

Comparing Family-Friendly Policies in Japan and Europe

Are We in the Same or in a Different League?

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Introduction

The search for a 'Japanese model' remains a long-standing and popular activity in social sciences' scholarship. Many academic arguments have been put forward to date concerning whether or not Japan's social systems are unique, citing examples such as its corporate organizational structures and its policy-making processes. Some scholars claim that the fabric of society differs fundamentally between Japan and the West; others maintain that such differences have ceased to exist. As is well known, Japan and Western countries bear rather different cultural and historical backgrounds. This leads some to say that culture and history have imprinted their distinctive features upon Japanese society, and have locked Japan onto a divergent track from other industrialized countries. Over the past hundred years or so, however, Japan has adopted various artefacts born in the West, as a result of which we can now see characteristics shared in common by both Japanese society and those of Western countries. No doubt the mixture of indigenous and endogenous elements places Japan in a complicated position in comparison with other industrialized countries. Indeed, Esping-Andersen (1997) argues that the Japanese welfare system is a hybrid model including traditional familialistic and post-war liberalist elements.

The same is the case with family policies in Japan and European countries. It can easily be identified that these countries share similar socio-economic and demographic situations. On the demographic side -- the US with its rising birth rate apart -- both EU countries and Japan have experienced the twin phenomena of low fertility and an aging population over the past decades. On the economic side, the female labour participation rate has been on the increase in these countries. Owing to such socio-economic and demographic conditions, governments in the EU and Japan have, without exception, implemented policy measures to reconcile work and family responsibilities and to raise birth rates. As a result, the difference in the patterns of governmental intervention between Japan and EU countries is likely to shrink and their family policies may converge. In addition, the expansion of globalization also may diminish the extent of diversity in family policies among countries. Nowadays, a large amount of products, services, and information are flowing rapidly from one country to another, making our world more borderless and interdependent than ever (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, & Perraton 1999). The openness caused by globalization may restrict nations' capacity to design and implement their own policy (Esping-Andersen, 1996). As a result of this, countries may pursue similar policies.

At the same time, however, there are good reasons for thinking that the divergence in policies continues to exist among countries. First, family policy patterns are not dominated merely by economic and demographic factors. The

shaping of governmental policies is also affected by cultural traditions and norms that implicitly prescribe the ideal relationship between parents and children in society (Hantrais 1997). As exemplified by filial obligations, Confucian ethics give Japanese family relations a special flavour. Indeed, Goodman and Peng (1996) point out that, owing to traditional Confucian ideas, family-based support receives special emphasis in the social welfare programmes of Japan and East Asian countries. Thanks to such indigenous factors, Japanese family policies may appear as distinct from those in European countries, irrespective of economic and demographic convergence. Secondly, building consensus among people plays an important role in the policy-making process (Esping-Andersen, 1996). The interests of organizations and groups peculiar to Japan exert their influence on the shaping of family policies, which will subsequently bring peculiarities in policy patterns to the country. Taking these points into consideration, it is likely that Japan remains distinct from European countries in terms of its family policy patterns.

In this paper, we will compare family-friendly policies in Japan and EU Member States, with specific reference to their policies supporting childbearing and childrearing. In general terms, family-related policies, which are partly designed to increase fertility, can be classified into two types. One type purposes to reduce the economic burden associated with raising children. Child allowance and family allowance fall into this category. The other type seeks to establish a social environment in which it is possible to reconcile childcare and employment. Maternity and parental leave schemes, and childcare services belong to this latter category (Hecht and Leridon 1993). Originally, these policies were not designed to promote the fertility rate. Child allowances were initially established as preventive measures to protect families with children from falling into positions of economic disadvantage, and were designed to increase the welfare of families and children. Likewise, maternity leave and parental leave programmes were created to protect employees, promote gender equity, or achieve the effective use of the labour force. Thus, we can understand that the programmes originally sprang from and were a part of labour market or employment policies (Hantrais 1996). However, the low fertility of recent years has added a pronatalist objective to these policies insofar as they promote and support childbearing and childrearing. The policies in this second category -- the so-called 'family-friendly' policies -- are aimed particularly at ameliorating mothers' difficulties in concurrent childrearing and employment, that is, in raising children and holding down a job at the same time. Owing to their beneficial effects, family-friendly policies are currently expected to increase the desire to have children, leading to a higher fertility rate (Hantrais and Letablier 1996). Thus, we will, in this paper, concentrate upon comparisons of maternity and parental leave and childcare services in EU countries and Japan. The first part of the paper will be devoted to a straightforward comparison of these countries. We will, in the second part, compare Japan with EU Member States by using a multi-variate analysis.

