1 Biopolitical governmentality

In my MA thesis, I will employ biopolitical governmentality which comes from Michel Foucault's idea of governmentality to understand young women's perceptions of the situation surrounding reproduction and their reproductive decision-making in relation to biopolitics in the current context of Japan. In his lectures on *The Birth of Biopolitics* at the Collège de France in 1979, Foucault explains that governmentality is a mode of government that emerged with liberalism, which centralises around problems of population such as health, birth rate, hygiene, and race. The term 'government' here means 'an activity which aims to shape, guide or affect the behaviour, actions, and comportment of people' (Macleod & Durrheim, 2002, p. 45). Unlike previous times of sovereign power where discipline and manipulation of human bodies and life were used to control individuals or the population (Foucault, 1995), for governmentality, the state does not determine people's behaviours and life choices directly but requires self-regulation for interests of individuals or the population (Foucault, 2008). Regulating oneself is conducted by control or guidance through interpersonal relations which are influenced by social institutions and political will (Gordon, 1991; Macleod & Durrheim, 2002). Therefore, Foucault's governmentality simultaneously includes micro-level views such as subjectivity/objectivity and macro-level views such as structure and regulatory control (Macleod & Durrheim, 2002). This theoretical framework will be useful to analyse young women's individual perceptions, thoughts, and experiences in relation to the political, economic, and social context of reproductive politics. Under the liberalist governmentality, it is considered that freedom is guaranteed only with the appropriate control of individuals and population and economic growth are prioritised to maintain a healthy population in the aim of prosperity of the state (Foucault, 2008; Repo, 2015). Governmentality continues to be seen in neoliberal times, strengthening the power exercised on individuals for self-management of their lives 'for the sake of their health and happiness'. It rationalises government of living beings through decentralisation of its power, encouraging the conduct of oneself, to maximise economic effects.

When discussing governmentality, it is essential to understand Foucault's concepts of bio-power and biopolitics as they are intertwined with one another. The force of regulating life for population control found in governmentality is what Foucault calls bio-power (Foucault, 1978; Macleod & Durrheim, 2002; Repo, 2015; Takeda, 2005) and the means of control including

strategies, techniques, knowledges, and discourses to exercise bio-power is called biopolitics (Foucault, 1978; Repo, 2015). Governmentality aims to manage population to make the state survive and this is where bio-power is exercised and where biopolitics is formed on biological beings, individuals at a micro-level and a species at a macro-level, to regulate healthy population for economic growth of the state (Foucault, 1978). The notion of bio-power was first introduced in the first volume of his book, *The History of Sexuality* in 1978 (Foucault, 1978; Repo, 2015; Takeda, 2005; Wallenstein, 2013) and Foucault argued that it closely linked to governmentality later in his lectures on *Security, Territory, Population* in 1978, (Foucault, 2009). I refer to the concepts of governmentality, bio-power, and biopolitics as ‘biopolitical governmentality’ (Repo, 2015, p. 10) and will apply it as a theoretical framework for my research.

### **3.2 Governmentality, bio-power, and biopolitics in gender and feminist research**

Foucault’s governmentality has contributed to various fields as a significant concept including philosophy, social sciences, political science, demography, history of science, and gender and feminist studies. Many scholars have developed their interpretations on governmentality such as Rose (1989, 1996), Dean (1999), and Lemke (2001) to name a few. Foucault’s explanation of governmentality, bio-power, and biopolitics has received great attention from gender and feminist scholars especially for its application on reproduction. Repo (2015) mentions Foucault’s idea as biopolitical governmentality and has proposed that gender is a ‘biopolitical apparatus’ (p. 4) of neoliberalist governmentality by demonstrating that gender equality policy and gender mainstreaming have been utilised as a technology of biopolitical governmentality ‘to manage women’s work and family lives with the promise of increasing both women’s fertility and their labor market participation’ (p. 22). She pointed out that women’s reproductive and productive labour were seen to be ‘reorganized, manipulated, and rendered more efficient’ (p. 22) by making the term ‘gender’ adjustable (Repo, 2015). Governmentality is helpful for gender and feminist scholars to uncover the structural issues and power relations around women’s bodies and reproduction hidden under the ‘gender-friendly’ propaganda especially in neoliberal times.

In gender and feminist research, it is often theorised that women’s bodies are centralised for the politics of reproduction at a societal level, in which Foucault’s biopolitical governmentality can be applied. For example, O’Brien (1981) argues that reproductive labour has been considered to be performed by women and human reproduction has been commodified to be

controlled as a property by regulations created by men in male dominant political theory in the West. In the political theory by male perspectives, family is defined ‘as the “basic unit” of political society, as the economic unity of society, as the repository of tradition, custom and morality, as a mode of safely siphoning off the disorderly dangers of sexual passion’ (O’Brien, 1981, p. 11). In reproductive politics, family is utilised as a practical method to produce human capitals which offer the labour power under the capitalist society (O’Beien, 1981). Therefore, according to O’Beien (1981), women’s reproductive rights should be discussed with the notion of women as a collective unit in male political theory rather than regarding women’s reproduction as an individual matter. In a similar manner, Yuval-Davis (1997) points out that ‘women are constructed as biological reproducers of “the nation”’ (p. 37) in political discourses under capitalism. Human reproduction is considered as the ‘natural’ role of women and women are positioned as ‘bearers of the collective’ (p. 26) in the construction of nations (Yuval-Davis, 1997). In most cases, women are objects to be controlled regarding their reproduction through ideologies and policies in male dominant politics and society (Yuval-Davis, 1997). Exploring various cases of nationalist policies of population control in different contexts around the world, Yuval-Davis (1997) criticises the feminist discourses focusing on reproductive rights of women as a matter of individuals. This is because their reproductive decision-making is influenced by power relations within a collective notion in political discourses (Yuval-Davis, 1997). In addition, Yuval-Davis (1997) argues that women who engage in their given roles as reproducers of the nation, especially older women, take their responsibility to control over other women to behave appropriately. This shows how internalisation of social norms and practices occurs in relation to political power, as Foucault’s governmentality suggest. Considering the nature of the politics of reproduction introduced by O’Brien and by Yuval-Davis, it is necessary to observe how politics problematises women for reproductive matters and what power is exercised on shaping an ideal way of women’s life for the sake of the nation. These literatures bring insights into the analysis of the political context on reproductive issues in contemporary Japan.

In the field of anthropology, Ginsburg and Rapp (1991) have explored reproductive politics from a feminist perspective in the global context with the notion of influence by Western medical practices on the global level. They argue that it is important that anthropologists acknowledge political, social, and economic power relations from multiple perspectives, including the local and the global, to understand women’s reproductive decision-making because women’s fertility and reproductive practices are regulated for population control

worldwide (Ginsburg and Rapp, 1991). In this aspect, Foucault's biopolitical governmentality can be applied to what Ginsburg and Rapp (1991) propose. Introducing various examples of reproductive politics around the world, Ginsburg and Rapp (1991) suggest that the politics of reproduction can influence family-planning, reproductive decision-making, new reproductive technologies, infertility, menstruation and menopause, and social and cultural understandings of pregnancy, parenthood, and family. In their later work, Ginsburg & Rapp (1995) emphasise the importance of placing reproduction at the centre of social theory as the new analytical lens of anthropology in the global context. In addition, the global context of reproductive politics from perspectives of sociology and political science, Gutiérrez-Rodríguez (2010) points to feminisation and racialisation of reproductive work which is regarded as affective labour. Under the neoliberalist state in capitalism, privatisation of care work has led to put its responsibility being put on women, and there is a trend in Western Europe that professional women opt for hiring other women who are undocumented migrants from the 'global South' (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, 2010). In reproductive politics, domestic and care work is devalued as simple labour which does not require professional training as it can be performed by women inherently (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, 2010). Therefore, Gutiérrez-Rodríguez (2010) mentions that women are trained to do unwaged or low-waged reproductive labour and to 'be mothers' (p. 90) through gender socialisation which takes place to reduce the social costs of reproduction. What Ginsburg and Rapp (1991, 1995) and Gutiérrez-Rodríguez (2010) suggest shows the importance of looking at power relations in the global context, especially the influence by the West, in biopolitics of reproduction. Drawing from discussions in Ginsburg and Rapp's work (1995), Inhorn (2007) mentions that human reproduction 'is inherently "biopolitical," involving complex power struggles enacted through the medium of women's bodies' (p. xi) in her article exploring 150 ethnographies. It demonstrates the contribution of anthropological research to producing knowledge on women's health. These anthropological views of reproductive politics are important to remember when analysing social norms and practices brought up by women and their reproductive decision-making in relation to them.

Although Foucault's work on governmentality, bio-power, and biopolitics have attracted criticisms within feminist academia, Macleod and Durrheim (2002) believe that Foucault's governmentality is a powerful theory to analyse feminist issues through intersectional perspectives. Foucault has been often criticised to focus on micro-politics and does not offer explanation on gender differences in a male dominant power structure (Alcoff, cited in Sawicki, 1991; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 1993; Soper, 1993). However, Macleod and Durrheim (2002)

point out that Foucault does not leave macro-politics but sheds light on power relations in everyday practices of people and analyses how micro-politics is conducted in relations to macro-level perspectives. In ‘Foucauldian feminism: The implications of governmentality’, Macleod and Durrheim (2002) argue that Foucault’s governmentality enables feminists to see power through both micro- and macro-level perspectives and gives possibilities to find various ways of how gendered politics have been played. According to Macleod and Durrheim (2002), Foucault’s work is closely linked to feminist thinking such as political struggles based on sexuality, a refusal of essentialism, and attention to diversified individual experiences and interpersonal relations (McNay 1992; Sawicki 1988, 1991). What is significant in Foucault’s governmentality is that power is considered not only as repressive power but also as productive power which allows possibility of ‘resistance to and disruption of normalised life trajectories and dominant reproductive discourses’ (p. 50) as a strategy for reversibility in biopolitics (Macleod and Durrheim, 2002). Therefore, biopolitical governmentality is a theoretical tool to analyse young women’s perceptions and decision-making on reproduction, looking at intertwined relationships of the personal and the social in a certain political, social, and historical context.

### **3.3 Applying biopolitical governmentality to the reproductive politics in Japan**

Although Foucault’s articulation of biopolitical governmentality is heavily based on Western societies, it seems applicable to analyse the reproductive politics in the context of Japan because the form of liberalist and neoliberalist government and politics has been historically influenced by the Western model which Foucault referred to. According to Takeda (2005), Foucault’s ideas of governmentality and bio-power can be applied to the historical context of the Japanese reproductive politics with three types of reproduction: biological reproduction, socio-political reproduction, and economic reproduction (Takeda, 2005). Although laws and policies had changed along with the changes of political aims for reproduction as previously introduced in Chapter 2, the eugenic idea of fulfilling ‘good quality and happy life’ has been at the centre of the politics of reproduction in Japan (Takeda, 2005). This continues in the current politics of reproduction, and the discourse of happiness is utilised to rationalise social practices of reproduction, hiding the national aim for population and economic growth. In the recent policy of *Shōshika Taisaku*, the positive image of family consisting of marriage and childbirth has been promoted excessively with fertility education providing ‘medically and scientifically correct knowledge of pregnancy and childbirth’ to fulfil one’s desires to achieve happiness in life (Fassbender, 2022; Suzuki, 2017). As well as problematising infertility as

something to be avoided (Fassbender, 2022; Suzuki, 2017; Tsuge 2016, 2017b), the government has been reluctant to provide information and required support for sex education (Fassbender, 2022; Fu, 2011; Hirose, 2013; Ohashi, 2017), contraception (Fassbender, 2022; Hirayama, 2018; Matsumoto & Yamabe, 2010; Ohashi, 2017), and abortion (Fassbender, 2022; Ohashi, 2017; Takeda, 2005) which would not be compatible with the national goal for population growth. In discussions about the promotion of selective information and policies focusing only on fertility in the era of *shōshika*, it has been argued that there is a clear intention by the state to utilise women for reproduction by scholars researching reproductive politics of Japan in the fields of gender and women's studies, sociology, medical anthropology, health care science, and Japanese studies (Fassbender, 2016, 2022; Nishiyama, 2017a, 2017b; Ogino, 2008; Ohashi, 2017; Suzuki, 2017; Takeda, 2005, 2018; Tanaka, 2016, 2017; Tsuge, 2016, 2017a, 2017b; Yui, 2021). Having such biopolitical governmentality found in the reproductive politics in Japan, Fassbender (2022) develops a theoretical framework of 'reproductive entrepreneur', which describes a postfeminist way of governing the self in the field of reproduction. Fassbender (2022) argues that the discourses around *ninkatsu* are shaped by a neoliberalist and postfeminist sense of promoting women's 'entrepreneurship' and 'autonomy', hiding the state power exercised in the aim of governing women's bodies. This is a good example of showing biopolitical governmentality which requires self-regulation or self-management for interests of individuals and population. Fassbender's analysis draws the importance of applying biopolitical governmentality when investigating the current reproductive politics in Japan.

In term of the family and welfare system, its construction of women's roles for reproduction can be analysed through Foucault's idea of neoliberalist governmentality. Ueno (2017, 2021) discusses influence of the neoliberalist welfare reforms which aimed to sustain the family ideology constructed by the Japanese style management by putting responsibility of reproductive work on women.<sup>17</sup> In the Japanese politics, women are the one to pay the reproductive cost, or the cost of gender discrimination, because the Japanese welfare system heavily relies on women for care work (Ueno, 2017, 2021). Similarly, Miura (2015) argues that a distinguished trait of the Japanese family ideology is to require citizens to sacrifice themselves for the state whilst denying the state's support of its citizens. She calls it 'statist family ideology' (p. 63), and the welfare system has been constructed with promotion of the

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<sup>17</sup> As introduced in Chapter 2, this requires men to become 'corporate warriors' and devote themselves to produce economy for their family, which also contribution to the national economy (Ogasawara, 2016).



statist family ideology by the LDP (Miura, 2015). The nationalist utilisation of women in politics is what was seen in the pre-war period and wartime after the Meiji era, and Japan continues to hold similar ideologies today by changing its shape to the neoliberalist welfare state. In this scheme, there is a premise where engaging in reproductive work, giving birth to children, and raising them are an obligation for women (Miura, 2015). With this notion, Miura (2015) proposes that the idea of ‘neoliberal motherhood’, which emerged from the integration of statist family ideology and neoliberalism in the Japanese political context. According to Miura (2015), statist family ideology is different from neoliberalism, but she suggests that these two ideologies are highly compatible to exist together as both agree upon the ‘objectification of women’ (Miura, 2015, p. 67), which is the utilisation of mothers for statist family ideology and the utilisation of women for neoliberalism. For neoliberal motherhood, staying healthy and giving birth to as many children as possible is what is expected as women’s roles for economic effects. This can be included in what Foucault considers as biopolitics and governmentality. Their analysis on how women are targeted to be utilised in the Japanese family and welfare system brings great insights on understanding the socio-political situation producing certain norms and practices for women’s reproduction for my research. Focusing on care work in relation to neoliberalist governmentality of legal and welfare aspects, Ueno (2021) argues that the current issue of care work must be solved for women to escape from their responsibility for reproductive work. By developing Nancy Fraser’s distribution of care model, Ueno (2021) identifies that Japan is found in the privatised care at home model. To solve this issue, there is a requirement to shift either to socialisation of care in the public sector or commodification of care in the market (Ueno, 2021). According to Yamaura (2020), childcare support is motivated by biopolitical reasoning to stimulate ‘women’s supposedly innate desires’ (p. 251) to have more children in order to generate population for prosperity of the nation. In this logic, the promotion of male participation to childcare is included in *Shōshika Taisaku* to liberate women’s desires to engage in a dual life as caregivers and as the labour force.<sup>18</sup> It suggests the importance of looking at management of care work in my research as it is one area where negotiation by women would happen.

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<sup>18</sup> Governmentality through gender roles constructed by family ideology seems to influence men’s reluctance to participate in reproductive work due to time and efforts required by productive work. In addition, it seems that there is ideological influence on men’s reluctant attitudes towards reproductive work as the participation hours to household work and childrearing did not change due to their wives’ working status (Tsutsui, 2015). In fact, Japanese men’s lack of participation in childcare and housework is remarkable, compared to other OECD countries (Tsutsui, 2014, 2015). This aspect is considered to be influential on women’s reproductive decisions (Tsutsui, 2014, 2015).

In the politics of reproduction in Japan, perspectives of women's reproductive health and rights have not been included in discussions of reproductive policy as it has been a fight for political and economic interests of the nation most of the time (Fassbender, 2022; Ohashi, 2017; Tsuge, 2016, 2017a). As it can be seen from this, biopolitical governmentality is exercised in the Japanese reproductive politics. At the same time, it is important to remember that Foucault's idea of governmentality gives the possibility for resistance to governmental power as its trait is self-governance. In fact, Takeda (2005) argues that Foucault's idea of resistance to power could be seen in how women had been promoting their own empowerment even under the influence of controlling powers in Japan. As Foucault's explanation of governmentality, biopolitics, and biopower suggests that power mechanism interconnects between the micro-level and the macro-level, I believe that the idea of biopolitical governmentality will help in analysing young women's perceptions, thoughts, and decisions on reproduction in Japan in relation to the Japanese socio-political context of reproduction where biopolitical governmentality is exercised.

### **3.4 How power works with individuals in biopolitical governmentality**

When considering the relationship between power and individuals in biopolitical governmentality, it is important to be aware that power is not exercised simply in a top-down fashion because governmentality relies on individuals' self-governance. It is the responsibility of individuals whether to act, to behave, or to decide as governmental power intends. In other words, there is the possibility that individuals might not follow what is expected by society where governmental power is exercised. Foucault (1978) explains the coexistence of power and resistance as follows: 'Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power' (p. 95). Therefore, for my research on young women's life-planning related to their reproductive decision-making, it is crucial to analyse the dynamic of whether they accept to be governed or resist it. I will call the dynamic as the process of doing negotiation, and this negotiation can occur in individuals' thoughts, behaviours, and decisions.

According to Foucault (1980, 1995, 2007), power creates new forms of knowledge which align with its ideals, and knowledge is transferred to others using power and circulates within various actors including authorities, institutions, communities, and individuals. Power and knowledge exist to reinforce each other simultaneously as Foucault (1980) put it as one concept of power/knowledge. As a result of particular knowledge being spread through society, the

knowledge in turn becomes truth, where social norms and interactions are practiced based on the truth. In biopolitical governmentality, truth has been created by knowledge and dispersed to the individual through power, and the individual now acts under those ideals through self-governance, or self-management, as they have internalised the knowledge as truth (Foucault, 2007, 2008, 2009; Portschy, 2020). I will be using this perspective to analyse social norms and practices related to reproduction existing in the situations surrounding young women and its influence on their reproductive decision-making in my research. In addition, temporality is emphasised as a crucial element of governmentality as it requires individuals to manage their lives to the fullest by calculating their limited lifetime and by planning to avoid risks (Portschy, 2020). When it comes to biopolitical governmentality found in the politics of reproduction, the idea of temporality is often utilised to produce knowledge that women can only be fertile during a temporal period of time in human reproduction as truth. Therefore, the notions of internalisation and temporality will be a focal point for my research analysis.