Comparing Family-Friendly Policies in Japan and the EU

The construction of a family-friendly society is nowadays an important policy target for industrialized countries with the below-replacement level of fertility. In fact, the governments of Japan and EU Member States have been making efforts to support parents' childcare. In this section, we will focus upon maternity leave, parental leave and childcare services and compare their differences and similarities in the EU countries and Japan.

(1) Maternity Leave

The EU countries established their maternity leave schemes on the basis of an EC directive on maternity leave in 1992 (Directive 92/85/EEC). Since this directive only stipulates a minimum of 14-weeks' maternity leave legally guaranteed in EU Member States, the maximum duration of leave allowed to mothers varies from country to country. Furthermore, the interruption of employment for childbirth naturally entails the loss of earnings for female employees. It is therefore necessary, when conducting an international comparison of levels of maternity support, to pay attention not merely to the length of maternity leave, but also to the level of wage compensation given during the leave. With these points in view, Table 1 compares the maximum length of maternity leave and wage compensation on maternity leave systems¹ in Japan and EU Member States (including Norway) around the year 2000.

Looking first at the duration of maternity leave, Denmark showed the longest amount of leave granted at 28 weeks, followed by Italy at 5 months (20 weeks). At the opposite end of the scale, the shortest period, comprised of 14 weeks, was found in Germany and Sweden. In the latter countries, maternity leave is 50 per cent as long as their Danish counterpart and 70 per cent as long as their Italian counterpart. The remaining countries (Austria, the Netherlands, Spain, Belgium, etc.) fell between these two poles, with leave lasting around 16 weeks. In most countries, the length of maternity leave does not change according to birth order. In France, however, the amount of leave differs with the order of births. In the case of both first and second births, 16 weeks' leave is granted, while third and subsequent births met eligibility requirements for 26 weeks' leave. Thus, in the French leave system, as birth order rises, the length of maternity leave increases.

Looking next at the level of wage compensation during maternity leave, we found the highest level in Austria, the Netherlands, Greece, Germany, Portugal, Spain, and Luxembourg. These seven countries statutorily guaranteed the same wages during maternity leave as obtained in regular employment. Following next behind these countries, France, Italy, and Sweden set their maternity provision at around 80 per cent of the wages a mother earned before childbirth. The lowest levels of income support, however, were found to be in the UK and Ireland. In the UK, mothers were compensated for 90 per cent of their regular wage during the first six weeks of maternity leave, with a fixed amount of £55.44

¹ 'Maternity leave' is, in this study, defined as leave stipulated by statutory provisions, and does not include leave based on collective agreements.

per week offered for the remaining period. This figure is equivalent to approximately 18 per cent of the average weekly wage of a British woman employed in the manufacturing sector. Likewise, in Ireland, 70 per cent of the regular wage was guaranteed for the first fourteen weeks of maternity leave, with no wage compensation for the remaining period. When weighted by the length of the period during which compensation for forgone earnings is made, the average wage compensation during the maternity period reaches 41.9 per cent of the pre-maternity wage for women in the manufacturing industry in the UK and 54.4 per cent in Ireland. Belgium also had a system similar to Ireland and the UK, in which the amount of compensation allowed was not fixed over the entire period of leave. 82 per cent of the regular wage was paid in the first month of maternity leave. This figure dropped, however, to 75 per cent for the remaining period. As a result, the weighted mean of wage compensation indicates that, in Belgium, 77 per cent of a woman's pre-maternity wage is ultimately paid out to her during maternity leave. Compared with these EU countries, Japan is not very generous in its provision of maternity leave. The amount of maternity leave allowed in Japan was 14 weeks; the same as in Germany and Sweden. As mentioned above, these two countries had the shortest leave among the EU countries. By the same token, sixty per cent of the regular wage was guaranteed in Japan during the maternity leave. This is about 20 per cent higher than the UK figure, and quite close to the figure for Ireland. It follows from this evidence that the level of maternity support in Japan is below the European average.