As previously mentioned, when analysing one's decision-making related to reproduction, the process of negotiation is a key. To find how negotiation is conducted in the dynamic of one's decision of whether to accept or to resist the power exercised by biopolitical governmentality in my research, I will employ Foucault's idea of critique. In his lecture in 'What is critique?', Foucault (2007) proposes the idea of critique as the process where one decides how to conduct oneself based on valid reasons for doing so rather than accepting to be governed by the specific system of power and self-governance outside what an authority tells as truth. Although Foucault (2007) argues that people cannot escape from power completely because resistance can occur only when power exists, he suggests that one can escape from a singular and particular strategy of power through the practice of critique. Applying this idea of critique to my research analysis enables me to look at points where my participants question knowledge they have access to, which is believed as truth in the Japanese society, and how they negotiate and make meanings of their life choices related to reproduction with a sense of agency in relation to biopolitical governmentality.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Data collection

As the research aim of my MA thesis is to explore what factors would contribute to reproductive decision-making of women in their 20s in Japan and how they make their life decisions related to reproduction, I conducted semi-structured in-depth interview with seven heterosexual women in their 20s who lived in Japan. According to Morris (2015), in-depth interview is an effective data collecting method for social research as '[t]he interview gives the researcher access to interviewees' thoughts, reflections, motives, experiences, memories, understandings, interpretations and perceptions of the topic under consideration' (p. 5). Therefore, an in-depth interview is suitable to grasp participants' perceptions and to analyse discourses in relation to the socio-political situation of reproduction in contemporary Japan. I prepared open-ended questions asking participants about their thoughts on situations of reproduction in which they are placed as young women in Japan and about life plans regarding their reproductive decisions. The question list included concepts of pregnancy, childbirth, child-rearing, and family. During interviews, follow-up questions and probes were asked to understand concepts and ideas brought up by participants as Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggest. The interview was one-on-one and there were two sessions for each participant. In the first session, details about the research were explained and the first interview session was conducted after a participant agreed to proceed to the interview process. The whole process of the first session, including the explanation and interview, lasted around 30 minutes. In the second session, a continuation of the interview was conducted. The second session lasted around 60 minutes. The interview was conducted online by using Zoom due to different geographical locations of the researcher and interview participants.

To recruit participants, I uploaded a recruiting post on Instagram and on a large online group for climate change activism with many young people. On Instagram, I used my public account with more than 500 followers, hoping to reach out to women who had different social and economic backgrounds and who lived in varied geographical locations across Japan randomly. I chose these recruitment methods because it seemed that Japanese people in my generation tended not to belong to online hobby groups, such as groups on Facebook, although it was advised by my supervisors to look for such hobby groups to reach out to good candidates for my research. I have found that women in my generation in Japan tend to create a public account on social media such as Instagram and to connect with other people who have similar hobbies

or similar interests by following each other instead. Therefore, I considered Instagram to be the most effective platform to approach possible candidates for my research. Instagram has been the most popular social media app for women in my generation in Japan as more than 80% of the women in their 20s answered that they use Instagram and 65% of them use it every day in 2021, according to a survey conducted by the Mobile Society Research Institute of NTT Docomo (2021). Although some of my followers were my friends or people whom I know, there was a high possibility that they would share my post to their followers and there were also followers seemingly around my age whom I did not know at all so I thought this method would be better to recruit people more randomly than the snow-ball sampling method starting from my close friends. In terms of online community where young people gather, there were several groups such as for career- or self-development but these groups were all run by admin members and did not allow general members to post or to advertise. The only possible access I had for reaching out to a community was a Slack group about climate change activism with around 1300 members. Hoping to find participants more randomly without having acquaintances there, I shared my recruitment post in a channel where everyone could promote their own activities which were not necessarily related to activism, but unfortunately, no one contacted me during the period of recruitment. Therefore, all participants for my research contacted me through Instagram.

The recruitment process started from August 2022 and interviews were conducted during September and October of 2022. As a result, seven heterosexual women agreed to participate in interviews for my research. All participants were in their late 20s, from 25 to 29 years old, at the time of interviews although the age requirement for participation was women in their 20s. Concerning relationship status, four participants were in a relationship and three participants were not dating at the time of interviews. All of them had never got married and did not have any children although there was no restriction on marriage and family status as requirements for participants. Six of them lived in the Kantō region, and one lived in the Tōkai region. Five of them worked as *seishain* [a regular full-time employee], one worked full-time under the irregular employment contract, and one worked part-time as well as studied for acquisition of a librarian qualification. For educational background, all participants had completed higher education. All of them had lived, studied, or worked in urban areas, mostly Tokyo. Five participants were raised in urban areas, one participant was from a rural area, and another participant spent 14 years, most of her early life as a child, in other countries. In addition, in terms of social class, three participants attended private schools in Tokyo, of which

two and another participant mentioned that they were from relatively wealthy family. Another participant went to international schools in several countries, and the last participant attended public school in a rural area and mentioned that she was from a non-affluent family. As can be seen, there is an uneven distribution of my research participants' backgrounds in terms of marital and parental statuses, geolocations, and social classes. However, it was not intentional as I attempted to reach out to possible participants from various backgrounds by making my recruitment post publicly visible. One reason for this may be due to the characteristic of social media which uses its algorithm to show certain posts to similar demographic users who have similar interests. In addition, as my public Instagram account was for sharing information about sexual and reproductive health and rights, participants were most likely women who had interest in related topics. Therefore, it should be noted that some similarities of the research participants' backgrounds might have an influence on my research results.

#### **4.2 Analysis methods**

For my research, I will use interview data as the main source for analysis and will refer to previous literatures about the Japanese economic, social, and political context introduced in Chapter 2 and 3 as the secondary sources. For analysis method, I will use thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis is 'a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Because of its flexibility, thematic analysis is usually combined with other types of analysis or frameworks and can be used as supplementary (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Therefore, thematic analysis is preferred in various academic fields with various types of research. Additionally, thematic analysis provides 'theoretical freedom' (p. 78) and is a good match with this theoretical framework because a researcher can construct and analyse themes around what they would like to be focused on with the application of a theoretical framework. Therefore, the use of thematic analysis will be effective for my research to employ the theoretical framework of biopolitical governmentality. Although thematic analysis is a flexible research tool, it is important to have basic guidance for the conduct of analysis process to obtain good analysis result, as Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest. When conducting the analysis process, I referred to Braun and Clarke's six phases of thematic analysis (2006): 1) Familiarising with data, 2) Generating initial codes, 3) Searching for themes, 4) Reviewing themes, 5) Defining and naming themes, 6) Producing the report. As content reviewing and revising were required through the process between 2 and 5, I roughly followed these phases in an intertwining manner. After reading and coding interview transcripts carefully, important points, such as how social

norms and practices were discussed and where negotiation happens, were identified. The transcripts were in Japanese to analyse the nuance of the Japanese language and context. However, as my thesis is written in English and my master's degree program is in English, I conducted translation of the original Japanese transcripts to English and the process of analysis involving my supervisors and course mates were conducted in English.

For research analysis, I will apply Foucault's theory of biopolitical governmentality. As power in biopolitical governmentality is complex, I will employ Foucault's idea of power, knowledge, and truth as well as the conduct of critique to analyse individual thoughts, experiences, and decisions on reproduction in relation to biopolitical governmentality. By doing so, it will be analysed how research participants interact with power, which constructs social norms and practices, by conducting internalisation, critique, or negotiation. Through analysis, I aimed to find answers for the following research questions:

- 1) What social norms and practices related to reproduction are young women expected to follow in current Japanese society?
- 2) How do heterosexual women in their 20s consider their own life decisions related to reproduction? Do they internalise dominant norms and practices or is there a point of critique?
- 3) In their decision-making, how do heterosexual women in their 20s conduct the process of negotiation in the current political, economic, and social context?

### **4.3 Research ethics**

In feminist research especially, it is crucial for a researcher to reflect on their own positionality and situatedness in relation to their research participants (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002) when considering research ethics. Throughout my research process, I will apply Donna Haraway's idea of situated knowledges (1988) which is the notion that knowledge is situated in a context. Although a researcher's vision is partial, Haraway (1988) proposes that knowledge can be enriched by exchanging viewpoints between human beings beyond the boundary of subject and object in research. I acknowledge that my research is motivated by my personal experience as a Japanese woman, who is in her late 20s, who is in a long-term relationship but still unmarried, and who has been immersed in Japanese society for a long duration in her life. Although I share several identities with my research participants, I will try not to impose my limited viewpoint as much as possible because each person's background is different, and thus, experiences, thoughts, perceptions, and emotions of my research participants may be different.

When recruiting interview participants for my research, all important information about the research including the purpose, usage of data, data management, and possible risks were informed to them before they decided to join the study. By clearly informing participants about the aim and topics of the interview, I tried to minimise the risk of recruiting people who may feel uncomfortable to talk or who may have trauma about something related to reproduction. Participants were informed that they would be able to stop interviews or withdraw their consent at any point of the interview process if they would like to. As they might recall their past experiences which were painful to them, interviewees were informed that they did not have to answer a question if they felt uncomfortable to talk or if they were asked to share what they did not want to. For protecting the privacy of interviewees, their personal data is anonymised on interview documents and in my master's thesis. Gathered data and all documents related to this research have been stored on Seafile which is protected and is monitored by IT services of the University of Turku. Some documents were temporarily stored in local storage on my laptop, where the antivirus and security software McAfee was installed, whilst I worked on my thesis. All possible solutions for protecting confidentiality and interview participants' personal data have been implemented by the researcher. However, there is a possibility that the data would get leaked for unexpected reasons. Therefore, in terms of data management, steps to minimise the risk of their identifiability as much as possible even if the data gets leaked have been conducted. This includes removing identifiable personal information from interview documents except consent forms and protecting files with passwords. When citing their words in my thesis, only a translated version in English is included to reduce personal identifiability of interviewees. Translation work was done by the researcher as accurately as possible to avoid misrepresentation or misconduct. Throughout the research process, I follow the ethical guidelines of The Finnish National Board for Research Integrity and General Data Protection Regulation of the EU.



## 5. Analysis

The focus of the analysis will be what kinds of social norms and practices were brought up by interviewees and how they reacted to the dominant norms and practices for their life decisions related to reproduction. I will employ Foucault's theory of biopolitical governmentality (Foucault, 1978, 2008, 2009) as well as his ideas of power, knowledge, and truth (Foucault, 1980, 1995, 2007) to identify social norms and practices about women's lives and reproduction which are constructed in Japanese society. By doing so, the analysis results show that there were social norms and practices idealising specific life paths and reproductive decisions for young women. If social norms and practices brought up by interviewees were linked to the political, economic, and social context of Japan, I will refer to previous literatures introduced in Chapters 2 and 3 which discussed the welfare and corporate structure, family ideology and gender roles, and the reproductive politics in Japan.

In addition, by including Foucault's concept of critique (Foucault, 2007) to my theoretical framework, I will analyse how participants interacted with power and knowledge circulated in society as social norms and practices regarding women's life paths and reproductive decisions. This is to explore how my interview participants reacted to dominant norms or practices; whether to internalise, to resist, or to negotiate for their own life decisions related to reproduction under the influence of biopolitical governmentality. When looking at the process of reproductive decision-making of interview participants, my research data shows that they sometimes internalised social norms and practices and desired to follow given social norms without questioning. However, in many cases, the conduct of critique by participants can be seen, in that they questioned whether to believe dominant norms and practices related to reproduction and resisted to follow them without the consideration of other possible life paths for themselves. This led some participants to consider whether to accept different options for their future, depending on their situations. Moreover, being aware of some limitations of resources and availabilities in their circumstances, participants often conducted negotiation to find the best options for their lives. Most of the time, my research participants had carefully considered their life choices related to reproduction and made their own meanings for their reproductive decisions regardless of whether they would accept conducting social norms and practices or resisting them to a certain extent.

### 5.1 The life paths imagined as ideal in the current Japanese society

I will start my analysis by identifying what kind of life paths were imagined as ideal for young women in the environments surrounding the interviewees, and then, I will examine how they reacted to dominant norms and practices when deciding on their own life decisions on reproduction. During interviews, social norms and practices idealising certain women's life paths were brought up by the interviewees, and they were constructed based on a certain family model. What interviewees brought up as a family image that is normalised and idealised in society closely resembled the Japanese family ideology introduced in Chapter 2. Along with the family ideology promoted in society, I found that my interviewees felt that they were expected to follow certain life steps in a certain order. In biopolitical governmentality, individuals are required to manage themselves to choose a certain way of life in every life stage they encounter. Therefore, identifying social imagination of an ideal family model and ideal life paths for women introduced by participants deepens understanding of how power is exercised on women in their 20s who currently live in Japan. One crucial finding is how interview participants reacted to social norms and practices varied depending on each participant. Some internalised the dominant social norms and practices to operate self-governance whilst others considered their own reasons for what would be ideal for themselves based on their own circumstances through the conduct of critique. There were some participants who were open to different life paths, not necessarily only the socially idealised women's life paths, detaching their personal decisions from social pressure to expect women to give birth. Although the interview participants recognised what kinds of norms and practices were promoted as ideal in Japanese society, they questioned, negotiated, and found what would be ideal for themselves.

### **1) The idea of 'happy family' – a heterosexual couple with biological children**

From interviews, my findings indicated that there was social promotion of the 'happy family', which idealised heteronormative marriage with biological children. As only heterosexual marriage is legalised in Japan, a socially idealised image of family was often discussed by interviewees with an assumption of a family consisting of a husband, a wife, and biological children. This family model is linked with the Japanese family ideology of heterosexual married couples with children which is adopted as a basic unit for legislation and for the welfare system in Japan (Chapman, 2019; Dalton, 2017; Kumagai, 1986; Miura, 2015; North, 2012; Ochiai, 1997, 2005, 2014; Ogasawara, 1998; 2016; Ueno, 2021). When talking about their reproductive decisions, several interviewees brought up the idea of the 'happy family'

normalised in the Japanese society. For example, Haruka described how the social image of the ‘happy family’ would influence on her life choices:

I think there is a general image of family considered as ‘happy’, something like, of having a family, of everyone getting on well with each other and going on a family trip, that kind of thing, that kind of image of happiness, still exists in Japan, I think. How do you say, it’s like *the family* [emphasis added] [laughing], it’s like Instagrammable, something like that. I feel such expectations [laughing] exists. [What is considered] as happy. Yes. There is such an expectation, so I want to become like that. (Haruka, age 26)

Her explanation of ‘a general image of family’ is a family having children, and she mentioned that she desired to obtain this ‘happy life’ by having children in the future. Here, she described that ‘happy family’ was ‘Instagrammable’, which is a word used when something is visually attractive so that it is worthy enough to post it on Instagram. This knowledge of a family with heterosexual married couple with biological children as ‘general’ or ‘happy’ overlaps with political promotion of positive images for marriage and family which has been conducted as part of *Shōshika Taisaku* (Suzuki, 2017). According to Miura (2015) and Ueno (2017, 2021), the family ideology is promoted in the reproductive politics of Japan under the national aim of population and economic growth under the current neoliberalist welfare system relying on family as a unit to provide self-support for care work. Therefore, this positive image of the family model spread in society seems to be related to biopolitical governmentality of the reproductive politics in Japan. For Haruka, her desire to have a biological child or children in the future came from internalisation of the idea of achieving the ‘happy family’ to get happiness in one’s life.

In terms of generation of this ‘general image of family’, Ai shared her observation that the media representation was one of the reasons why people tended to believe that having children is the best life choice:

In dramas, TV dramas, books, or films, which we are exposed to when growing up, it intends something like, happiness comes from family with children. Like, as if having no children cannot make us happy, there’s probably many works portray family in this way. (Ai, age 25)

This media representation mentioned by Ai seems to be related to previous literatures discussing discourses of happiness around having children in the media and in educational materials (Fassbender, 2022; Suzuki, 2017). According to Fassbender (2022) and Suzuki (2017), this is influenced by the reproductive politics aiming to promote women to give birth to combat the national issue of the population decline which is expected to bring economic and welfare crises. Ai was aware that the image of the ‘happy family’ spread in society had much influence on people’s thoughts on reproductive decisions. She mentioned:

There are much less people who want to choose not to have children, I feel like that. There are many people saying that they want to have children, it’s normal, for some people, having children is too normalised so that they don’t think of a choice not to have children. (Ai, age 25)

Misaki also shared that she used to think having children as normal after becoming an adult and had imagined her life with a biological child in the future when she was younger:

Having been living a normal life in Japan, there was a time when I once thought I would want to have children like other ordinary people. Without deep consideration. Right. It was when I was much younger, like when I was a high school student or a university student, without thinking about it seriously. I was like, ‘I want to have children someday’. (Misaki, age 27)

She later explained that her thoughts on reproductive choices had been changing as her age started approaching to an age range socially expected to get married and to give birth to a child. However, her emphasis on ‘living a normal life in Japan’ and ‘like other ordinary people’ suggests that individuals tend to internalise the norm of having biological children if they do not get an opportunity to question it. The normalisation and the internalisation of the ‘general image of family’ bringing happiness to everyone’s life seem to lead individuals to assume that everyone should desire to have biological children. For example, Ai shared her experience of being interrogated by her friends about her decision not to have children:

People who say they plan to have children wouldn’t be asked, ‘Oh, why do you want to do so? Why do you want children?’ But when I say, ‘I don’t want any children’, then the response would be like, ‘Wait, why?’ For me, ‘Well, why you ask “Why?”’ [laughing]. That’s how I feel. (Ai, age 25)

Normalisation of a life plan to have biological children shows the process of internalisation where individuals conduct self-governance by believing that having children is the best choice for everyone's happiness in life. The power exercised on individuals is hidden under the reproductive politics aiming to achieve the national goal under the biopolitical governmentality, as previously mentioned. Unlike people who desired to have children around her, Ai mentioned that she did not consider having children in her life. The main reason for her reproductive decision was her experience of having a toxic parent and an unhappy upbringing in her family. She therefore questioned the social belief that 'happy family' would be achieved by having biological children because 'there were more unhappy memories in my childhood' (Ai, age 25). Here, the conduct of critique can be seen in her interaction with social norms and practices. Although she firmly decided not to have children in her future, she mentioned that she genuinely liked children so that she engaged in jobs and activities which had opportunity to interact with children. This is how she negotiated and found the way to fulfil her desires in life.

My interview data shows that there are various reasons of why having biological children was considered to bring happiness to one's life. One of them is emotional fulfilment. During interviews, several interviewees brought up emotional satisfaction as a reason to have children. Interacting with her friends, Mai discussed what she expected to feel by having children:

When I see friends who are mothers saying things like, '[their children are] more important than me', I assume that there must be a kind of euphoria and emotional richness that you won't get usually unless you have children. (Mai, age 29)

Here, Mai imagined that there would be 'emotional richness' which could be obtained only by having biological children. It seems to be considered that there is a promise of happiness that comes with having one's own children. Similarly, Misaki shared her expectation that one's mental strength would be improved and trained by having children:

I imagine that having children will make you stronger mentally. Even if you have something you cannot do just for yourself, by having someone who is weaker than you and who needs you, I feel that it will encourage you to work harder. (Misaki, age 27)

She also mentioned:

Although there would be hardships for a certain period [if people had children], when you are becoming elderly, or when you become an adult, . . . I think having a family will make you feel glad very much. (Misaki, age 27)

Here, she expected that there would be emotional support if one had children. However, she said that she recently started questioning if such emotional support would be provided only by having biological children. As a result, she found that she might be able to receive such emotional support not necessarily by biological children:

It doesn't mean that I don't want my own child at all, but at the same time, it's not that I definitely want one. I just realised that I don't have a strong desire for it. So, for example, I think adoption can be a good option as well. Rather than longing for my own child, it's more like I'm getting older, and I want to have something to cherish. Yes, and well, maybe it doesn't have to be a child, maybe an animal or a pet would fulfil it. Right. The more I think about it, the more I think that there's no reason why it has to be my own child. (Misaki, age 27)

With constant consideration of the meaning of life with children, she had come to realise that she did not have strong preference on whether it should be a biological child, an adopted child, or a pet.<sup>19</sup> Through the conduct of critique, she recognised what she wanted for her life more clearly and became more open to different options for her reproductive decisions.