Table 1: Maternity Leave in EU and Japan (Statutory Provision), around 2000

	Length of Leave	Wage Compensation
Austria	16 weeks	100%
Belgium	15 weeks	82% (first month) 75% (the remaining period)
Denmark	28 weeks	2846 DKK per week
Finland	105 days (except Sundays)	From 43% to 82%, on average 66%
France	16 weeks (first and second births) 26 weeks (after third birth)	84%
Germany	14 weeks	100%
Greece	16 weeks	100%
Ireland	18 weeks	70% (first 14 weeks) 0% (the remaining period)
Italy	5 months	80%
Luxembourg	16 weeks	100%
Netherlands	16 weeks	100%
Portugal	120 days	100%
Spain	16 weeks	100%
Sweden	14 weeks	80%
United Kingdom	18 weeks	90% (first 6 weeks) 54.44 GBP per week (the remaining period)
Japan	14 weeks	60%

Source:
Bettio, F., & Prechal, S. (1998). Care in Europe.
Commission of the European Communities. (1999). Report from the
Commission.
Ministry of Labour (1999a) Kaisei Danjyo Koyokikai Kintoho no
Aramashi.

(2) Parental Leave

The present parental leave schemes in EU Member States have been developed on the basis of a 1996 EU Directive (EU Directive 96/34/EC). This directive, following 'ILO Recommendation No. 165', defines parental leave as leave granted to an employee after maternity leave for the purpose of childcare.² It recommends that EU Member States should guarantee a minimum of three months' leave by law. However, parental leave programmes actually implemented differ considerably across countries with regard to the length of leave allowed and the amount of cash benefits granted. Furthermore, in order to establish more flexible frameworks for combining childcare and employment, a couple of EU countries have not only 'full-time' parental leave programmes (during which parents are not engaged in their jobs), but also 'part-time' leave (in which working hours are reduced).

Table 2 compares parental leave³ in the EU countries and Japan. Looking first at the maximum period of leave, France, Germany, and Spain were at the top of the list with three years, after which came Austria with 24 months, and Sweden with 450 days. In contrast, the shortest period, only three months in duration, was found in the Netherlands and Belgium, which satisfies the minimum level recommended in the EU Directive. Next in order came Denmark and the UK with 13 weeks, and Ireland with 14 weeks. In addition to statutory parental leave, Belgium has a 'career break' system allowing up to five years' leave, which Belgian parents can take to care for their children. Similarly, 'childcare leave', in addition to parental leave, is granted in Denmark for 26 weeks and, in Finland, up until the child reaches three years of age. If we look at 'career break' and 'childcare leave' as a type of parental leave programmes, the maximum length of leave granted in Belgium. Also, Denmark and Finland becomes even longer. Accordingly, the shortest parental leave provisions in the EU are to be found in the Netherlands, the UK, and Ireland, in increasing order.

Japanese leave provision comes in at about the same length as European provisions. The period of leave granted in Japan was one year, which was the same as Norway's allowance. It should be noted that, because maternity leave and parental leave are combined in Norway, the figure for the length of leave shown in Table 2 for Norway represents these two leave periods added together. On the other hand, parental leave is given separately from maternity leave in Japan. Taking this point into consideration, the Japanese leave provision is, in fact, slightly longer than its Norwegian counterpart.