In addition to emotional fulfilment, my interview data shows that having children was considered as a promise for a happy future after retirement.<sup>20</sup> Some interviewees brought up their worries for future if they did not have children. For example, Natsumi mentioned:

I think I will be able to rely on [her own children] when I get older. Well, something like an ulterior motive, I think that [her children] would become someone who will support me in terms of care and living expenses. (Natsumi, age 28)

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<sup>19</sup> In Japan, the purpose of adoption had been considered to be for family continuity or prosperity rather than providing care for children in need (Hayes, 2008). There have often been cases of married couples seeking a child to adopt from their blood-related extended family or a child from 'good blood' under ordinary adoption (Hayes, 2008). This was due to influence of the Japanese family *ie* system with the naturalistic idea of valuing bloodlines (Hayes, 2008). Meanwhile, for special adoption, which is for children in need of care, the adoption rate is significantly lower due to social and legal structural issues such as the stigmatisation of children of unknown parents and confidentiality issues of adoption on legal documents (Hayes, 2008).

<sup>20</sup> Confucianist idea of filial piety in the Japanese family ideology is influential for Japanese people as they expect their children to take care of them after retirement and ageing (Jared, 2015). It is entangled with the current welfare system expecting family to be the main actor of providing care for the elderly.

She later added:

I'm also afraid of the cost of living when I start living on a pension, thinking about it from now. When I [get older and] become incapable of moving my body, I guess I'd have to choose to die alone. (Natsumi, age 28)

Here, she expected her future children to provide care work and financial support for her because she assumed that the social welfare system in Japan would not be adequate when she gets older.<sup>21</sup> She imagined that she would 'die alone' if she did not have children in her future.<sup>22</sup> Haruka also brought up her worries to die alone:

I want [her future child] to look after me in the later stage of my life. Like I don't want to die alone [laughing]. A bit like that, yes. Like I want [her child] to be at my side when I'm dying [laughing]. (Haruka, age 26)

Looking at how Natsumi and Haruka described life without children, it shows that it is considered to bring a lack of support, loneliness, and thus, unhappiness. This seems to be related to the Japanese welfare system relying on self-support within families under the neoliberalist government facing the continuous economic decline due to the super aging society caused by the population decline (Miura, 2015; Ueno 2017, 2021).

On the other hand, for Natsumi, her future child who would provide support in her later life would not necessarily be her biological children. She pointed out that she saw more values in getting experience of 'raising a human being' (Natsumi, age 28) rather than having her own biological children:

[Watching] news about baby posts, or interviews with children who grew up after being adopted from a baby post, and I read about cases of babies being dumped, well, for society, I think there's an aspect of contribution to society if I adopt a child. So, I'm not like, 'my own child', 'my own child', I don't think I've been brainwashed like that. (Natsumi, age 28)<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Due to the current population and economic decline, it is expected that the amount of pension will be decreasing for younger generations.

<sup>22</sup> In recent years, 'dying alone' of the elderly has been reported as a social issue (see Eguchi, 2023; Ueda 2020). This is most of the time because their children were not able to take care of their parents all the time due to difficulties of living together or nearby for various reasons.

<sup>23</sup> There is a baby hatch called *kōnotori no yurikago*, which is also known as the 'baby post', in Kumamoto Prefecture ('*Akachan post*', 2023). It is run by the private hospital without governmental subsidies ('*Akachan post*', 2023).

Here, she mentioned that she was not ‘brainwashed’, where she seemed to be aware of power influencing people’s beliefs that having biological children was normal. Rather than having biological children, Natsumi saw importance in experiencing parenthood as she thought it would be an important experience despite expected hardships: ‘Being able to see a human’s growth from a baby to an adult is a very precious experience, I think’ (Natsumi, age 28). However, she also has interest in experiencing pregnancy and childbirth and shared that she started to take hormonal pills as preparation for future pregnancy. It seems that she was trying to be well prepared for whatever choices she would make because she was still open to various options. This shows lived complexity as well as ambiguity to be undecided for one’s reproductive decisions after consideration of different options. Her decision-making process includes all of the following: internalisation of, critique against, and negotiation with the dominant idea of having biological children. In this process, it was seen that she conducted self-management, but with a sense of agency to choose her reproductive decisions based on her own values.

The emotional, financial, and social benefits of having children may lead to another social reasoning of happiness, which is to make one’s parents happy. Several interviewees considered that their parents and grandparents would be happy if they gave birth to a child and showed them their own child. For example, Haruka mentioned, ‘I think my grandparents would be very happy to see me [showing them] like, “this is my child” while [they] are still alive so I hope to be able to show them my child’ (Haruka, age 26). Momoko also explained that one of the reasons why she would like to have her biological children was to bring happiness to her parents and grandparents by referring to the concept of *oyakōkō*.<sup>24</sup> The Japanese word, *oyakōkō*, means the ethic to show appreciation to parents, to pay them respect, and to make them happy (Jared, 2015). According to Momoko, having biological children is considered as *oyakōkō*:

Parents, or, I don’t know, maybe it’s a concept, I feel like this fits into the concept of *oyakōkō*, if I say it in a formal way. As I feel it’s normal, I think my parents, my grandparents, well, I no longer have grandfathers, but I think my grandmothers would be happy. Yeah, . . . like one aspect of *oyakōkō*. (Momoko, age 26)

Momoko’s explanation suggests that there is an aspect of *oyakōkō* requiring people to have biological children to fulfil the duty of making their parents happy, and it seems utilised to

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<sup>24</sup> It is often translated as ‘filial piety’ in English.



reinforce the idea of ‘happy family’. This pursuit of happiness by giving birth might be related to parents’ or grandparents’ expectation to see a grandchild or a great-grandchild. A few interviewees mentioned that their grandmothers sometimes put their expectation of seeing a great-grandchild into words. However, they did not take it as pressure to themselves and it was most likely because they were not married yet. This is because there are certain life steps to be expected to happen, which I will discuss it in the next subchapter.

## 2) The normalised life paths to follow – childbirth after marriage

Throughout the interview data, it was found that there were certain life paths that were normalised and practiced for women. For example, Haruka mentioned, ‘Dating for a few years, getting married, and having children. I think, it’s nice. You may call it normal and proper [laughing] but I think that kind of path is good’ (Haruka, age 26). Here, she believed that the ‘normal and proper’ paths for marriage and childbirth were good and desired to follow them, which shows her internalisation of the social norms and practices about reproduction. Similarly, Kana described ideal paths often discussed within her friends as:

The ideal steps would be, get married in your late 20s, enjoy your newlywed time for about two years, give birth to your first child in your early 30s, and give birth to your second child in your mid 30s. It’s spoken as kind of ideal steps that everyone aims to achieve. (Kana, age 26)

Her explanation gives an idea of the specific age range considered as ideal for each life stage although there might be a few differences of a few years for what is imagined as ideal for other people. Kana later mentioned, ‘It’s kind of a normal thing, like, “well, that’s the path to follow”. I feel like there’s a certain expectation, yes, a tendency like that’ (Kana, age 26). These ‘steps’, also mentioned as ‘the path to follow’, ‘flow’ (Misaki, age 27), or ‘template’ (Misaki, age 27), suggest that a family model of heterosexual marriage with biological children was idealised as well as normalised in Japanese society. This seems to be aligned with the political promotion of marriage included as one of the reproductive policies of *shōshika* because marriage is expected to increase the birth rate in the scheme of the Japanese family model, as Suzuki (2017) has argued. Referring to her friend’s experience, Mai explained about social pressure of having children on married women:

My married friend said, after she got married, she sometimes got asked something like ‘Oh, when, when are you planning?’ Like, ‘When are you planning to have a baby?’ as

if it's natural or normal. . . . If you get married, then there might be expectations like, 'Oh, when's the next one?' Especially in our parents' generation or in our grandmothers' generation, there might be many people who think like that, I think. (Mai, age 29)

From what she said, it seems that the concept of the ideal family is internalised by many people, both young and old, so that they expect married women to give birth.

My interview data shows that normalisation of the idea that everyone has a desire to have biological children after marriage also creates negative discourses around life paths not following the order of marriage, pregnancy, and childbirth. Haruka described how people would react to pregnancy or childbirth before marriage:

For example, if you make a child before you get married, and then you get married later, it's like, you know, it's not that I'm seeing it negatively, but it's like the social pressure in Japan. It's like, 'Oh, so it's *dekichattakon*'. (Haruka, age 26)

*Dekichattakon* is a popular word to describe marriage after pregnancy or childbirth (Tsutsui, 2006). *Dekichatta* means 'accidentally getting pregnant' and *kon* means 'marriage', so it includes the nuance of blaming a couple for getting pregnant before marriage. Momoko also mentioned, 'Nowadays, you know, of course, there are many cases of de facto marriage without getting married legally in other countries, but I think, there's still a word '*dekikon*' (*dekichattakon*) in Japan' (Momoko, age 26). Here, she indicated that a couple would get negative reactions even in the case that they did not see the importance of marriage before childbirth. Due to the stigmatisation of getting pregnant outside of marriage in society, she strongly considered getting married before having any children. Whilst Momoko was aware that having children outside marriage would be an option for people in other countries, she believed that following social norms in Japan would be the best option for her. There is the process of negotiation that led her to accept the social expectations of following the normalised life paths after observing the circumstance in which she was positioned. This social concept of *dekichattakon* demonstrates that only certain reproductive practices are accepted. This internalisation and normalisation of the life path of 'getting married first, and then having children' seems to reinforce the Japanese family ideology promoted by the Japanese reproductive politics introduced previously. Therefore, this shows how power and knowledge are constructed around family and reproductive behaviours.

The life paths expecting pregnancy and childbirth after marriage are not only promoted as norms but also imposed in legislation. The Japanese family registration system, *Koseki-seido*, was brought up by different interviewees as one of the reasons why they would prefer to get married before having any children. Kana mentioned that having children outside marriage would bring ‘a lot of inconveniences’ (Kana, age 25). In addition, she was worried that a family having children outside marriage would be registered separately and would not be considered as family legally:

When I want to have children, I know I don’t have to be married, but I imagine that there might be a lot of inconveniences if I’m not married. . . . It’s very specific, but, like *Koseki*. Yes, I would feel like, each of us is separated. Like, we’re not a family on the legal paper. (Kana, age 26)

Mai pointed out that it would be better to get married before having any children:

If a child is born [outside legal marriage], there will be issues of family name and so on. . . . We need to think which one of us will get parental authority of the child, if we are not married, I guess. I think there will be a lot of troubles. (Mai, age 29)

Although Mai mentioned having children after marriage would provide ‘benefits’ (Mai, age 29), her explanation rather emphasised the disadvantages of having children outside marriage due to the legal structure restricting one’s rights to form different types of families. There are ‘institutional guarantees’ (Momoko, age 26) which only legal families can obtain. This is why Momoko also saw the importance of getting married legally before having children: ‘I think it would be better if we have [institutional guarantees]. Something like, on a formal written document’ (Momoko, age 26). As interviewees have pointed out, the *Koseki-seido* only accepts heteronormative married couples to be registered as a legal family and excludes other forms of family, and a born child is expected to be registered under the family of a married couple (Chapman, 2019). Therefore, participants tended to negotiate their reproductive decisions to accept practices to plan pregnancy and childbirth after marriage for the legal advantages provided, although some of them questioned the meaning of marriage.

### **3) Emerging ideas against dominant norms and practices of family with children**

As social norms or ideal practices are considered to change as time goes by and to exist temporally in biopolitical governmentality (Foucault, 1978, 2008, 2009; Portschy, 2020), it is

crucial to look at emerging ideas against currently existing knowledge in transitions of society. One significant point found in the interview data was about choosing life paths not to have children. During interviews, positive aspects of childless marriage were brought up by several interviewees. Although the interview data has shown that there was social and political promotion of happiness achieved by forming a family with children in Japanese society, most interviewees recognised several benefits of choosing life paths without children. They tended to bring up positive traits of a childless life by comparing it to the hardships of becoming a parent. The main advantages they pointed out was having more freedom in terms of finances, career, time, and responsibilities. Haruka mentioned:

If I don't have children [after marriage], for example, money will be fully spent on me and my [future] husband, only for two people. . . . it would make it easier for us to go somewhere luxurious, by spending money which would be spent on a child on ourselves. In addition, we wouldn't have to find someone to look after [our children] . . . It's really, just the two of us, so it would be easier to travel to different places. I feel that [being childless] wouldn't require, really, to consider anything carefully. (Haruka, age 26)

She also described restrictions on some behaviours which people would get after having children due to their responsibilities as parents:

For example, if I went clubbing and drunk all night, people would say, . . . 'You have a child, you're a parent, but is it okay to behave like that?' I think there's such pressure, so I would feel, 'I have to behave as a parent properly'. So, I don't think I will be able to do whatever I want. (Haruka, age 26)

Due to these financial and social restrictions, Haruka expected that spending a childless life would be more carefree. She mentioned that she was eager to have children for her happiness, but she was not against the choice of not having children. Misaki also imagined that becoming a parent would bring 'a life requiring much patience' (Misaki, age 27). Like Haruka, Mai brought up the financial benefits of having no children: 'All the costs would be for only me and my [future] husband, just the two of us' (Misaki, age 27). In addition, Momoko mentioned that there would be differences between lives with and without children in terms of spending money and working styles. She imagined what her life would be like without children as follows:

Probably, if I don't have children [in the future], I will probably live the same kind of life as I do now [laughing]. To be more precise, well, working quite a lot, and spending money on things I like and hobbies. I think I would enjoy that kind of lifestyle to a certain extent. (Momoko, age 26)

Although she wished to have children in the future, she said that she would enjoy a life without children if she ended up not having children.

In addition to leisure and financial aspects, Ai mentioned, 'By not having children, of course, it gives you more time for yourself. And also, about career, there would be no concerns about what would be affected by having children' (Ai, age 25). The benefits in terms of career were brought up by Kana as well:

For example, if I want to work abroad, and then if my [future] husband is also working, and if we have children, . . . well, it'll be not just my matter. . . . But if I don't have children, I'll be like, 'Oh, there's opportunity to work abroad, let's go'. It'll be smoothly decided. (Kana, age 26)

As she had wishes to work abroad, Kana imagined that it would be easier to decide to work abroad if she did not have children. Her way of thinking came from her experience of seeing her older sister's life changes after childbirth: 'I've seen up close that there was a 180 degree turn in [her older sister's] life, really. It's her own life, but she has to adapt her [life] for her children' (Kana, age 26). Having this in mind, Kana recognised that having children would bring life changes to mothers with some restrictions and hardships. For Mai, seeing her aunt spend her life without children had brought positive impressions of a childless life:

I have an aunt who is married, but she didn't give birth to a child. She's already, probably 67. . . about to be 70, 70 years old soon. When I look at her, I really feel, how do you say, it seems that [she and her husband] are able to do whatever they want to do at their own pace. (Mai, age 29)

She later described that her aunt and her aunt's husband lived in Europe and often enjoyed their vacations for long. This made a life without children attractive to her: 'their lives are revolving around themselves, and it makes me think, "this way of life also looks fun"' (Mai, age 29). My interview participants imagined a childless life to be more carefree and more flexible by having more money, time, career opportunities, and leisure options. Unlike social norms presenting

childless family negatively, interviewees perceived a life without children positively to a certain extent. Interviewees' views on the benefits of living a childless life might be influenced by the current economic and welfare situation which I will discuss further in Chapter 5.3. It shows that participants considered pros and cons of different life paths before making their reproductive decisions, questioning the positive promotion of 'happy family' as well as negative social impressions around childless marriage.

Considering what Momoko shared, these positive aspects of a married life without children might be recognised by more individuals in recent times. She mentioned that the number of people choosing life paths without children seemed to increase in recent years:

I feel like, there's the certain number of people [who decide not to have children] in my company, I guess. . . . Well, in that sense, there're probably a lot of couples without children. . . . I feel, there're more people like that than before, I feel the number has increased compared to that of 10 years or decades ago. (Momoko, age 26)

Bringing up some examples of her married colleagues who chose not to have children to enjoy work and hobbies, she said, 'I feel like, there's a trend to think that having children is not a goal. Like, a goal, I mean, it's no longer the definition of happiness' (Momoko, age 26). This suggests that there are emerging ideas against the dominant norms and practices about reproduction are becoming new norms in small groups of people. As Foucault's theory of biopolitical governmentality (1978, 2008, 2009) suggests that certain norms or practices exist always temporally in changing political, economic, and social contexts, transition might be happening to make life paths without children more accepted positively, especially around younger generation in the Japanese society.

## **5.2 Knowledge about women's bodies and reproductive health**

According to interviewees, there are certain norms and practices encouraging women to plan their pregnancy and childbirth with the promotion of specific information about fertility and infertility of women's bodies and reproductive functions. Interviewees sometimes believed knowledge promoted as what was based on biological and medical truth, and other times questioned whether to conduct socially idealised reproductive practices constructed by this knowledge. Whilst fertility education is promoted, all interviewees recognised that some information about women's reproductive health and bodies, especially regarding menstruation and contraception, were excluded from health education although they felt it was required.

Despite its inaccessibility, they were eager to obtain excluded information and had a strong sense of agency to find and select information they would need to make the best reproductive decisions for themselves. In this chapter, I will focus on social norms and practices about women's bodies and reproduction brought up by interviewees and will analyse where resistance against and negotiation with dominant norms and practices were performed by my interview participants.

### **1) The ideal time of pregnancy and childbirth – healthy bodies for healthy babies**

One significant finding from what interviewees brought up is excessive promotion of prioritising healthy bodies to give birth to a healthy baby. Regarding the ideal times for pregnancy and childbirth, most interviewees believed that giving birth at a younger age was better because younger bodies were considered healthier. Here, 'younger' was mentioned as calculating from the current age of the interviewees most of the time. For example, Misaki said, 'When I listen to my parent's and grandmother's stories, I've heard that physical strength is important, so in that sense, I think the earlier, the better' (Misaki, age 27). From her explanation, 'physical strength' was discussed as an important condition for childbirth within her family. She added that the knowledge was not only shared within her family, but also within her friends: 'I have impression that everyone is saying that "The younger, the better"' (Misaki, age 27). Mai also described more details about why physical strength would be required:

When I talked to people who had their first babies in their late 30s, they said it was really difficult. Well, most of them went through infertility treatment, got pregnant, and gave birth to their children. [I heard that] the infertility treatment was really hard, both mentally and financially, to the point it became a great burden . . . it's definitely better to give birth to a child while you're young, considering things like the physical burden. (Mai, age 29)

Hearing from other people's experiences about childbirth and childrearing, both Misaki and Mai expected that it would be better to give birth as soon as possible if they would like to have biological children. This importance of 'physical strength' is shared among family and friends as knowledge to suggest the conduct of a certain practices, such as giving birth at a younger age when women's reproductive functions are considered healthier. This similarly links to the political promotion of fertility education, which suggests women give birth whilst their

reproductive functions are considered to be healthier and to be more fertile (Fassbender, 2016, 2022; Nishiyama, 2017a; Tanaka, 2016, 2017; Yui, 2021).

In terms of what is considered as ‘younger’, it seems to be counted from the interviewees’ own ages. For example, Ai mentioned as follows:

If people get pregnant whilst they are university students, very strong criticisms against them will be brought up, you know. Although they are already in their 20s [at the time of pregnancy]. . . . People say that they want to have at least one child during their 20s, but I think it’s maybe from the age of 25 or 26. (Ai, age 25)

Considering all participants were in their late 20s at the time of interviews, ‘the younger, the better’ meant to plan to give birth as quickly as possible due to their current ages. Such ideal age range for pregnancy and childbirth brought up by interviewees might be influenced by information about women’s reproductive bodies that they obtained. From the interview data, it was remarkable that most participants had knowledge that the likelihood of getting pregnant would start decreasing after reaching a certain age:

[I’ve heard that] 24 years old is the peak, it’s something like, the older you get, after the age of 24, the harder it will be to get pregnant. Something like that, the implantation rate of being able to get pregnant. . . . [I obtained such information] from something posted on [the wall] at obstetrics and gynaecology clinics, or played on TV, TV [programs] the clinics made. And, from my friends who are married and who are considering having children. (Misaki, age 27)

I don’t know where I obtained this information, but I guess, when you’re over 30, the probability goes down to, like a certain percentage. Seeing such information makes me feel worried. . . . About the percentage [of a likelihood of getting pregnant] decreasing to something at the age of 30, I think I’ve seen it on TV, and this topic is brought up when I talk with my friends, it’s discussed quite often. (Momoko, age 26)

Reproductive information tends to be provided on websites of obstetrics and gynaecology clinics, many of them have such websites, and when I looked at the miscarriage rates in the 20s, 30s, and 40s, I was quite intimidated by the data. Although it’s not certain if I would be included in that percentage. Numbers are powerful, you know. (Natsumi, age 28)



Although what age was considered as the most fertile might be not the same for all interviewees, they seemed to share the understanding that women had higher probability of getting pregnant during their 20s. Because of this, considering all interview participants were above the age of 24 at the time of interviews, they believed that it would be better to experience pregnancy and childbirth at earlier ages. From what interviewees shared, it seemed that there was information about fertility flooded on media surrounding them. Most interviewees recognised the dominant information about fertility as biologically and medically confirmed knowledge because sources of the information were often medical institutions or medical practitioners. This links with the national aim to spread ‘medically and scientifically correct knowledge of pregnancy and childbirth’ (Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, 2015, p. 9) as a countermeasure against the low birth rate. What interviewees described as fertility information obtained seems to be related to excessive media promotion of the concept of ‘egg-ageing’ targeting young women, which suggests ‘a likelihood of getting pregnant’ decreasing by age, as discussed in previous literatures showing biopolitical governmentality of the Japanese reproductive politics. (Fassbender, 2022; Ohashi, 2017; Tanaka 2016, 2017; Tsuge, 2017a, 2017b; Yui, 2021). As seen in the interviewees’ quotes, the fertility information is not only promoted in the media but also discussed within their friend groups. This shows how knowledge is circulated in multiple directions, and through this process, social norms and practices for women’s reproductive behaviours seems to be constructed as well as internalised by young women including several of the interviewees.

My interview data shows that the idea of the temporality of women’s fertility during their lifetimes strengthens awareness of the risks of childbirth at an older age. This knowledge made interviewees feel pressured to plan their pregnancy and childbirth by calculating their ages backwards from the latest time they would like to have biological children. This calculation of age was often discussed by interviewees. For example, Kana described her plan of when to give birth:

If I want to have two children, I need to give birth to the first one before 35, [laughing] sounds very obligatory. Well, calculating backwards, it depends on how much age difference you want [between a first child and a second child], but if it’s like three- or five-year difference, I want to have a second child before 40, I think. (Kana, age 26)

As she would like to have two children, Kana took an age gap between a first child and a second child into consideration. Believing that probability of getting pregnant would start declining

around the age of 30, Momoko mentioned, ‘I think it’s until 30. I have my hope that I want to give birth during my 20s, 20s’ (Momoko, age 26). Both Kana and Momoko internalised social practices constructed by the knowledge about the most fertile ages for women. They felt the need to manage themselves and to plan the timings of pregnancy and childbirth. This coincides with political promotion of ‘life plan education’ which encourages women to plan the timings of pregnancy and childbirth by considering the fertility of women’s bodies (Fassbender, 2022; Nishiyama, 2017a; Ohashi, 2017; Yui, 2021).

When discussing the ideal ages for pregnancy and childbirth, the word *kōreishussan* (advanced age childbirth) was often brought up by interviewees with concerns of increasing risks related to pregnancy and childbirth at older ages. For example, Kana mentioned, ‘My concern is about my physical strength. Because *kōreishussan* has some risks’ (Kana, age 26). Similarly, Haruka was aware of risks for *kōreishussan*:

I want to have a baby by the age of 35. Because I’ve heard many times that there’re risks on the women’s side by experiencing *kōreishussan*. . . . Such risks are scary, right. Of course, I think there’re people who gave birth after the age, but yes, considering those risks, 35, is the limit, I think like that a bit [laughing]. (Haruka, age 26)

She later shared that she had heard about risks of *kōreishussan* possibly from her mother who was a nurse, on TV, and through social media, but there was no specific source she remembered. She mentioned, ‘The information about, something like, “35 years old is the limit [for childbirth]” came from, I have impression of, rather than someone teaching me “this is it”, it reached my ears just involuntarily and came to my knowledge’ (Haruka, age 26). This seems to show that there was power to construct knowledge about fertility information regarding women’s age limit for reproduction to Haruka. As a result, she conducted internalisation of social practices to experience childbirth before the age of 35. Additionally, Natsumi shared what her friend who was a nurse taught her about risks of *kōreishussan*: ‘There is the fact that the probability of having a handicapped child would increase after becoming 30’ (Natsumi, age 28). It shows that there is an ideal of giving birth to a healthy baby, and thus, the timing of childbirth should be considered to avoid risks of getting ‘a handicapped child’. The idea valuing healthy bodies for healthy babies is linked with what Takeda (2005) has proposed, which is that the Japanese reproductive politics has been centralising around eugenics to strengthen the nation with a healthy population. Throughout the discussion of *kōreishussan*, interviewees recognised that *kōreishussan* is what should be avoided to reduce risks of pregnancy and

childbirth. As risks of *kōreishussan* are often associated with infertility, it seems to be related to the problematisation of infertility as ‘what should be avoided’ in Japanese reproductive politics (Fassbender, 2022; Suzuki, 2017; Tsuge, 2017b). It links to the reproductive policies of *Shōshika Taisaku* which aims to help women to manage their reproductive health as prevention of infertility (Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, et al., 2021). This kind of self-management is conducted to avoid risks that can terminate one’s life and to maintain a healthy life is one characteristic of biopolitics and governmentality (Foucault, 2008, 2009).

Concerning the upper limit for people to be able to become pregnant and give birth, most interviewees assumed the age around 40 by having seen someone who had experienced it. However, they were concerned about the risks associated with advanced age childbirth and only one participant, Natsumi, saw the possibility of childbirth at the age of 40 as one of her life choices:

I feel that giving birth at the age of 40 will be fine if physical strength allows. I won’t be afraid of giving birth at 40 at the latest. Well, I’ll be able to develop my career in that case, so looking at financial aspects, there may be some benefits. (Natsumi, age 28)

Here, she made her own meanings to accept pregnancy and childbirth at the age of 40 through the conduct of critique. She mentioned that she used to think that giving birth in the 20s would be best when considering women’s reproductive ages and higher risks of *kōreishussan*, but by seeing a parent and a child with about a 35-year age gap often, she recently started feeling that childbirth at an older age would be manageable. By questioning negative social impressions towards childbirth at the age of 40, she found some benefits of childbirth at a later age for her future reproductive decisions.

Knowledge which promotes the admiration of youth for physical strength and healthiness includes not only pregnancy and childbirth but also childrearing. Looking at her older sister raising two children, Kana believed that it would be better to give birth as early as possible to be capable of tackling the physical hardships of childrearing:

Looking at my sister, I’ve found that parenting requires real physical strength, so, it’s true that you have more stamina, for various things, when you are younger, you know. That’s why it is said, ‘the younger you are, the better it is for childbirth’ in society. It is

said like that in society, but when I see [her older sister's case] up close, I kind of feel that 'it's real' (Kana, age 26)

During the interview, she emphasised how exhausting her older sister looked when taking care of her children. Kana believed that age was a crucial factor for physical strength to bear with the hardships of childrearing and internalised the social ideal of 'the younger, the better'. Mai also shared her considerations on physical strength for childrearing:

If I give birth to a child at the age of 40, I think like, 'I'll be 50 years old when the child is 10 years old', and I'm like, 'I don't have confidence to be that healthy at the age of 50' [laughing]. I doubt if I have the strength to run around with a 10-year-old child when I become 50 [laughing]. (Mai, age 29)

From this concern about physical strength, Mai mentioned that she would be 'glad to have one child by the middle of my 30s' (Mai, age 29). However, her desire to have children was not very strong at the time of interview, and she shared reasons why she was not in rush to have children:

About when I want to have children, [she and her partner] talk like, 'if we get pregnant now, it's fine, yeah fine', but after all, . . . I think there are some things which we only can do without children. For example, I wish to go to university, having something I want to study. Also, for career, I want to challenge myself to work abroad. Things like that, which tend to be difficult to be done if we had children, . . . but it's not impossible to do such things with children, so if we get to see our paths clearer, we may start talking like, 'we want to have a child'. (Mai, age 29)

A similar opinion was brought up by Kana as well:

Children are cute and I want to have my children someday, but I want to work, and want to go out and to go on a trip with my friends whenever I want, I really want to live freely. Also, there are many things that you can do only while you're young. . . . After I enjoy my single life, as the second [stage of her] life, I may become to want to have children, I guess? (Kana, age 26)

Both Mai and Kana had some interests other than having children and saw the importance of enjoying what they could do in their lives without children. As they understood what they

would like to do in their lives, they did not feel the need of practicing the dominant norm of ‘giving birth as early as possible’ anytime soon. This shows their negotiation which was to leave their reproductive decision-making undecided until they were satisfied with their lives before having children whilst hoping to experience childbirth earlier with less risks if their desires to have children grew in the near future. Likewise, Haruka desired to develop her career, but with concerns of *kōreishussan*, she had not found the best life choice for herself yet:

I want to become a ‘career woman’ [a woman devoting herself to work] and to earn a lot of money so I don’t want to give up and to compromise. So, I want to experience various things such as going abroad first, and then, I want to make a choice about my life. But considering something like *kōreishussan*, it’s not easy for me to make that kind of choice [laughing], I have that kind of concern [laughing]. (Haruka, age 25)

For her reproductive decisions regarding the timings of childbirth, Haruka conducted negotiation with consideration on what to prioritise, either giving birth with less risks or enjoying career development and her other interests.

In terms of gender differences, some interviewees explained that the biological limited time for reproduction was imposed only on women. Kana described her feelings about her male friends’ attitudes towards marriage and having children:

Because for men, honestly, it doesn’t matter how old they are. Well, unless they want to be young dads. Well, it’s our side who is going to give birth, you know [laughing]. It’s like, ‘Well, the risk is on our side’. So, when I talk to my friends, male friends, who are the same age as me, they say, ‘Well, I’ll get married one day, if I can. I’m not in a hurry’. And also about children, they’re like, ‘Well, when the time comes’ or ‘If that happens’. I feel these kinds of things. So, yeah, I think the time frame is a bit different. I think it’s women who are under a lot of time pressure. (Kana, age 26)

Here, she thought that a timeframe for reproduction was a particular difference between men and women, which determined the amount of pressure women received regarding marriage and having children. Therefore, the temporality of the body for reproduction is a gender issue. There are social expectations, which are stronger on women, to manage their lives and reproductive behaviours by considering the ideal times of pregnancy and childbirth.

## 2) Women’s bodies as resources to produce offspring

As previously discussed, there is stronger social pressure on women to give birth than on men to have children due to the temporality of women's reproduction. Similarly, several interviewees mentioned that women got more pressure of having children in general because women were the ones who actually gave birth. For example, Haruka mentioned:

To be honest, I feel like women are being told [to have children strongly] because it's women who give birth. . . . so I really feel like there's a pressure towards women. There will be no use of pressure you give to men no matter what if a women's side is not willing to give birth. (Haruka, age 26)

Kana also showed her acceptance of getting pressured as a woman: 'You can't do anything about it. And men can't give birth. That's how it is. It's no use complaining about [the gendered difference of pressure]' (Kana, age 26). Analysing what Haruka and Kana said, receiving social pressure due to their gender was considered as what should be accepted because it was believed as biological or medical truth which was unchangeable. Here, both Haruka and Kana internalised the idea that reproduction was women's issues. This is a good example of the reproductive matter regarded as 'women's problems' or 'women's responsibility' in reproductive politics (O'Brien, 1981; Yuval-Davis, 1997). Interviewees' interpretation of women's bodies as resources to produce offspring is interlinked with the Japanese reproductive politics centralising women to solve the national issues of population, economy, and welfare (Fassbender, 2022; Miura, 2015; Ohashi, 2017; Tsuge, 2017a, 2017b; Ueno, 2021).

There is one finding related to this socially accepted idea of reproduction as women's matters. It is that my interview participants saw women's reproductive functions as valuable so that they desired to have children. Some interviewees mentioned that they desired to have children because they would like to experience what only female bodies could do, which were pregnancy and childbirth. For example, Kana mentioned, 'I was born in a woman's body, and only women can give birth to a child, right? So, I want to experience what I can do with a female body' (Kana, age 26). Mai also provided the same answer, 'Because I have a body that I can give birth to a child, it'd be interesting to do so as an experience [laughing]' (Mai, age 29). Both Kana and Mai said that such an idea comes from their genuine interests. From what they shared, it seems that female bodies were considered as a means of reproduction, and they saw themselves as subjects to conduct the practice of bearing a child. It shows how experiencing childbirth was seen as special to women, and it constructs their reasons to consider having biological children in their future. Similarly, Momoko recognised that women

were expected to provide their own bodies as resources for reproduction, comparing different expectations based on gender:

For men, I think they're more expected to provide financial resources, or some kind of actions such as supporting his whole family financially. For women, something like infertility treatment, something related to bodily experiences. I feel like, there are a bit of differences between them. (Momoko, age 26)

She thought this was the reason why media promotion about infertility treatment seemed to target women intentionally to some extent. This shows that infertility tends to be problematised as women's problems because women are expected to provide their bodies as resources for reproduction. This confirms problematisation of infertility in the Japanese reproductive politics as discussed in previous literatures (Fassbender, 2022; Suzuki, 2017; Tsuge, 2017b).

Seeing values in uniqueness of women's bodies producing offspring brings concerns about not experiencing childbirth, as brought up by Ai. Regarding her reproductive decision, Ai discussed as follows:

I feel invisible pressure against my decision not to have children, like, 'Is there no problem not to have children although you're born with a female body?' or 'Why do you choose not to have children although Japan has a low birth rate?' These kinds of thoughts or ideas attack me suddenly sometimes like a needle. (Ai, age 25)

From what Ai shared, it can be said that there are the following social norms: women are expected to give birth because they have female bodies and because Japan is experiencing a low birth rate. Her expression of 'feeling attacked' indicates that these norms are internalised by people around her, and thus, there are negative social responses against one's choice of not having children. Considering that Ai brought up *shōshika* as one of the reasons to blame people who make a choice of not having children, it seems that there is the influence of reproductive politics around the issue of the low birth rate (Fassbender, 2022; Ohashi, 2017; Tsuge, 2016, 2017a) on social construction of norms that women should give birth. In addition, negative images towards childless married couples in relation to infertility were discussed by other interviewees. For example, Haruka described what kinds of reactions that married people without children would receive if someone found out that they did not have children:

In Japan, people say things like, ‘Oh, I’m sorry for asking’, . . . I think that’s because it’s not normal [to have no children], . . . So it’s like, ‘not having children equals not being normal’. And there’s an expectation like, ‘So you couldn’t have children due to some reasons’. (Haruka, age 26)

Here, what is considered as ‘normal’ is the ideal family model of heterosexual marriage with biological children, which is believed as happy, as previously discussed. Therefore, it seems that childless married couples tend to be assumed that they are not happy although they are happy to choose to be childless. Additionally, Kana talked about the social environment of asking about children as taboo:

Maybe, either [of a couple] has an infertile body and they may be depressed because of that, you know. Well, I think there are a lot of couples like that in the current society. . . . That’s why it’s considered as a bit taboo these days. . . a question like, ‘Are you not going to have children?’ (Kana, age 26)

In Kana’s explanation, as awareness of infertility treatment and of its hardships has been spread in society, childless married couples have tended to be associated with infertility more frequently. To avoid hurting someone who is taking infertility treatment, people consider that asking questions related to children is a taboo. This shows the problematisation of infertility as well as childless marriage in the Japanese society, and it comes from social norms and practices expecting women to give birth.

### **3) Information excluded from knowledge – stigmatisation of menstruation and contraception**

Thus far, I have discussed that certain types of fertility and infertility information are promoted in terms of reproductive functions of women’s bodies. As previously mentioned, this includes the likelihood of pregnancy by age, risks of advanced age childbirth, and physical strength for childbirth and childrearing. On the other hand, it was found from the interview data that certain types of information about women’s sexual and reproductive health were excluded from knowledge which interviewees had easy access to. During interviews, it was brought up that there was little opportunity to take sexual and reproductive health education at school. All interviewees shared that a health and physical class, which was partially considered as a sex education class, did not provide any practical knowledge about sexual and reproductive health. Interviewees discussed sex education at school as follows: ‘I don’t recognise that I received



[sex education] at school' (Ai, age 25), 'If you ask me whether sex education was taught in school, I think it's not at all' (Haruka, age 26), and 'There was not much content. During my school years, in a health and physical class' (Natsumi, age 28). This confirms the lack of sex education about necessary information on sexual and reproductive health, especially practical information about sexual intercourse, contraception, and abortion, due to strong opposition from the leading party (Fu, 2011; Hirose, 2013; Ohashi, 2017). Despite the lack of sex education, interviewees had specific knowledge about fertility and infertility because they were exposed to such information mostly through media and interaction with friends and family, as previously introduced. However, in contrast, there seemed to be much less opportunity for them to obtain other types of information related to women's reproductive health, such as menstrual health and contraception, which were brought up by interviewees as lacking information. For example, Mai mentioned,

I don't think [information and education about reproductive health were] enough at all. Like, something about contraception. . . . And, for example, when my period got a bit late, or when I got a lot of discharge, I didn't have any knowledge about [menstruation]. (Mai, age, 29)

It is demonstrated that there was an exclusion of certain types of information about sexual and reproductive health from knowledge allowed to exist in society although it was what interviewees needed to solve their problems related to sexual and reproductive health.