With reference to monetary allowance during the parental leave period, the EU countries may be categorized into four types. In the first type, no cash benefits are offered during parental leave. Spain, Greece, and Portugal in Southern Europe, and the Netherlands, the UK, and Ireland fell into this category. The second type is the provision of a fixed amount of money; Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, France, and Luxembourg are included in this category. For example, in Austria, 5,600 Schillings per month was granted for full-time leave.

² For further details of the ILO definition of parental leave, see ILO (1997).

³ This study deals with only parental leave stipulated by statutory provisions, and leave based on collective agreements is excluded.

Likewise, in Germany, 600 Marks per month was provided during the first two years of leave, subject to a means test. In France, no cash benefits were given for the first birth, but 3045.70 Francs a month was allotted for second and subsequent births when mothers took full-time leave. The third type of monetary allowance is a wage compensation granted during leave, based on a fixed percentage of the pre-birth salary. Finland, Norway, and Italy fell into this category. For example, in Finland, the level of monetary compensation ranged from 43 to 82 per cent of the full wage, depending on the amount of the employee's income. Generally, the average compensation in Finland stood at 66 per cent of pre-birth wages. In Italy, 30 per cent of the regular wage was paid, and in Norway it was possible to choose one of two provision types: 80 per cent for 52 weeks or 100 per cent for 42 weeks. The fourth type of cash benefit is the combination of a fixed monetary allowance and a proportional wage compensation during leave. Sweden fell into this category, where 80 per cent of wages were paid during the first year of leave, and 60 Kronor a day was provided for the remaining three months.

The type of cash benefit system exercised in Japan belonged to the third type of allowance, which was also used in Finland, Norway, and Italy. Under the Japanese provision, employees were paid 40 per cent of their pre-birth wages if their employer did not make any wage compensation, and up to a maximum of 80 per cent if some proportion of wages were paid by their employer during parental leave. However, according to the Basic Survey on Women's Employment Administration (Ministry of Labour 1999b), companies that paid some portion of wages to employees during parental leave accounted for only 11.4 per cent of the total in 1999, whilst the vast majority did not make any wage payment at all during leave. With this point in view, we can say that the level of wage compensation made in Japan during leave was around 40 per cent of the average wage.

One of the important elements in achieving compatibility between childcare and work is flexibility in leave arrangements. The availability of part-time parental leave programmes with reduced working hours and flexi-time are of particular import here. In fact, most of the EU countries have this form of leave. Only Denmark, Finland, Italy, and Greece adhere to full-time parental leave programmes and do not allow parents to work during leave (see Table 2). Reduced working hours and flexi-time is provided through Japanese parental leave programmes, which formally allow parents to combine childcare and employment by taking part-time leave. Moreover, there is a difference between full-time and part-time leave in terms of the length of leave and the amount of cash benefits provided. In most countries, mothers are given a longer duration of leave and a smaller amount of money for part-time than for full-time arrangements. For example, in France, if parents are engaged in their jobs for less than 85 working hours per month (second child and higher), the amount of their benefit during parental leave will be 2013.88 Francs a month, with a reduction of about 35 per cent. If they work between 85 and 136 hours per month, their benefits will be reduced, by approximately 50 per cent, to 1522.35 Francs a month. Likewise, for Belgian parents who opt for part-time parental

leave, the period of their leave will be extended to six months, which is twice the length of time allowed them had they chosen full-time leave.

Table 2: Parental Leave in EU and Japan (Statutory Provision), around 2000

	Length of Leave	Cash Benefit/ Wage Compensation	Part-time Employment during Leave
Austria	24 months	5,600 ATS per month	Yes
Belgium	3 months. In addition, career break for 5 years .	20,400 BEF per month. 12,308 BEF per month (during career break)	Yes
Denmark	13 weeks. In addition, child care leave for 26 weeks.	2,846 DKK per week. 1,710 DKK per week (during child care leave)	No
Finland	26 weeks. In addition, child care leave until a child becomes 3 years old	Same as maternity leave. 1,500 FIM per month (during child care leave)	No
France	3 years	3045.70 FRF per month (after a second birth)	Yes
Germany	3 years	600 DEM per month (for 2 years, means-tested)	Yes
Greece	3.5 months	Nothing	No
Ireland	14 weeks	Nothing	Yes
Italy	10 months	30% of monthly wage	No
Luxembourg	6 months	60,000 LUF per month	Yes
Netherlands	3 months	Nothing	Yes
Norway	52 weeks or 42 weeks	80% of the wage for 52 weeks, or 100% of the wage for 42 weeks	Yes
Portugal	6 months	Nothing	Yes
Spain	3 years	Nothing	Yes
Sweden	450 days	80% of the wage for 1 year, and 60 SEK per day for 3 months	Yes
United Kingdom	13 weeks (at most 4 weeks per year)	Nothing	Yes
Japan	1 year	From 40% to 80% of the wage	Yes

Source:

- Moss, P., & Deven, F. (eds.). (1999). *Parental Leave: Progress or Pitfall?*
 Clauwaert, S., & Harger, S. (2000). *Analysis of the Implementation of the Parental Leave
 Directive in the EU Member States.*
 Rostgaard, T. & Fridberg, T. (1998) *Caring for Children and Older People.*
 Ministry of Labour. (2000) *Ikuji Kaigo Kyugyo Ho no Aramashi.*

(3) *Childcare Services*

The reconciliation between childrearing and employment is achieved not only by the establishment of childcare leave systems, but also by the improvement of childcare arrangements such as day-care centres, kindergartens, and nurseries. Governmental policies to increase the supply of childcare services are aimed at reducing the burden of childcare on parents and allowing them to accommodate both employment and childrearing in their lives by entrusting part of the care of pre-school children to agents outside the family. This kind of support may be called the 'externalisation' of childcare.

Table 3 compares the provision of childcare services for pre-school age children in the EU (including Norway) and Japan. The level of childcare

provision in these countries was measured by means of the following two indices⁴: (1) the proportion of children aged 0-2 using formal childcare arrangements; and (2) the proportion of children aged 3-5 using formal childcare arrangements.

Table 3: The Percentage of Children Using Childcare Arrangements, around 2000

	Aged 0-2 (%)	Aged 3-5 (%)
Austria	4	68
Belgium	30	97
Denmark	64	91
Finland	22	66
France	29	99
Germany	10	78
Greece	3	46
Ireland	38	56
Italy	6	95
Netherlands	6	98
Norway	40	80
Portugal	12	75
Spain	5	84
Sweden	48	80
United Kingdom	34	60
Japan	13	34

Source:
OECD. (2001). *Employment Outlook*.

When looking first at childcare provision for the 0-2 age group, it was found that the proportion of children was greatest in Denmark, with 64 per cent of children using childcare arrangements. Sweden was the next highest, with nearly 50 per cent of children offered childcare services. In contrast, the lowest percentages appeared in Greece, Austria, and Spain, where formal childcare were provided for only five or less per cent of children in this age group. Italy and the Netherlands also yielded a very low percentage. In Japan, only 13 per cent of children between ages 0 and 2 had places at childcare arrangements. This percentage is almost on a par with that of Portugal and ranked middle among the countries compared. Thus, Japan is near to the median percentage of childcare provisions in the EU countries.

As for the percentage of children in the 3-5 age group, France, the Netherlands and Belgium ranked the highest with almost 100 per cent of children being placed in childcare arrangements. The next highest percentages were found in Italy and Denmark, and approximately 90 percent of their children utilized childcare arrangements. By contrast, Japan stood at the lowest position in the ranking of the 3-5 age group, with childcare services being offered to only 34 per cent of children. Furthermore, percentages in Greece and Ireland also ranked fairly low with around 50 per cent.