When analysing the exclusion of certain sexual and reproductive information, which is about menstrual health and contraceptive pills for example, stigmatisation of women's sexual and reproductive health was found as one of the reasons for the lacking information. For example, Haruka said, 'There are people who feel uncomfortable to talk openly about menstruation and pregnancy' (Haruka, age 26). In addition, Mai shared her thoughts on the social environment to make women's menstrual health as a taboo:

I feel that society must have some kinds of mechanism to make people feel difficult to say anything about it. For example, putting menstrual products in a paper bag [before putting it into a plastic bag with other products] at pharmacy. It seems like, 'It shouldn't be seen' [laughing]. (Mai, age 29)

Mai was aware of invisible power which is exercised in Japanese society to stigmatise women's sexual and reproductive health, including menstrual health, as a taboo or as something private.<sup>25</sup> She introduced examples of stigmatisation of women's sexuality at a societal level:

[A famous Japanese female influencer] has got a contraception, I guess, a contraceptive ring or something in her body. I've heard that she decided to announce it openly to share information about something like this as an influencer. However, as expected, when she announced it, there were comments saying like, 'You're slutty!' (Mai, age 29)

Although it was a purposeful content about women's reproductive health, Mai mentioned that the negative and attacking comments on the influencer were something 'expected' due to its topic. She continued, 'Also, you know, contraceptive pills too, you somehow feel that you need to say, "because I'm having heavy menstrual pains" or something, like an excuse, when you tell someone that you are taking contraceptive pills' (Mai, age 29). This suggests that there is stigmatisation of women talking about contraception, and women might encounter it in everyday life. It might be related to negative discourses around female-led contraception, especially contraceptive pills, which can be shown in huge controversies on them and political reluctance to make them accessible to women (Hirayama, 2018; Norgren, 2001; Ogino, 2008; Takeda, 2005). Recognising that having knowledge about women's sexual and reproductive health is necessary and important, Mai questioned the social environment to stigmatise it, especially about menstruation and female-led contraception. She resisted internalising the social norms oppressing female sexuality by considering that there is no practical reasoning behind it.

As previously discussed by Mai, there is social pressure to make women feel the need of 'having an excuse' to take contraceptive pills other than for the purpose of getting contraception. This expectation that women should not manage contraception is reflected on the medical system of Japan where prescription of female contraception including contraceptive pills is not covered by the national health insurance scheme (Hirayama, 2018). Interestingly, the same pills are accepted to be promoted as hormonal pills providing effective

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<sup>25</sup> Since the 10th century, menstruation had been considered as *kegare*, which means impure, and there was management of women on their menstruation at a societal level by secluding them from the public space for a long period of history in Japan (Taguchi, 2003). However, after an import of Western medicine in the Meiji era, menstruation was medicalised as a private issue which would be informed only to medical professionals or teachers (Taguchi, 2003). It is considered that the taboo of menstruation which remains in the current Japanese society is constructed by the entanglement of these social structure and values.

treatment for menstrual pain and diseases, as Mai mentioned previously. In recent years, hormonal pills have been promoted as a method to maintain the condition of the uterus better for future pregnancy, according to Natsumi. She shared her reasons why she decided to start taking hormonal pills:

It has an effect to rest the functions of the uterus, so even if you get older, your chances of getting pregnant will be higher than if you didn't take it, you know. The soccer player Homare Sawa shared this information. She got pregnant and gave birth when she was in her mid-30s, and I read an article by her. . . . She was explaining the importance of preparation in the article. There are preparations which you can do after you get married and want to have children, and preparations which you can do during your 20s as a preliminary preparation. And she said that she was glad that she had done that. So, I started taking the hormonal pills too [laughing]. (Natsumi, age 28)

Influenced by this media promotion, Natsumi internalised the idea of 'preserving a uterus for future pregnancy' and accepted to conduct the idealised practice of maintaining fertility by taking hormonal pills. Recognising the national health insurance system not covering hormonal pills for contraceptive use, Natsumi described how she interacted with a doctor:

Rather than emphasising 'contraception', 'birth control', I said [to a doctor] I wanted to focus more on resting my uterus so [it was covered by insurance]. The doctor recommended a very low dose instead of a low dose. So, the cost was very, well, well, it wasn't that bad, but it cost a certain amount. (Natsumi, age 28)

This rationalisation of the use of hormonal pills for boosting one's fertility is both socially and structurally constructed. If hormonal pills are framed as 'preservation of one's uterus to prepare for pregnancy', it is considered as something women should take. In contrast, if it is framed as 'contraception', it is considered something women should avoid. This seems to be related to media promotion of 'the active pursuit of pregnancy' which encourages self-management by women for their fertility in the biopolitical governmentality of the Japanese reproductive politics (Fassbender, 2022). Hence, contraceptive pills seem to be stigmatised not only due to denial of female sexuality but also due to social, structural, and political rejection of what may allow individuals to choose life paths outside 'happy family', which may lead to a decline of the birth rate, in the context of *shōshika*.

Although it has been discussed that certain types of information about women's sexual and reproductive health are excluded from knowledge, interviewees were actively seeking for information excluded from mainstream fertility education. Most interviewees mentioned that they put their efforts to reach out to lacking information related to women's reproductive health. For example, Momoko said, 'Of course, the information I have, I think it's lacking. . . . How I've learnt it is looking things up by myself, not the information given' (Momoko, age 26). Similarly, Mai mentioned:

I look things up on Google, look at a few websites that I think I can trust, and come to a conclusion, like 'maybe, this one', that kind of level [of knowledge]. If you ask me if I had knowledge [before], I don't think so. (Mai, age 29)

Moreover, she shared her experience of struggling to find correct information about contraceptive pills:

I didn't know about specific details [of contraceptive pills]. . . . so, I researched by myself. But after all, although I researched about it, it turned out as advertisements. Advertisements took a large amount, so it was difficult to find which [information] was correct. . . I think there's possibility that there's a certain intention, like, it's only saying good aspects [of the contraceptive pills]. (Mai, age 29)

Despite the difficult accessibility, she tried to find reliable information from the unorganised information online. In addition, Mai mentioned that she asked her friends who lived overseas to obtain useful information. Natsumi also explained how she conducted her research on reproductive information and described her surprise when learning about menstruation:

It's always like, when I come to the stage of life [laughing], I do a lot of research. When you take the hormonal pills, you know, you could understand the ovulation system very well. . . . I had a fear towards hormonal pills before. So I did some research. I learnt at that time that 'Such a thing was happening in my body every month!' Yeah, I think I voluntarily obtained almost all the knowledge. (Natsumi, age 28)

Like Momoko and Mai, Natsumi actively searched for reproductive information by herself. Their process of seeking out the lacking information was conducted by questioning knowledge which did not fulfil their personal needs. They conducted negotiation with agency to choose

the best options for themselves through research online, as they realised how knowledge about women's sexual and reproductive health was limited.

With the limited access to information and services related to women's sexual and reproductive health, participants hoped to have an environment where people can openly talk about topics related to it. This is mainly because women's sexual and reproductive health, including menstrual health, contraception, and infertility, is stigmatised.<sup>26</sup> For example, Misaki mentioned, 'I hope we can talk more openly' (Misaki, age 27). Likewise, Mai emphasised the importance of having an environment allowing people to talk openly: 'I really think, it would be better, not only about infertility [but also about contraception and menstrual health], to make it easier for people to talk' (Mai, age 29). Throughout the interview, she repeatedly mentioned the need of making people feel comfortable to talk openly when she was talking about infertility treatment, menstruation, and contraception. In addition, Mai said:

I don't like the pressure to prohibit talking about something without any reasons, for anything [laughing]. It's understandable [to restrict someone to talk about something] if there's a reason, but I cannot understand the pressure that 'you shouldn't talk about this' without any reasons [laughing]. (Mai, age 29)

Here, she questioned social norms silencing women from talking openly about menstruation, female-led contraception, and other stigmatised reproductive information. This shows her conduct of critique against social oppression towards certain topics about women's sexual and reproductive health because she considered that there was necessary reproductive information and support that was not provided. Similarly, Natsumi discussed how important it was to provide a place where people were able to talk openly about menstruation:

I wish there was a place where we could talk about it. . . . When I was a second-year master' degree student, there was an event, 'let's talk about menstruation', . . . I had the opportunity to talk with various people there. I think such an environment is important. Yes, it would be great if various people could talk more openly. (Natsumi, age 28)

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<sup>26</sup> Some NPOs and projects are spreading information about women's sexual and reproductive health and rights (see #nande naino, n.d.-b; JOICFP, n.d.). However, the fact that society requires these organisations to promote women's health shows the stigmatisation of these issues at a societal level.

Due to inadequate information especially around menstruation, female-led contraception, and infertility treatment, interviewees pointed out that it was required to change the environment stigmatising such topics as well as to create a place where people can exchange knowledge about reproductive health with each other.

In addition, several interviewees wished to get easier access to helpful information related to sexual and reproductive health online. For example, Haruka suggested some ideas on spreading helpful information on the internet:

Something where you can learn something on your own, for example, something on the internet, . . . like online courses, something like that. I think it'd be good if we could get information through such things. . . . Maybe apps make it easy to do so, or Instagram accounts which give you that kind of information. Well, I think there're already some, but I hope they become more widely known. (Haruka, age 26)

Misaki also brought up similar ideas:

I think it would've been better if there had been more information on social media which I was familiar with, like, well, of course, correct information, or on communicating platforms which people from the same generation and of the same sex would use, something like that. (Misaki, age 27)

In addition to their suggestions, Kana shared an idea of providing information at somewhere like a workplace: 'After becoming an adult, for example, companies or whatever would hold a session for that, I think it'd be quite useful' (Kana, age 26). Furthermore, Natsumi hoped to get consultation services as well as information services especially for hormonal pills:

I think it would be nice if there was a place to provide information. . . . Before I started taking hormonal pills, and even after I started taking them, some questions have been brought up about something I don't know. So, I think it'd be great if there was someone or an institution which I'd be able to talk to easily, for free [laughing], where I could ask for advice. (Natsumi, age 28)

As most interviewees recognised the lack of opportunity to receive helpful information about sexual and reproductive health, they wished to have easier access to the necessary information to decide the best options for their own bodies. This shows negotiation conducted by interview

participants to obtain the information they want whilst recognising some limitations and difficulties.

### **5.3 The notion of motherhood in the neoliberalist welfare system in Japan**

My interview data shows that there were economic and welfare factors influencing on interview participants' life-planning regarding reproductive decisions. Considering this, I will analyse how these factors constructed motherhood of the current times in Japan and how interview participants made reproductive decisions based on their consideration of a life after having children. During interviews, most of the interviewees shared their feelings of being required to manage their financial situation and working styles when considering having children. They brought up the current economic situation and the welfare system to discuss how they would make choices on working styles to be compatible with childrearing. In addition, I identified that there were socially idealised norms and practices for motherhood and gender division of labour, which were in line with neoliberalist governmentality expecting women to provide care work as well as to contribute to the labour market. Whilst most participants hoped that the economic and welfare situation would get better, they considered what would be the best choice under the current circumstance and negotiated what kinds of life decisions they would make, such as becoming mothers and adjusting their working styles after childbirth.

#### **1) The need of engaging in work after becoming a mother for financial reasons**

When interviewees talked about childrearing, becoming a working mother was discussed as a normal choice due to the need of self-funding. Some of them mentioned that the current national economic situation required both a husband and a wife to work full-time after they got a child, which is referred to as *tomobataraki*. For example, Mai said, 'For younger generations, *tomobataraki* is getting normal, you know. So, it's like, "it's not easy to have children", like, such social expectation. I think there're a lot of people who think like that.' (Mai, age 29). Relatedly, Ai shared her reproductive decision influenced by *tomobataraki*: 'In today's Japanese society, where we can't avoid *tomobataraki*, I don't think I would be able to spend enough time to raise my child. So, I wouldn't have children' (Ai, age 25). She further explained financial struggles experienced by the younger generation and its influence on her reproductive decision:

As social issues, there are still many bad aspects of Japan, such as hierarchy system based on seniority, and employees who have been working for the company for a longer

time get paid more. Young people's salaries don't go up much even if they work a lot. I think that this would affect childrearing as well. (Ai, age 25)

In the process of her reproductive decision-making, she seemed to observe the current social circumstance and questioned whether to choose a life with children under the current financially hardships facing the younger generation. Because there was less hope for improvement of the economic situation and the political and social structure of Japan, she was also worried about the future for her children:

Considering raising children in Japan, the future of this country is not bright, I would feel sorry for my child to grow up, and to be forced to work after becoming an adult. This makes me think that I don't want to have children. (Ai, age 25)

Mai's and Ai's explanations on *tomobataraki* indicate that it cannot be avoided for women to continue working after becoming a mother due to the current economic situation. This confirms what Takeda (2018) introduced as the double income family model which started to be promoted in the context of economic and population decline.

Similarly, Misaki shared her feelings for working after childbirth: 'If I could become a housewife, I would like to, but I thought it would be difficult with the current economic situation in Japan so I assume that I will have to continue working [after childbirth]' (Misaki, age 27). She later explained that she was longing for having different available options for her life rather than dreaming of becoming a housewife. This was because there was a social environment to encourage women to choose working after childbirth:

At the current times, about promotion of women's social advancement, the government and corporations have been promoting it strongly. Well, I guess it makes the working environment better [for women], compared to the past. However, I feel, there are many women who choose to continue working after childbirth, and there is strong pressure that women are forced to do so. (Misaki, age 27)

Misaki perceived that becoming a housewife would be available only for a rich household under the current economic circumstances. Referring to the social environment pressuring women to choose certain life paths, she wished to be in environment where she could choose her life path by herself, not by being forced to choose one way. This is where the conduct of critique happened where she questioned the social norms and practices forcing women to



become a working mother. It seems that the social promotion of ‘women’s social advancement’ is greatly related to the neoliberalist welfare and corporate system of Japan sustained under national economic stagnation, considering that interviewees described the need of becoming a working mother after childbirth for financial reasons. Misaki also brought up *shōshika* as a reason why working women who have children gives positive impression socially: ‘Also, as we’re facing *shōshika*, . . . I feel that there is a strong atmosphere that people admire women who gave birth, who are raising children, and who still work’ (Misaki, age 27). With the influence of the economic stagnation and the population decline, women are encouraged to continue working after childbirth. Like social idealisation of life paths for women to get married and to give birth, it was found that there was social idealisation of motherhood to become working mothers. This seems to be linked with political promotion of women’s labour participation, which aims ‘to make women shine’, as one of the national economic strategies (Dalton, 2017; Miura, 2015; Takeda, 2018; Ueno, 2021). Although financial struggles strongly motivated women to work after childbirth according to interviewees, positive promotion of working mothers seemed to be constructed to make people internalise the norms and practices of continuing working after childbirth.

In terms of how much money is required for raising a child, Momoko mentioned, ‘I think, as it would cost a lot of money [to raise a child], it’s necessary for mothers to work, to create this kind of money’ (Momoko, age 26). From what she said, it is considered that parents are expected to fund the cost of childrearing mostly by themselves. Other interviewees also expected that a tremendous amount of money would be required for childrearing. For example, Haruka shared her friend’s experience: ‘I have a friend who sends her children to kindergarten, and it costs hundreds of thousands of Japanese yen just to go to the kindergarten, such as for a uniform. I’ve heard that it is not even a private school’ (Haruka, age 26). Mai also brought up her friend’s story about a reproductive decision on a second child:

For example, there is my friend who has already given birth to her first child, and she says, ‘I want to have a second child, but when I think about school and stuff, it’s difficult to have a second child, financially speaking’. (Mai, age 29)

When discussing how much financial resource is required for childrearing, several interviewees shared that they saw importance in maintaining their living standards and in providing as good an environment as where they grew up for their own child. For example, Momoko described why she thought that she would need to earn money after becoming a mother:

In my case, well, I think my parents spent a lot of money on me for my upbringing. So, I want to provide the same environment to my [future] children, I don't want to raise my children with a lower standard of living, basically. . . . I don't want to create situation where my children wouldn't be able to do what they would want to do because of a lack of money. (Momoko, age 26)

Similarly, Kana mentioned:

If you didn't have financial resources, you wouldn't be able to provide them with a good education. I also want to support them for doing many activities and lessons. And I wouldn't be able to do so if I didn't have money. (Kana, age 26)

According to interviewees, the quality of education which children would get was considered to vary depending on parents' financial abilities. Talking about her upbringing of having a life without any financial concerns, Haruka mentioned the importance of preparing financial resources to cover costs for childrearing beforehand 'to maintain [the high living standard] in the future' (Haruka, age 26). She thought that the preparation would be needed mainly because she did not want to get stressed out about her financial situation simultaneously with getting stress from childrearing:

I'd like to give birth to a child after I prepare financial resources to the point that I won't be worried about money at all. It's because worrying about money is quite hard and stressful, and I think raising a child is also quite hard and stressful, so I think I won't have a mental capacity to deal with the stress of money, such as living expenses, on top of the stress of childrearing. (Haruka, age 26)

Meanwhile, Ai pointed out that it was getting very difficult for the current childrearing generation to maintain a living standard for their family, compared to their parents' generation, due to economic depression and stagnation:

Since kindergarten, I was sent to private school all the time, and I was supported to go skiing and to study abroad, really, I was supported to do most of the things I really wanted to do, so it'd probably be impossible for me to do the same thing for my child, considering that the tax has been increasing and [social welfare system is] not friendly to childrearing generation. It's a burden [to have children] economically. (Ai, age 25)

On the other hand, Natsumi shared different opinions about financial situation for childrearing:

There was a survey about ‘financial struggles’, . . . and 60% of respondents who said ‘yes’ were childrearing generation. And, about that, hmm, . . . do they feel like that because they feel too strong responsibility [for providing financial support to raise a child]? Like, they have millions of Japanese yens and savings, but they somehow feel like [they are financially struggling]? Or, they live in relative poverty, and struggling financially? It’s difficult to determine’. (Natsumi, age 28)

Her way of thinking might be influenced by her experience of growing up in a non-affluent family in a rural area and of attending public school which provided compulsory education mostly for free. As importance in ‘maintaining the high living standard’ is often discussed by participants growing up in relatively wealthy family in urban areas, there might be regional and class differences in terms of financial expectations for childrearing. However, based on shared stories of interviewees’ friends who were engaging in childrearing, the financial issues of high costs for childrearing are the reality at least for some people. In any case, most interviewees believed that they would need to be self-sufficient to cover the cost of childrearing. Some accepted to internalise the norms and practices of becoming a working mother promoted in society due to the national economic stagnation whilst others questioned or resisted the social construction of motherhood achieved by engaging in the labour market. Considering that they were not able to control the national economy, participants conducted negotiation in every aspect to find the best options for their life decisions related to reproduction within the limited choices. The sense of self-management can be seen from their wills to manage their situation of reproduction and of work.

## **2) Self-management on work-family balance due to inadequate welfare support**

In addition to economic influence on the construction of currently normalised motherhood, it was found from what interviewees discussed that they would need to consider, as a mother, how to manage care work whilst working. When discussing welfare system supporting childrearing, several interviewees were aware of inadequate welfare support by the government. For example, Haruka mentioned:

[The government] says they want people to have children, but then public support is inadequate, like a long waiting list of children to get into nursery school. Well, there’s

an aspect that [the government] just say so but there isn't enough support from them. I think it's a difficult situation [for childrearing]. (Haruka, age 26)

The lacking number of nursery schools was often brought up as an example of inadequate social support by the government. Ai shared her co-workers' experiences of hardships related to getting their children into nursery schools: 'Some of my seniors started having children, and I often hear that there're no nurseries, that they have to choose nurseries, or that they can't get in even if they choose some' (Ai, age 25). Here, what she meant by 'they have to choose nurseries' was that it was not easy for people to find available nursery schools which were accessible for them. This interlinked with the issue of the waitlisted children problem due to inadequate number of nurseries, as introduced by Yamaura (2020). In addition, concerns related to costs of day care services and nursery school were brought up by Natsumi: 'Day care services, well, the longer you leave your child at a day care centre, the more it will cost' (Natsumi, age 28). For other aspects, inadequacy of the following was brought up by interviewees: 'night-time hospitals [for children]' (Haruka, age 26), 'accessibility [for prams] at public space' (Momoko, age 26), and 'diaper-changing tables' (Momoko, age 26).

Due to the inadequate national or local welfare support for childrearing, some participants recognised the importance of relying on their family members to manage care work for childrearing. For example, Misaki mentioned:

Even if I really want to have children, I guess, I don't think I want to have children as a single mother. Support by my [future] partner, or support by my parents, if I know that I'll be able to get that kind of support, . . . I'd consider having children. That's the biggest part. (Misaki, age 27)

Natsumi also expressed her feelings that she would like to get her family support because she was aware of hardships around *wanope ikuji*, which is a popular Japanese word for describing the situation that childrearing is operated by only one parent, specifically by mother (Fujita, 2017). Natsumi said:

I've read about the fear of *wanope ikuji* on some posts about 'typical stories about childrearing' [on social media] [laughing], and also seeing couples, who are raising their children in a cooperative way, in TV drama series, I feel like, 'This is ideal' or 'This is the way it should be'. Rather, I think the more people there are to look after a

child, the better it is for childrearing. So, I think that it'd be a good option to raise children with the help of my parents at my family home. (Natsumi, age 28)

Recognising that childrearing by one person would be very stressful, Natsumi hoped to obtain support especially by her parents. The social issue of *wanope ikuji* shows how care work is expected to be provided by mothers without much public and social support under the neoliberalist welfare system (Fujita, 2017; Miura, 2015; Ueno 2017; 2021). To manage care work for childrearing, Misaki and Natsumi thought it would be better to rely on their future partners and their parents to share the care work required. Whilst they seemed to internalise the idea of managing care work by mothers, they tried to manage it by asking other family members for childrearing regardless of gender, including their future male partner. As previous literature suggested that there was social expectation that men would not engage in care work and housework as much as women did (Tsutsui, 2015; see also Ueno, 2017, 2021), the interviewees' hopes for their future husbands to participate in childrearing cooperatively seem to be resistant to the dominant norms and practices to some extent. Considering the economic and welfare circumstances, interviewees conducted negotiation that they would decide to have children when they would be able to obtain a supporting environment for childcare.

Another finding is that corporations play an important role in providing support related to childrearing for employees. Some interviewees shared how their companies were parent-friendly in terms of working environment and welfare benefits. For example, Misaki and Kana described what it was like to work as a parent at their workplaces:

Of course, there is a corporate welfare system, such as flexible working hours, or shortened working hours, also subsidies, and something called congratulatory payment [for childbirth]. There are such welfare services [offered by the company], of course, and there is an environment and a precedent for the use of these services. (Misaki, age 27)

Our company is quite flexible. And you can also work from home. We work under the flexible working hour system, so you don't have to work during certain hours, like 9-5, and you can adjust your working hours during a month, so I think it would be easy to work at my company [if people have children]. . . . My director has a child too, and we all think that we can't catch her after 5:30 most of the time, we're like, 'We have to contact her before then.' It's like that. (Kana, age 26)

Considering the various benefits their companies are offering, it seems that corporations have a large responsibility to provide welfare benefits for all employees, including working parents. This confirms that the Japanese welfare structure outsourcing responsibility largely to corporations to offer welfare benefits to employees and their families (Ueno, 2021; Yamaura 2022).

However, it was pointed out by several interviewees that this would not be applied for all companies so it would depend on companies or colleagues whether their corporate welfare benefits could be used without problems. Momoko shared her company's situation as follows:

Of course, there're people who have applied for shortened working hours, but some don't, well, it depends on projects they are working on. . . . But if It's a hectic project, well, or the way of how I work currently, I'm sure it'd be very difficult to have children. (Momoko, age 26)

She mentioned that she usually had a hectic working schedule with frequent overtime working at the current job so she expected that it would be difficult to make it compatible with childrearing. A similar opinion was shared by Mai as well. She explained that her workplace offered a welfare system providing fully flexible working hours and flexible working places, but the amount of work was ridiculously high for regular employees:

[Mothers who come back to work after childbirth] work very hard during 9-4 or 9-5, applying a corporate system of 'shortened working hours'. . . . Right, it's not 'shortened'. . . . So, they're like a 'superwoman'. I have a strong impression that only working mothers who are like, 'stronger than men, aren't they?' can work as a regular employee. (Mai, age 29)

She mentioned that overwork was normalised at her workplace so working for legal full-time hours was considered as 'shortened'. Under this working environment, she described the situation for working mothers:

But after all, because I'm working for a venture business, it's very busy. So, when I see working mothers at my workplace, I feel like they are superwomen [laughing]. They're like, 'I'm using all kinds of housekeeping services as much as I can rely on'. . . . They use outsourcing services for cooking, a cooking service coming for a few days a week, and cleaning. (Mai, age 29)

Here, it shows that women working full-time under regular employment at Mai's workplace were required to work for longer time by sacrificing their private time, which was expected to be spent on care work. The normalisation of overwork for regular employees, which was brought up by interviewees, seems to be related to what Dalton (2017) has introduced as 'long-work-hours culture' (p. 98) which normalises male-centric working patterns for regular employment. Both Momoko and Mai worked with hectic schedules under regular full-time employment at the time of their interviews, and they were aware that their working styles would not be compatible with childrearing once they had children.

In addition to working hours, it was brought up by the interviewees that maternity or parental leave is not guaranteed for all employees due to unwelcoming environment and inadequate corporate structure. For example, Momoko mentioned, 'There're people who cannot take maternity or parental leave' (Momoko, age 26). Haruka also pointed out, 'It's not guaranteed for [employees of] all kinds of occupations' (Haruka, age 26). In addition, Mai described how her friends considered the timings of pregnancy and childbirth to minimise negative results to their work:

Considering her own career, my friend's saying like, 'I want a second child right away'. . . . Also, there're some of my friends who consider the time when they should give birth, or their career, of course, there's a system of maternity and parental leave, but whether it's easy to return to work smoothly after 1-year-leave, big corporations may protect employees' rights, but for small and medium-sized companies or venture business, it's difficult, I think. In these aspects, I've heard that [her friends said,] 'I have concerns'. (Mai, age 29)

What is shown from the interview data is that it is considered as individuals' responsibilities to obtain an ideal working environment which is supportive of childrearing. One needs to consider which company provides what kinds of working environment and welfare benefits so that they can choose a suitable company to make childrearing compatible or less burdened. Haruka mentioned, 'If I think of changing my job [in the future], I will look into [working environment and welfare benefits], like, how a company would provide support when someone has children, I'd like to check these aspects' (Haruka, age 26). This shows that self-management is required for individuals in terms of working styles and care work by finding a company providing a good environment for childrearing by themselves. Haruka was aware of this aspect so she said

she would pay attention to these aspects if she changed her job in the future although she was satisfied with her current working environment which she considered parent-friendly.

Similarly, several interviewees wished to change their jobs to one allowing shorter working hours once they had children because their current working schedule was too busy. For example, Momoko said, '[Changing to] a part-time job, or, working with a shortened working hour system [under regular employment], working like that. I'd like to do some kind of work, but I want to do a bit lighter amount of work [laughing]' (Momoko, age 26). Likewise, Mai wished to adjust her working schedule if she got a child, questioning the general working styles in Japan which did not allow both parents to work part-time for a few years after childbirth under the secured regular employment:

I'm not a type of person who has a strong will to work very hard to pursue my career and just really want to live a slow life [laughing]. But by working, it gives me experience to get connections with society greatly, so I want to keep it. I've been wondering, 'Do I have to choose either [housewife or working full-time like a superwoman]?' since a while before. (Mai, age 29)

Looking at working mothers who were 'superwomen' at her workplace, by the time when she would have a child, she hoped to find a workplace which would require fewer working hours and less devotion. She put emphasis on working for real 'shortened hours', not the 'shortened hours' of working full time without overwork. Her intention was not as a part-time or a dispatched worker, who would not be able to receive corporate welfare benefits, but as a regular worker under secured employment. Her critique against the current Japanese corporate welfare system was brought up from getting information about working styles in the Nordic countries which allowed both parents to take a few days off during a week for a few years:

I watched a TV program introducing how people raised children in [one of] the Nordic countries, and, . . . when I heard about the nursery system in other countries, I thought, 'Wow, there are countries which provide such [childcare support]'. What is more, it's like, mothers didn't have to become a superwoman [to continue working as a regular employee after childbirth], they were all normal mothers and were able to work like that. I thought it's really nice. It makes me wish, 'If I have a baby, I want to work at a place where I can do that'. (Mai, age 29)



Although Mai was aware that it would be difficult to find jobs providing such working styles for parents in Japan currently, she hoped that small or venture business companies would consider applying working styles for parents similar to the Nordic ones to attract more candidates soon. As it is difficult to expect the change in the welfare system immediately, continuous negotiation is conducted between interview participants' ideal working styles and limited choices available under the current socio-political structure. Through this negotiation, interviewees aim to find the best working style for them to raise children.

### **3) Additional meaning-makings for decisions on lifestyles after childbirth**

Although most of the interviewees mentioned that there was influence of the economic situation and welfare system on their decisions regarding life paths after childbirth, there are other meanings made to support their life decisions after becoming mothers. One interesting finding is that choosing to work for shortened hours or for part-time to fulfil motherhood idealised by interviewees. Several interviewees discussed their wishes to spend as much time as possible with their children. For example, Momoko described her ideal lifestyle after becoming a mother as follows:

Doing what I like, for example, starting [her own] café, . . . Like, whenever I want, taking a break and having time to spend with my [future] children, and whenever I like, selling whatever I like, if I can work like that, it'll be fun, I think. . . . That's ideal, right. (Momoko, age 26)

In contrast to her current busy corporate working style, she imagined working for what she liked as well as having some time with her future children as her ideal. For Momoko, it seems that self-employment may be one way of achieving her ideal lifestyle after having children. Moreover, Kana emphasised the importance of spending time with her future children especially when they were little:

I want to be by their side when my [future] children are little, I think like that. When they start going to elementary school, they will not be at home due to club activities at elementary school. So naturally, they will spend less time at home. So, until then, I'd like to be with my children, it's like that. (Kana, age 26)

Here, she considered that early childhood would be when parents can spend much time together with their children. About a reason for spending time with their own children, Kana and

Natsumi believed that it would be important to make their children feel loved or happy as mothers:

You can feel loved, you know. When sleeping, when I went to sleep, [her mother was] always with me, and when I took a nap too, she was there for me. My mother also saw me off to and came to pick me up from school. Because, for example, I had friends, at the time when I was living abroad, for them, it was often that their maids came and picked them up instead. Their drivers too. But for me, my mother came to pick me up every time. (Kana, age 26)

I really want to spend as much time as possible with my own child. In the current times, there're a lot of mothers who restart working right away, and I know mothers who leave their children at day care centres at the age of 0 or 1. I wouldn't like to do so. It's because my mother was working a lot and I felt lonely. I'd like to actively make time for my [future] children, so I don't let them to be alone, that kind of feeling. Yes, I'd like to look after them as much as possible [laughing], I have a strong feeling for that. (Natsumi, age 28)

Both Kana and Natsumi saw the importance in being present for their future children because of their experiences of interaction with their own mothers. Kana's description of time spent with her mother suggested she continued to be attentive during and even after early childhood. As she had lovely memories with her mother who was a housewife when she was a child, she wished to provide the same experience to her own children in the future. Although she mentioned that she would like to continue working after becoming a mother, she believed that she would prioritise having time with her future children. Natsumi also said that she would spend much time with her future children due to her experience with her mother, but for her, she rather wished not to make her children feel lonely as she felt so when she was a child. Although there is a social environment encouraging mothers to return to work right after childbirth, as previously discussed, both Kana and Natsumi seemed to find their own meanings for prioritising childrearing based on their own values rather than believing the social norms and practices to encourage women to work right after childbirth.

When they talked about the importance of spending time with their future children, they did not specifically mention their partners' roles for this involvement although both Kana and Natsumi wished for their partners to participate in childrearing. Their focus on themselves to become the most attentive person to their future children as mothers might come from

internalisation of the gender division of labour which expected women to be more responsible for care work and men to be more in charge of supporting their families financially, as several interviewees brought up. For example, Ai pointed out the different pressures to take parental leave based on gender:

When people who have become fathers want to take paternity leave, they might be able to take it, but at the same time, there's probably pressure to earn money. . . . On the other hand, women are still struggling when taking maternity leave and they feel they're unwelcomed to apply shortened working hours when they return. (Ai, age 25)

It shows the employees' rights of taking parental leave are not guaranteed in all companies. Natsumi also shared what she thought of male employees' working styles at her previous workplace:

[Male employees who could take paternity leave] did not change their working styles and worked always full-time [laughing]. But in conversation, some of them said that they're taking care of their children like, bathing them or putting them to sleep. Well, yes, income would change if they took paternity leave so I thought they might do their best without changing their working styles. But, well, none of them took paternity leave [laughing]. (Natsumi, age 28)

What Natsumi mentioned indicates that there is the corporate welfare structure which makes it difficult for male employees to take paternity leave due to the social structure expecting them to earn income for their families. Similarly, Mai brought up unequal acquisition of parental leave based on gender:

Systematically or structurally, [maternity and paternity leaves are] considered to be provided equally. But actually, male employees can take paternity leave, but how long was it? It's one or two months for the longest, so they would take the leave just for about two months, right? But for female employees, maternity and childcare leave, if they take both properly, they would be away from work for one year. (Mai, age 29)

Mai recognised that paternity leave was allowed for male employees to take for one or two months at her company. However, the longest period for parental leave is one year both for mothers and for fathers legally (MHLW, 2022). Considering how interviewees explained paternity leave, it might be normalised for male employees to take paternity leave for a much

shorter period or not take it at all. This might be related to the gender division of labour which expected men to fulfil their responsibilities to support their families financially by working, as interviewees mentioned previously. This confirms the gender division of labour based on the Japanese welfare family model expecting a husband to earn income as a corporate warrior and a wife to provide care work for family (Miura, 2015; Ogasawara, 1998; Ueno, 2017).

It was brought up by some interviewees that gender power imbalance in the household due to the division of labour was one of the reasons why they were eager to continue working after childbirth. For example, Haruka explained:

In Japan, men are slightly higher than women. Well, now, I think things are getting better, but there is the *gender gap* [emphasis added]. So, I don't want to be dependent on men. . . . I have a friend who got married to a man and who became a housewife, and her husband is the sole breadwinner, I've heard stories about, . . . like, 'I'm the one who's earning money' when they disagree with each other. But the friend, she is a housewife, so she doesn't have money to deal with a divorce. (Haruka, age 26)

Recognising the power relation which she would possibly get into when she became a housewife, Haruka saw the importance of becoming financially independent if she got married. A similar story was shared by Kana as well:

I want to earn money by myself. Oh, maybe [seeing her sister's case] is part of the reason too. My older sister doesn't earn any money so . . . maybe [her sister's husband] doesn't say it in words, but maybe there's a bit of, um, 'I'm the one earning money' kind of thing. (Kana, age 26)

She mentioned that this might be the case because her older sister was a housewife who raised two children. Kana later explained that her sister's husband was relatively corporative for childrearing for most of the time although his working schedule tended to be very busy. However, just a little element of showing attitude expecting her sister to be responsible for care work made Kana think that such gender ideology might be brought up if she became a housewife.<sup>27</sup> Being aware of the gender ideology disrespecting women providing care work

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<sup>27</sup> According to Tsutsui (2014, 2015), there is also gender power imbalance in a double income household due to the gender pay gap. As the welfare and corporate structure forces women to work under irregular employment in many cases, the wife's income tends to be considered as supplementary to her husband's income (Tsutsui, 2014, 2015). Although there was gender ideology that a housewife would manage her household finance, including distribution of pocket money to her husband, with the influence of the Japanese style management (Ogasawara, 2016), it might become less popular in recent decades as the double income household increases whilst men's greater earning power remains.

without any incomes, both Haruka and Kana believed that it would be beneficial to continue working after becoming mothers because they would be able to get a sense of financial independence in relationships with their future husbands. This shows how they make meanings of their choice to continue working after childbirth with feeling their own agency against the gender ideology of disrespecting women providing care work without incomes.

In addition to financial independence, most of the interviewees brought up several benefits of working after becoming mothers either as a part-time worker or as a regular worker. Especially, the importance of maintaining social connection and responsibility outside the household was emphasised as it was regarded as effective to maintain good mental health. This is because several interviewees recognised that focusing on childrearing all the time would be stressful. For example, Kana mentioned, '[Working] would be also freshening up [her feelings]. Because it seems that it would be quite stressful when you're dealing with kids all the time.' (Kana, age 26). Similarly, Momoko shared her thoughts on continuing working whilst raising a child by remembering the time when staying at home with her dog for all day during the pandemic:

[Looking after her dog all day long] tends to make my perspective narrower, and I think this will be more remarkable for [raising] children, . . . and for a long period of time, . . . I assume that it'll be quite hard. . . . It'll be refreshing, to have connection with society, or with the company, or something, connection outside the home. If I have opportunity to get such connections regularly, this is probably because of my personality, but it'll be good for my mental health. (Momoko, age 26)

Haruka also said, 'Something like, raising children without any contact with the outside world, I guess, it wouldn't suit my personality, I feel. . . . I want to belong to various communities, I think like that' (Haruka, age 26). For interview participants, social connection is a key for better mental health, and it is considered to be obtained by working outside. Some mentioned that having social connection thorough working would be good for their mental health because of their personalities. It shows how they made their own meanings to accept the social expectation for women to work after becoming mothers. In addition, most of the time, they negotiated with economic, political, and social circumstances surrounding them to identify their best lifestyles after becoming mothers by changing jobs, adjusting their work styles, and managing care work, for example. Through negotiation, participants obtained a sense of agency in terms of their life decisions as well as reproductive decisions.

## **6. Discussion**

With analysis results of this research, I will first discuss research findings and applicability of the Foucauldian theoretical framework of biopolitical governmentality on young women's reproductive decision-making in Japan with Foucault's ideas of power, knowledge, and truth. In discussion, I will focus on research participants' interactions with power in biopolitical governmentality, especially the movements of internalisation, critique, and negotiation. By showing applicability of my theoretical framework to women's life decisions related to reproduction, I will demonstrate the contribution and significance of this research. Later in this chapter, limitations of this MA thesis will be discussed with suggestions for future research.