The interesting point here is that the coefficient of variation differs saliently between the percentages of children in the 0-2 age group and the 3-5 age

⁴ Childcare arrangements here include group-care facilities such as childcare centres and home-based care such as childminders. For further details, see OECD (2001).

group. The latter figure stood at 25.7, which is less than one-third the former group's figure of 80.9. This evidence means that, although the provision of childcare services for the 3-5 age group differs only slightly among the countries, there are great variations in the provision for the 0-2 age group. It seems reasonable to think that these differences stem not merely from socio-economic factors, but also from societal norms and cultural factors concerning the 'desirable agent of childcare'; that is, in who should look after children primarily.

Typology of Nations: Are We Typical or Atypical?

As has been seen in the previous section, the EU countries and Japan show wide variations on their provisions of maternity leave, parental leave, and childcare arrangements. Thus, insofar as we discretely focus on single aspects of these policy instruments and make straightforward comparisons, it is difficult to grasp a broad overall picture of a country's support for bearing and rearing children. With this point in view, we will, in this section, compare the patterns of governmental support by employing the multi-dimensional scaling method. For this purpose, first of all, six variables examined thus far were transformed into a standardized score: (1) the maximum length of maternity leave; (2) the level of wage compensation during maternity leave; (3) the maximum length of parental leave; (4) the percentage of cash benefits provided during parental leave (=the average cash benefit per month during leave divided by the average monthly wage in the manufacturing industry); (5) the percentage of children aged 0-2 using childcare arrangements; and (6) the percentage of children aged 3-5 using childcare arrangements. After this operationalization, we performed multi-dimensional scaling⁵. Figure 1 displays the two-dimensional configuration of countries.

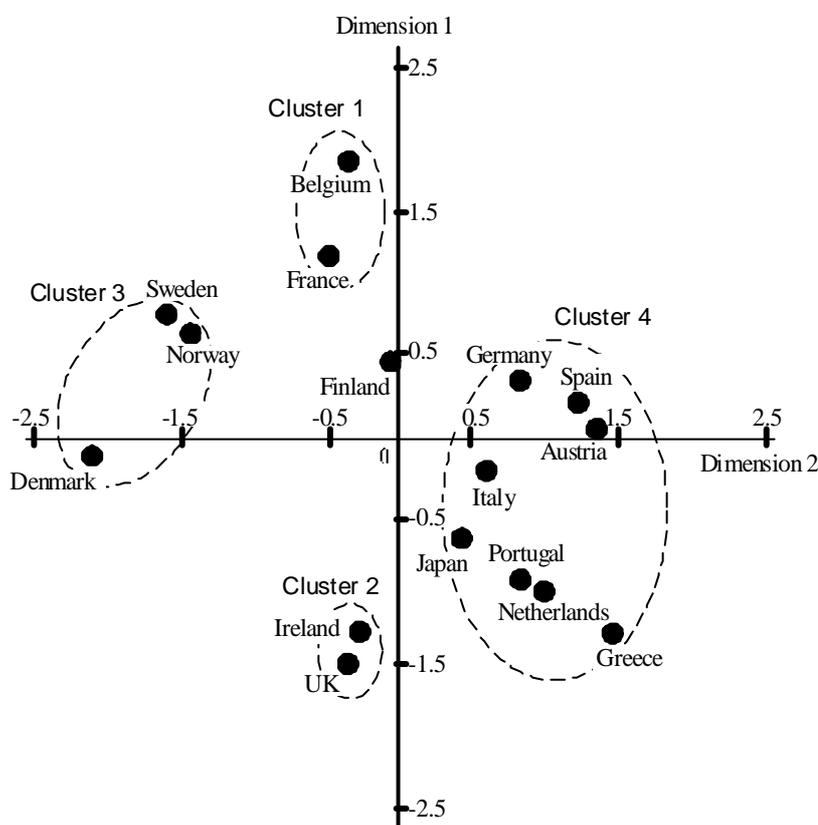
First, we can identify that two countries, Ireland and the UK, are positioned at the lower extremity of the Dimension 1 axis. As mentioned in the previous section, Ireland and the UK had the shortest periods of parental leave in the EU, and no allowances were given statutorily during the leave period. Accordingly, countries in the lower part of this axis tend to have relatively short periods of maternity and parental leave, and relatively poorer levels of wage compensation and monetary benefits. In contrast, Belgium, France and Sweden are to be found at the upper extremity of the Dimension 1 axis. Maternity and parental leave periods are relatively lengthy in these countries, and the level of monetary allowances during these periods is also high. For example, the maximum length of parental leave in Sweden was 450 days and its average cash benefit reached 60 per cent of the average manufacturing industry wage. Therefore, it is safe to say that the scale of Dimension 1 indicates the levels of leave provisions. The higher a country is situated on this axis, the more generous its maternity and parental leave programmes.