### **6.1 Discussion on research findings and the Foucauldian theoretical framework**

In this subchapter, I will introduce my discussion of analysis results by looking at my research participants' interactions with power in biopolitical governmentality which was found in the Japanese reproductive politics under the influence of the severe population and economic decline. In my research, the theoretical framework of Foucault's biopolitical governmentality has allowed to identify the dominant norms and practices of women's reproductive behaviours and life decisions in Japanese society. It was found that there were social norms and practices idealising specific life paths for young women, which were to follow the flow of getting married, giving birth to children, and then continuing to work after childbirth. The socially idealised life paths for women were linked to a family model of heteronormative marriage with biological children, which was promoted to maintain the welfare structure created based on it, as previously discussed. Through the lens of biopolitical governmentality, construction of the social norms and practices of women's reproduction was found to be influenced by entangled various factors in the current political, economic, and social context in Japan.

When looking at individual interactions with power in my research, however, I have found it difficult to assert the influence of power solely with the idea of biopolitical governmentality because power is exercised in various layers to different directions, and thus, it cannot be simplified as one single relation in biopolitical governmentality. By employing Foucault's ideas of power, knowledge, and truth (Foucault, 1980, 1995, 2007), it is possible to identify where points of power encountered individuals in a scheme of biopolitical governmentality when participants discussing dominant norms and practices about women's life decisions and reproduction. This has allowed me to find that socially idealised norms and practices for

women's reproductive behaviours were constructed as power, existed as knowledge, or were accepted as truth in the Japanese society. In addition, this theoretical framework has brought insights that the dominant norms and practices were maintained to exist through the process of internalisation by groups of people, often who were around participants. There are overlaps of knowledge circulated in family, in friend groups, at the workplace, or in media, and the knowledge is often aligned with political aims to achieve population and economic growth as well as to sustain the neoliberalist welfare structure for cost reduction of the government. This shows the complexity of power exercised in various directions at different levels as Foucault's theory of biopolitical governmentality (1978, 2008, 2009) suggests. By being exposed to knowledge promoted to promise happy life for women, it made some participants believe that following socially idealised dominant norms and practices about marriage, pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood would fulfil their own happiness. This shows that internalisation is often conducted through idealisation of certain women's life paths which were compatible with the 'happy family' promoted socially. It includes both social and individual idealisation. For social idealisation, what participants brought up as social admiration of women who gave birth and who continue working full-time due to *shōshika* can be one example. For individual idealisation seen as internalisation, it was participants having a desire to obtain happiness in their lives by believing knowledge about fertility, childbirth, childrearing, and motherhood which suggested women chose expected life paths and reproductive decisions. It shows how internalisation leads participants to conduct self-governance for their life decisions related to reproduction.

My research data shows not only internalisation but also the conduct of critique as participants' responses to dominant norms and practices about women's reproductive decisions through which bio- and governmental power is exercised. Foucault's idea of the conduct of critique (2007), which is introduced as resistance to the art of governing, has helped me to identify the process of critique conducted by participants for their life decisions relate to reproduction. As Foucault's theory of governmentality (2007, 2008, 2009) has suggested, participants were able to question some norms or practices if it did not fit with their own ideals due to a characteristic of governmentality which requires self-governance. By not believing social idealisation right away, the research participants recognised possibilities for various life paths, which would not necessarily follow the dominant norms and practices expecting women to have biological children and to become working mothers, both for themselves and for others. In addition to the conduct of critique against normalised life paths for women, participants sometimes questioned

stigmatisation of childless life, infertility, and certain part of women's sexual and reproductive health such as menstruation and contraception. Moreover, some participants criticised inadequate welfare support and legislation restricting various life choices which would not follow a family model of heteronormative marriage with biological children. When conducting critique, participants considered both pros and cons of various cases regardless of social idealisation. For the conduct of critique, my research data suggests that it may not necessarily result in complete resistance to dominant norms and practices as my research participants sometimes considered other types of life choices better but without strong opposition against practicing what is expected as women's reproductive behaviours. In such cases, participants seemed to be open to various options and did not feel rushed into giving birth and starting a family despite social discourses of 'the younger, the better' for pregnancy, childbirth, and childrearing. Nonetheless, participants questioned whether to follow the social norms and practices immediately for their reproductive decisions.

As explained in Chapter 3, from Foucault's discussion (2007) about the coexistence of 'the art of governing men' (p. 44) and 'the art of not being governed like that' (p. 45), I thought of a possibility to be somewhere in between, where individuals would accept to be governed partially as well as would not accept to be governed to a certain extent. As I could not find such theorisation in relation to governmentality, I have developed the idea of negotiation for analysing complex interactions of the research participants with power. My hypothesis was that participants would conduct negotiation for their life decision-making related to reproduction within the dynamic between being governed and not being governed. As a result, it was found that participants conducted the process of negotiation to find the best life decisions for them related to reproduction by considering their circumstances. More importantly, my research data shows that they obtained a sense of agency through meaning-making of their own in the process of negotiation. There were different cases of negotiation found in the analysis, but the most notable one was that participants questioned the dominant norms or practices, recognised that complete resistance would not be realistic or ideal, and conducted the process of negotiation to find the best options within limited circumstances and availabilities. This includes acceptance of norms and practices such as planning pregnancy and childbirth during ideal times, getting married before having children, taking responsibility of care work, and becoming working mothers but with some arrangements to make their lives closer to their own ideals. They chose to accept to follow social norms after considering other choices as well and came up with their own reasons to conduct normalised practices for reproduction so that they



would not make decisions through internalisation. The process of negotiation is also seen in the act of seeking for excluded information about women's sexual and reproductive health such as menstruation and contraceptive pills. In spite of difficulties in obtaining access to useful and unbiased information about women's sexual and reproductive health, most participants were eager to try to find it by themselves so that they would be able to make the best reproductive decisions possible. The crucial point is that, whether they accepted to practice normalised life paths and reproductive behaviours or not, the research participants produced their own meanings for their life decisions. This shows that they obtained a sense of agency to plan their lives and reproductive decisions.

My research has shown the applicability of Foucault's theory of biopower, biopolitics, and governmentality to micro-level qualitative research of young heterosexual women's reproductive decisions by analysing individual perceptions, thoughts, and experiences about reproduction with Foucault's ideas of power, knowledge, and truth in relation to the political, economic, and social context of current Japanese society. What the small qualitative data of my research can show is a complex picture of internalisation, critique, and negotiation conducted by individuals by employing the Foucauldian theoretical framework of biopolitical governmentality. It shows various layers of governmental power, entangled, such as legislation, school, workplace, community, friend groups, and family, which is exercised to individuals. At the same time, my micro-level study highlights agency of research participants in terms of their life decisions related to reproduction. Although Foucault's theories of governmentality, bio-power, and biopolitics have been applied to analyse the reproductive politics of Japan at a macro-level in previous literatures, macro-level studies cannot define power at an individual level which consists of lived complexity and lived ambiguity. Therefore, I believe that this is the significance point of my research. I hope that this MA thesis contributes to bringing new insights to gender and feminist research in Japan about various women's reproductive decision-making processes under the influence of the Japanese reproductive politics from the perspective of biopolitical governmentality.

## **6.2 Limitations of this MA thesis and suggestions for future research**

Before concluding this MA thesis, I will discuss important notes for my research and implications on what is left to be explored for future research. One crucial point to be noted is the recruitment method for gathering interview participants for this research. There are some similarities found in the majority of participants especially for regions, social class, marital

status, and educational background. This is most likely due to the recruitment method using social media, which is influenced by its algorithm, as discussed previously. Although some participants shared similar identities in terms of locations, social class, and perceived life stages, it was not my intention to generalise or to categorise my participants' experiences based on their backgrounds or identities in my research as women's experiences cannot be essentialised (Oksala, 2014; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). Therefore, it should be recognised that this research does not represent all types of women in Japan, but it aims to focus on different individual experiences in terms of life and reproductive decisions.

To understand what kinds of issues women face in certain contexts, it is important to discuss several points showing the possibility of differences based on social groups, which was brought up in the analysis for further research development. During interviews, possibilities of regional differences were mentioned by several participants in terms of reproductive decisions such as different values in marriage and childbirth. Moreover, it should be considered that there are regional differences in terms of financial and welfare environment which might affect one's reproductive decision-making. For example, as introduced in the analysis, Mai brought up that expensive living costs in Tokyo would make it difficult for people to consider having children. This might be one factor for participants who grew up in urban areas to think that costs of raising children would be expensive. Moreover, their upbringings of higher-than-average social class may be another influential factor in their high calculation of childrearing costs. In addition to living costs, childrearing costs could be much less in some prefectures due to their welfare system having an emphasis on supporting childcare. Because of severe depopulation in rural areas and decentralisation of responsibilities for welfare support to local governments, some local governments have been trying to attract young people to migrate (Matanle, 2017). As a result, childcare support has been developed to attract the working population in several local governments (see Konishi, 2020; Yoshida, 2022). Therefore, it is crucial to investigate regional differences in further research to understand additional factors influencing young women's life and reproductive decisions.

Another point to be discussed is differences due to a perceived life stage such as marriage status and parental status. This is because all research participants were unmarried and did not have any children at the time of the interviews. During interviews, as discussed in the analysis, some participants expected that there would be more pressure on them for reproductive decisions after they got married due to social idealisation of life paths to get married first and then to give

birth. However, reproductive decisions of women who already have children were barely brought up. The only part it was mentioned was where Mai shared her friend's story of giving up having a second child due to their financial situation, as introduced in the analysis. Therefore, experiences of women in different perceived life stages should be explored in further research.

As Oksala (2014) mentioned, women's experiences are not to be used to naturalise their identities or universalise their experiences as foundation for all women's experiences, but it is important to analyse their experiences to question the current context of 'how they restrict, oppress, and impoverish the experiences of individuals' (p.397). By doing so, personal experiences motivate to bring changes in politics which is conducted without consideration of their realities (Oksala, 2014). This is why it is important to study individual experiences of women in different situation such as region, class, and life status when aiming to achieve real feminist politics especially in biopolitical governmentality found in the Japanese reproductive politics where women are utilised to achieve the national goal for economic growth to strengthen the nation power.

## 7. Conclusion

This research project has shed light on young heterosexual women's experiences, thoughts, and decision-making about reproduction in the current context of the severe population and economic decline and of the neoliberalist welfare structure in Japan. According to previous literature, Japanese reproductive politics is entangled with the current corporate and welfare system utilising the Japanese family model and encourages young women to form a family, give birth, and provide care work as well as to work after childbirth. Having this as the research background, semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven heterosexual women who were in their 20s and who lived in Japan at the time of the interview. For analysis, a theoretical framework of biopolitical governmentality was employed, and Foucault's ideas of power, knowledge, truth, and critique were applied to understand individual relations to power. In addition, I have developed the idea of negotiation to see dynamics of power relations in individuals to be put somewhere between the art of governing and the art of not being governed for their reproductive choices in biopolitical governmentality. For the analysis method, thematic analysis was chosen to analyse interview data effectively and to be combined with the theoretical framework of biopolitical governmentality. After the analysis process, the results have brought three major findings: 1) There were social norms and practices idealising specific life paths for young women, and the dominant norms and practices were maintained through internalisation by people around participants and sometimes by themselves, 2) Participants sometimes questioned to believe the dominant norms and practices about women's life paths and reproductive decisions and recognised possibilities for various life paths other than the dominant ones, and 3) Participants conducted negotiation to find the best life decisions related to reproduction for themselves by considering circumstances surrounding them and obtained a sense of agency through the process of meaning-making for themselves. I structured my analysis based on themes to identify social norms and practices which helped to understand the power of biopolitical governmentality and to show the dynamics of the process of internalisation, critique, negotiation, and meaning-making by my research participants in a comprehensive manner. I believe that this MA thesis has contributed to deepening the understanding of women's individual experiences and life decision-making in terms of reproduction in Japanese society where biopolitical governmentality is exercised to combat the nation's population and economic decline. The results of this research have shown the importance of centralising women's rights as well as their sexual and reproductive rights for future policy implementation to remove obstacles that young women encounter.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Interview Participant Characteristics Table Summary

**Table 1** Summary of Interview Participant Characteristics

Pseudonym	Age	Employment status	Relationship status
Misaki	27	Full-time worker under regular employment	In a relationship
Ai	25	Full-time worker under irregular employment	In a relationship
Haruka	26	Full-time worker under regular employment	In a relationship
Kana	26	Full-time worker under regular employment	Not in a relationship
Mai	29	Full-time worker under regular employment	In a relationship
Natsumi	28	Part-time worker under irregular employment	Not in a relationship
Momoko	26	Full-time worker under regular employment	Not in a relationship

## Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet (Japanese)

### 「日本における女性の妊娠・出産・子育て・家族に対する価値観の研究」の 説明および参加のご依頼

研究実施者：トウルク大学大学院ジェンダー研究科  
修士課程 鶴岡侑里子

この度は、鶴岡侑里子を実施する「日本における女性の妊娠・出産・子育て・家族に対する価値観の研究」への参加にご興味を持っていただき、誠にありがとうございます。この書類は、本研究の詳細についてご理解いただくためのものです。内容をご一読いただき、本研究にご参加いただける場合は、『研究参加の同意書』にご署名をお願いいたします。研究に参加しない、あるいは一度参加を決めた後に途中で辞退されることになっても、不利益を被ることはありません。

本研究はトウルク大学大学院ジェンダー研究科 Anu Koivunen 教授およびトウルク大学大学院 東アジア研究科 Yoko Demelius 教授の指導の下、フィンランドのトウルク大学大学院ジェンダー研究科修士課程の鶴岡侑里子が修士論文のために実施いたします。

#### 1. 研究の目的・意義

この研究は、日本における女性の妊娠・出産・子育て・家族に対する価値観と日本の社会的・政治学的な背景との関連性を明らかにすることを目的として、実施いたします。本研究を実施することで、日本における女性のリプロダクティブヘルス・ライツ（性と生殖の健康と権利）の向上に貢献することが期待されます。

#### 2. 研究方法、研究期間

本研究では、2回にわたるインタビューを実施する予定です。初回は、最初に本書類と『研究参加の同意書』を用いながら本研究について改めて説明いたします。インタビューへの参加にご同意いただいた後、ご自身のプロフィールについて15分程度の簡単なインタビューを実施させていただきます。初回は、全てを含めて30分程度を予定しています。2回目にお会いする際は、全体を通してインタビューを実施させていただきます。2回目のインタビューは、最長60分を予定しています。

インタビューは、ご自身の価値観、経験、選択、感じていることや思っていることについてお話しいただくことを目的としていますので、伝えたいことはご遠慮なさらずお気軽にお話しください。インタビュー中の質問に対する回答に正解や不正解はないので、ご自身の思っていることをありのままに伝えていただけますと幸いです。インタビューは

堅苦しいものではないため、気楽にリラックスした状態でお話ししていただけたらと思います。ご不安な点やご質問があれば、研究実施者にいつでもお伝えください。

インタビューはオンライン（Zoom）での実施を予定しており、実施期間は 2022 年 8 月～9 月を予定しています。インタビューの内容は、録音・録画にて記録させていただきます。記録された録音・録画データは、日本語で書き起こした後、分析いたします。修士論文は英文のため、日本語で書き起こした逐語録は英文に翻訳して引用いたします。インタビューは 2 回にわたる実施を予定しておりますが、分析をする中で改めてお話を伺いたいことが出てきた場合、追加インタビューをお願いすることがあります。本研究は、修士論文の提出が承認された後、2023 年 5 月にトウルク大学内にて開催予定の論文発表会での発表をもって終了する予定です。

### 3. 研究対象者

この研究は以下の全ての条件に当てはまる方を対象といたします。

- 女性の方
- 20 代の方
- 異性愛者の方
- 日本にお住まいの方

また、本研究にご参加いただける場合、以下の環境をご準備いただくようお願いいたします。

- Zoom が利用できる環境（アプリやソフトウェアをインストールせず、ブラウザでご参加いただくことも可能です）
- インターネットの接続が比較的安定している環境
- 周囲が静かで、ご自身に関するプライベートな内容を話しやすい環境

### 4. 研究への参加と撤回について

本研究の趣旨をご理解いただいた上で、インタビューにご参加いただけますと幸いです。インタビューへの参加・不参加については、研究実施者に口頭もしくはメールにてお知らせください。途中で辞退される場合も、研究実施者にお知らせいただけますようお願いいたします。参加をお断りになったり、一度参加を決めてから途中で辞退されることになっても、不利益を被ることはございません。論文執筆期間終了予定の 2023 年 3 月末までにいつでもお申し出いただければ、如何なる理由においても辞退いただくことが可能です。その際は、それまでに収集したデータの取り扱いに関するご希望を研究実施者にお知らせください。

### 5. 研究に参加することにより期待される利益

本研究にご参加にいただく際に発生する報酬はありません。しかしながら、日本における女性の妊娠・出産・子育て・家族に対する価値観と日本の社会的・政治学的な背景との関連性を明らかにすることによって、日本における女性のリプロダクティブヘルス・ライツ（性と生殖の健康と権利）に対する社会的な理解が進み、政策やサービス等といった女性のリプロダクティブヘルス・ライツを取り囲む状況の改善に役立つ洞察を提供し、社会に貢献できることを期待しています。

## 6. 予測されるリスク、危険、心身に対する不快な状態や影響

本研究への参加にあたり、身体的な危険は一切伴いません。しかし、インタビューを進める中で、過去のつらい経験を思い出されることがあるかもしれません。お話になることがつらい場合や、お話しになりたくないことを質問された場合は、無理にお話しただかなくて大丈夫です。また、お申し出いただきましたら、いつでもインタビューを中断いたします。インタビューを中断したまま終了した場合は一旦研究を辞退されたこととなりますが、改めてインタビューにご参加いただける場合は、その旨を研究実施者にお伝えください。

## 7. 研究成果の公表と情報公開

本研究の成果は、英文の修士論文としてまとめるとともに、トゥルク大学内にて開催される論文発表会にて発表を行う予定です。論文や発表では、あなたに関する情報は仮名を用いて匿名化し、個人が特定できない形で記載いたします。

必要であれば、論文作成前に逐語録を確認していただくことも可能です。ご自身の発言が誤りなく書き起こされているか、また個人情報匿名化されているかを確認していただくことができます。ご希望があればお申し出ください。

また、完成後の修士論文につきましては、内容について資料及び口頭でご説明させていただくこともできますので、ご希望があればお申し出ください。

## 8. 守秘や個人情報、研究データの取り扱いについて

本研究で収集した情報を研究目的以外に用いることはございません。また、あなたの個人情報と秘匿性を守るために、研究実施者は可能な限りの対策を実施いたします。しかし、予期せぬ事態が発生した場合、情報の漏洩を防ぎきれない可能性があります。万が一情報が漏洩したとしても、あなたの個人が特定されるリスクを最小限に留めるため、特定可能な個人情報を逐語録から削除する、インタビューに関連する書類にパスワードをかける等といった対策を講じた上でデータを管理いたします。

インタビューに関するデータ（同意書、逐語録、逐語録の英文翻訳、録音・録画データ等）はトゥルク大学が管理している安全性の高い Seafile というクラウド上にて保管いたします。論文執筆期間中は、作業に必要なデータのみウイルス・セキュリティ対策ソフトウェアをインストールしたパソコンのローカルディスクにもパスワードをかけた

上で保存いたします。一度修士論文の提出が承認され、修士論文が発表されましたら、記載内容の修正は致しかねることをご了承ください。

研究データは、研究実施者である鶴岡侑里子の責任の下、彼女が卒業するまでの期間はトウルク大学が管理する Seafile 上で保管されます。卒業する際に、インタビューに関する全てのデータを廃棄いたします。

なお、本研究は Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK guidelines（フィンランド国家研究公正委員会が作成した研究倫理ガイドライン）と General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)（EU 一般データ保護規則）に準じて実施いたします。

## 9. 研究実施者、および問い合わせ先について

本研究は、フィンランドのトウルク大学大学院ジェンダー研究科修士課程の鶴岡侑里子を実施いたします。研究内容に関するご質問は、以下の連絡先までご連絡ください。

研究実施者： 鶴岡侑里子（トウルク大学大学院ジェンダー研究科修士課程）

Email: [yuriko.y.tsuruoka@utu.fi](mailto:yuriko.y.tsuruoka@utu.fi)

この度は、本研究への参加にご興味をもっていただき、誠にありがとうございます。あなたのお話や経験、価値観についてお聞かせいただけることは、本研究において大変意義のあるものとなります。本研究への参加にご同意いただける場合は、別添の同意書をご一読、ご署名いただきメールにてご送付いただきますようお願いいたします。あなたのご参加を心よりお待ちしております。

今回のインタビューに参加されない場合でも、本研究への参加にご興味いただけたことに感謝いたします。

最後までお読みいただきありがとうございました。

### **Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheet (English Translation)**

#### **Participant Information Sheet for the research “Young women’s perceptions on pregnancy, childbirth, child-rearing, and family in Japan”**

Researcher: Yuriko Tsuruoka  
Master’s Degree Programme, Gender Studies, University of Turku, Finland

Thank you for your interest in participating in the research of ‘Young women’s perceptions on pregnancy, childbirth, child-rearing, and family in Japan’ which Yuriko Tsuruoka conducts. This document is provided to help you understand details about this research. If you decide to participate after reading this document, please sign your name on the ‘Consent Form for Research Participation’. If you decide not to participate, or to withdraw from this research after you decide to participate once, there will be no issues.

This research is conducted by a researcher, Yuriko Tsuruoka, as a part of the requirement of her Master’s Degree Programme, Gender Studies at the University of Turku in Finland under supervision by Professor Anu Koivunen from the Gender Studies department at the University of Turku and Professor Yoko Demelius from the East Asian Studies department at the University of Turku.

#### **1. Research purpose and significance**

The purpose of this research is to find out perceptions of young women on reproduction such as pregnancy, childbirth, child-rearing, and family in Japan and to examine its relation to the socio-political context in Japan. It is hoped that this research will be able to contribute to improving the situation surrounding women’s reproductive health and rights in Japan.

#### **2. Research method and research duration**

For this research, the interview process will be divided into two sessions. In the first session, details about the research will be explained using the ‘Participant Information Sheet’ and ‘Consent Form.’ After agreeing to proceed to the interview process, the first interview session will be conducted. The whole process of the first session, including explanation and interview will take around 30 minutes. In the second session, a continuation of the interview will be conducted. The second session will take up to 60 minutes.

The aim of the interview is to learn your perception, experience, choice, feelings, and thoughts so it is appreciated if you could answer questions as honestly as possible. This interview expects frank and detailed answers from you and there is no right or wrong answer. You are welcome to ask any questions at any time if you feel unsure.

The interview is planned to be conducted online (Zoom) during August and September 2022. The interview will be recorded as audio and video files. Recorded data will be analysed after being transcribed in Japanese. As her master’s thesis will be written in English, Japanese transcripts will be translated to English for citing purposes. The interview is planned to be conducted twice but if there are additional questions that emerge after the interview, there may

be a possibility to ask you to participate in another interview. This research project is planned to finish after her thesis submission is approved and after she presents her research at the conference held at the University of Turku in May 2023.

### **3. Research subject**

A person fulfilling all of the following criteria can participate in this research.

- Female
- In her 20s
- Heterosexual
- Living in Japan

If you decide to participate, please ensure that you can be in the environment where the following requirements can be fulfilled.

- You can use Zoom (You can use it on an internet browser without installing an app or a software)
- The internet connection is relatively stable
- The surrounding environment is quiet and private so you can talk about yourself comfortably

### **4. About participation in and withdrawal from this research**

It would be appreciated if you could take part in this research after you understand the purpose of the research. Please inform the researcher of your decision to either join or decline, either verbally or by email following this explanation. If you wish to withdraw from the interview process, please inform the researcher. If you decide not to participate, or to withdraw from this research after you decide to participate once, there will be no issues. You are free to withdraw from the research at any time provided you for whatever reasons if you inform the researcher by the end of March 2023, at which point the writing of the thesis will be completed. Following withdrawal, please inform the researcher how you would like the data that has been collected to be dealt with.

### **5. Profits expected from research participation**

There will be no compensation provided by participating in this research. By finding out young women's perceptions on reproduction such as pregnancy, childbirth, child-rearing, and family in Japan and its relation to the Japanese socio-political context, this research is expected to deepen societal understanding of women's reproductive health and rights in Japan and to contribute to society by providing insights to improve the environment surrounding women's reproductive health and rights including policies and services.

### **6. Expected risks, dangers, and uncomfortable situation or influence**

There is no physical danger when participating in this research. However, there may be possibilities of recalling your past experiences which may be painful to you. If you feel uncomfortable to talk or if you are asked to share any information that you do not desire to,

you are not required to answer the questions. You can ask to stop the interview at any time if you would like to. If you decide to stop and to finish taking the interview, it will be considered as withdrawal from participation but if you would like to join again, please contact the researcher.

## **7. Disclosure of research results and information**

The results of this research will be written in Yuriko Tsuruoka's master's thesis in English and will be presented at a conference which will be held at the University of Turku. Your personal information will be anonymised with a pseudonym in the thesis and in the presentation.

If needed, you can check a transcript of your interview before being cited in the thesis. You can check if your words are transcribed accurately and if your personal information is anonymised. Please inform the researcher if you would like to check the transcript.

In addition, you can receive a written and oral explanation about the finalised thesis so please inform the researcher if you would like to receive an explanation.

## **8. About confidentiality and management of personal information and research data**

Information collected for this research will not be used for other purposes. All possible solutions for protecting confidentiality and your personal data will be conducted by the researcher. However, there is a possibility that your data would get leaked for unexpected reasons. Therefore, in terms of data management, it is planned to minimise the risk of your identifiability as much as possible even if your data gets leaked. This includes removing identifiable personal information from transcripts and protecting files with a password, as an example.

The interview data (a consent form, transcripts, translated documents, recorded files, etc.) will be stored on Seafile which is a cloud storage securely monitored by the University of Turku. During the time of writing the thesis, some necessary data will also be stored on a local disk of the researcher's laptop locked with a password where an antivirus and security software is installed. After the thesis is submitted to and approved by the University of Turku once, its content will not be able to be modified.

The research data will be stored on Seafile managed by the University of Turku under the researcher, Yuriko Tsuruoka's responsibility while she is at university and all data related to this research will be discarded after she graduates.

This research is conducted following Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK guidelines and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

## **9. About researcher and contact information**

This research is conducted by Yuriko Tsuruoka, who is enrolled at the Master's Degree Programme of Gender Studies at the University of Turku in Finland. If you have any questions about this research, please contact her using the contact information below.



Researcher: Yuriko Tsuruoka  
(Master's Degree Programme of Gender Studies at the University of Turku)  
Email: yuriko.y.tsuruoka@utu.fi

Thank you for considering taking part in this research project. It would be very meaningful to this research project if you could share your story, experience, and perception. If you agree to participate in this research, please read the consent form attached to the same email and send a document with your signature to the researcher through email.

Even if you may decide not to participate, it is appreciated that you considered taking part in this research.

Thank you for your time.

## Appendix 4: Interview Guide (Japanese)

### [Session 1]

#### Topic 1: Backgrounds

- ご年齢と現在のご職業について教えてください。
    - 何をされているのか、より詳細を聞く
      - （働いている場合） どのようなお仕事をされていますか？ 雇用形態は（正社員、派遣、フリーランス）？ 総合職、一般職？ 経歴・前職は？
      - （学生の場合） 何を勉強されていますか？ 就活は？ 卒業後のビジョンは？
  - 現在はどの都道府県にお住まいですか。
    - 一人暮らしですか？ どなたかと一緒に住んでいますか？
  - ご出身は？
    - 今住んでいるところと同じですか？ いつ今の場所に引っ越して来られたのですか？ 大学、お仕事で？
    - 地元と今の場所で何か違いを感じますか？ 今住んでいる場所は好きですか？
  - 現在ご結婚されていますか。お付き合いされている方は？
    - （付き合っている） どのくらい長くお付き合いされていますか。お相手の方も学生、社会人ですか？ 結婚は考えていますか？
    - （付き合っていない） 誰かと付き合いたいという願望はありますか？ それとも今はそんなに興味がありませんか？
    - （結婚している） ご結婚何年目ですか？ パートナーの方は何をされていますか？
    - お子さんはいらっしゃいますか。
      - （いる場合） 何人いますか？ お子さんはおいくつですか？
- 

### [Session 2]

#### Topic 2: Reproductive decisions

- 将来子供が欲しいと考えていますか。→【はい/わからない/いいえ】
- 【はい】何故欲しいのですか？実子か養子か？何人欲しいですか？
- 【いいえ】その理由は何ですか。
- 子供を持つか持たないかという選択に影響を与えるのはどういった要因ですか。
  - 恋人がいる、いない？結婚している、いない？ 文化的、社会的な考え方、価値観？経済的理由？子供を育てる環境や制度？
  - 子供を育てるには、どのような環境が必要だと思いますか。
- 【はい/わからない】子供を産む場合、理想の年齢や時期などありますか。何歳までに子供が欲しいなど。
  - どうしてそのように思われますか？
    - 生物学的な理由（卵子の老化）？キャリアとの両立を考えた？社会的な理想年齢？ライフプラン教育？
    - ※これらの話題が出た場合は掘り下げる
  - 何歳までなら子供を産めると思いますか？
    - 何故そう思いますか？どこでその情報を聞きましたか？
    - 不妊治療や卵子凍結について
    - ※これらの話題が出た場合は掘り下げる
- 【わからない/いいえ】子供を持たない場合に生じるポジティブな点は何だと思えますか。
- 避妊や妊娠、出産について、ご自身が最善の選択をするために十分な情報や教育を受けていると思いますか。
  - 今までどのような情報に触れたりや教育を受ける機会がありましたか？
    - それはいつ、どこで、どのように学びましたか？
  - 現状に対する要望はありますか？どのような情報の普及や教育が必要だと思いますか？
- 将来子供を産むことが当たり前のように話が進んだり、いつか子供を産むことを期待されていると感じたことはありますか。

- どのような状況で？誰に？プレッシャーを感じる？
- 女性は子供を産んで母親になるべきという風潮を感じたことはありますか？
  - どういった点でそう思いますか？特定の年齢でプレッシャーが強くなることはありますか？
- そのような体験は、女性と男性で異なると思いますか？
  - どのように異なるのか？ジェンダーより他の要因の方が強いのか（年齢・配偶者の有無）？

### Topic 3: Motherhood/Parenting

- 【はい/わからない】母親になるのはどんな感じだと思いますか。
- 【はい/わからない】母親になったら、大変なことはあると思いますか。
  - どんな風に変な大変なこと？
- 【はい/わからない】子供を持つか持たないかという選択によってあなたの人生はどのように変わりますか。
- 【いいえ】子供を欲しくないと思う人は他にも多いと思いますか。

### Topic 4: Career/Dream

- 【はい/わからない】出産した時に仕事をしていた場合、仕事は続ける予定ですか。それとも辞める予定ですか。
  - なぜそうしたいのか？キャリア構築のため？経済的な理由？専業主婦への憧れ？
- 人生において達成したい夢や目標はありますか。
  - どのような夢・目標ですか？
  - どのようにしてその夢・目標が出来ましたか？誰かに影響を受けたりしましたか？
  - 【はい/わからない】もし家庭を持つこと以外に夢や目標がある場合、どのように子育てと両立しますか？
- (働いている場合) あなたの職場では、子供を持つ社員の働きやすさはどうですか。男性社員と女性社員で異なる状況や待遇はありますか。

## Topic 5: Infertility

- 【はい/わからない】不妊について考えたり、不安になったことはありますか。
  - どうしてそう思いますか？どのように不妊について知りましたか？
- 【はい/わからない】子供を授かるために不妊治療を受けたいと思いますか。
  - どのような不妊治療を受けたいですか？
  - 不妊治療を受けるかどうか後押しするものは何ですか？
  - どうして不妊治療を受けたくないのですか？
- 【いいえ】近年、日本政府が不妊治療への支援を増やしていますが、不妊治療について一般的にどう思いますか。
- （不妊治療を受けたことがある場合）
  - どのような不妊治療を受けたことがある・受けていますか？
  - どうしてその治療を受けようと思ったのですか？誰と相談して決めましたか？頑張ろうと思える源は何ですか？
  - 不妊治療の経験はどのようなものですか・でしたか？
  - あなたとあなたのパートナーの間で、不妊治療の経験において異なる部分はあると思いますか？（身体的・精神的・経済的な面で）
    - どのように異なると感じましたか？どうしてそう思いましたか？

## Appendix 5: Interview Guide (English Translation)

### [Session 1]

#### Topic 1: Backgrounds

- Could you tell me your age and occupation?
  - o Ask more about what the interviewee is doing
    - (If working) What kind of job do you do? Are you employed as *Sōgōshoku* or *Ippanshoku*? Which position are you in? How did you end up in your current position?
    - (Student) What do you study? Are you doing job hunting? Any vision after graduation?
- Where do you live?
  - o Do you live alone or with someone else?
- Where are you from?
  - o When and why did you move to the current place?
  - o Do you feel any differences between your hometown and the current place? How do you like the current place?
- What is your relationship/marital status?
  - o (In a relationship) How long have you been in a relationship? What does your partner do for living? Are you considering marrying the person?
  - o (Not in a relationship) Do you want to be in a relationship with someone? Or are you not interested in engaging in a relationship?
  - o (Married) How long have you been married? What does your partner do?
  - o Do you have children?
    - (Yes) How many? How old are they?

### [Session 2]

#### Topic 2: Reproductive decisions

- Are you considering having a child in the future? → [Yes/Not sure/No]
- [Yes] Why? Biological or adopting? How many children do you want?
- [No] What is the reason behind your decision?
- What factors influence on your decision?

- Relationship/marital status? Cultural/Social norms? Financial status?  
Environment of (support for) child-rearing?
- What conditions do you think are required to have a child?
- [Yes/Not sure] Do you have a specific age/time that you expect to give birth to a child if you want?
  - Why do think so? Why do you think it would be the best timing?
    - Biological reason (egg-aging)? Career development? Social norm?  
Education about life-planning?  
\*mention these concepts if interviewees bring up
  - Until which age you would be able to give birth, do you think?
    - Why do you think so? How did you learn it?
    - Infertility treatment? Egg-freezing?  
\*mention these concepts if interviewees bring up
- [Not sure/No] What are benefits of not having a child, do you think?
- Do you think that you have received enough information/education for contraception, pregnancy, and childbirth to make the best decision?
  - What kinds of information/education have you received?
    - How, when, and where did you learn them?
  - What can be improved? What kinds of information/education are needed?
- Have you felt that you are expected to have a child in your life?
  - In what kind of situation? From whom? Any pressure?
  - Have you felt that there is a social norm to expect women to become a mother?
    - In what aspect? Is there a specific age to feel such pressure?
  - Have you felt that such experience is gendered?
    - If yes, how different? In what aspect? Are there any other influential factors (e.g. age, marital status)?

### Topic 3: Motherhood/Parenting

- [Yes/Not sure] How do you think what becoming a mother would be like?
- [Yes/Not sure] Do you expect any difficulties?
  - What kind of difficulties?
- [Yes/Not sure] How different do you think your life would be depending on your reproductive choice of having a child or not?

- [No] Do you think that there are many people who do not want to have a child?

#### Topic 4: Career/Dream

- [Yes/Not sure] Are you planning to continue or quit working after childbirth?
  - o Why? Career development? Financial reason? Housewife idealisation?
- Do you have a life goal which you want to achieve in your life?
  - o Ask details about their life goal/dream
  - o How did you realise your life goal? Is there a role model?
  - o [Yes/Not sure] If having a life goal other than having a family, how would you combine parenting with other dreams?
- (If working) What is the working environment for parents like at your workplace?
  - o Are there different expectations or circumstances for male and female employees?

#### Topic 5: Infertility

- [Yes/Not sure] Have you considered or been concerned about infertility?
  - o Why? How did you learn about infertility?
- [Yes/Not sure] Would you be interested in taking infertility treatment to get pregnant?
  - o If yes, what kind of treatment?
  - o If not sure, what would be helpful to make your decision?
  - o If no, what is a reason?
- [No] The Japanese government has been expanding supports for infertility treatment recently. What do you think about infertility treatment in general?
- [If they have received infertility treatment]
  - o What kinds of treatment have you received?
  - o How and why did you decide to take a treatment?
    - With whom? What is/was your motivation?
  - o How is/was your experience of infertility treatment?
  - o Have you felt any differences between your experience and your partner's experience (physically, mentally, financially)?
    - If yes, how and why?



## Appendix 6: Recruitment Post (Japanese)

**修士論文研究のための  
インタビューに参加して下さる方を  
募集しています!** 

インタビュー内容: 女性の妊娠・出産・子育て  
・ 家族に対する価値観  
について

対象者: 20代女性の方  
異性愛者の方  
日本にお住まいの方


実施期間: 2022年8月~9月  
(全2回を予定しています)

場所: Zoom (オンライン) 

お問い合わせ: DMもしくはEmail  
(yuriko.y.tsuruoka@utu.fi) まで

 フィンランドトゥルク大学  
ジェンダー研究科修士課程  
鶴岡侑子




インタビューについて 

【1回目】30分程度  
・ 研究内容の説明と書類の確認 (15分程度)  
・ 参加者のプロフィールについて伺う簡単な  
インタビュー (15分程度)

【2回目】最長60分  
・ 妊娠・出産・子育て・家族に対する参加者  
の考えや価値観についてより深く伺うイン  
タビュー

トピック例:  
子供を持つ・持たないことについて、理想の出産年齢、子供  
を産むべきという社会的な女性への期待・プレッシャー、職  
場での子育てと両立した働きやすさ、不妊治療への興味、等

※上記はあくまでも一例で、基本はopen-ended interview  
(参加者に自由に回答していただいた内容を深掘りしていく  
インタビュー形式) になります

インタビューは堅苦しいものではなく、  
気楽にリラックスした状態で  
お話ししていただけたいと思います 

**オンラインでのインタビュー実施にあたって**

ご参加の際には、  
以下のご準備をお願いしています 🙏

Zoomが利用できる環境  
(アプリやソフトウェアをインストールせず、  
ブラウザでご参加いただくことも可能です)

インターネットの接続が  
比較的安定している環境

周囲が静かで、  
ご自身について話しやすい環境

ご協力いただき  
ありがとうございます!