With reference to the configuration of countries on the Dimension 2 axis, Denmark and Sweden are at the left extremity, whereas Greece and Austria are to be found at the right extremity. As seen in the previous section, the provision of

⁵ In calculating this multi-dimensional scaling, 'career break' in Belgium and 'childcare leave' in Denmark and Finland were included in the parental leave category.

childcare services in the countries at the right extremity was far less sufficient in comparison with the other EU countries. On the other hand, the countries at the left extremity showed the largest percentage of children utilizing childcare arrangements. For instance, 64 per cent of Danish children and 48 per cent of Swedish children between ages 0 and 2 took advantage of childcare arrangements. By contrast, the figures for this age group stood at 4 per cent and 3 per cent in Austria and Greece respectively. Accordingly, the Dimension 2 axis may be safely regarded as a scale indicating levels in the provision of childcare services. As a country is positioned further to the left on this axis, the provision of childcare services tends to become more ample. To put it another way, this axis indicates the extent to which childrearing is ‘externalized’ in the hands of agents outside the home; the further to the left a country moves, the greater this ‘externalization’ has advanced there.

Figure 1 : Configuration of EU and Japan



According to the result of our multi-dimensional scaling, Japan and EU countries can be grouped into four clusters. The first cluster stands at the top centre of Figure 1 and consists of Belgium and France. These two countries, as seen in the previous section, offered generous maternity and parental leave and a moderately high level of childcare services. In contrast, the second cluster is situated at the bottom centre and consists of Ireland and the UK. The features of these countries are poor leave provisions and a medium level of childcare

arrangements. At the left-hand corner of the plot, three Nordic countries, Sweden, Norway and Denmark comprise the third cluster. These countries are marked by higher proportions of children enjoying childcare services. The fourth cluster stands at the right-hand corner of the figure, and includes Austria, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain. This cluster of countries shows a relatively poor provision of childcare. Japan also belongs to this grouping and commands a position close to Italy. It can be argued from this evidence that Japan is not conspicuously different from its European counterparts in terms of governmental family-friendly policies. Rather, Finland is distinct from the other EU countries in Figure 1, and stands nearly at the centre of the figure

Moreover, our two-dimensional configuration reveals that the classification of the countries differs somewhat from what Esping-Anderson (1990) proposed for welfare states. He classified the welfare systems of advanced industrial countries into liberal, social democratic, or conservative (corporatist) regimes, based on governmental policy patterns indicating degrees of decommodification and principles of stratification. However, it has been pointed out that if social and labour policy patterns are classified according to the gender division of labour, typologies of contemporary welfare states do not agree with those proposed by Esping-Andersen (Esping-Andersen 1999; Gornick, Meyers, and Ross, 1998; Sainsbury 1994; Siaroff 1994). For example, Lewis (1992) focused on differences in governmental policies relating to the decommodification of the female labour force, and classified welfare states in a different way from Esping-Andersen. More specifically, she divided welfare states into three types: (1) the strong male breadwinner model; (2) the moderate male breadwinner model; and (3) the weak male breadwinner model.

As is clear from Figure 1, our typology based on differences in family-friendly policies also places countries in different positions from those in Esping-Andersen's typology. First, in Esping-Andersen's model, the Nordic countries were classified as one group in the social democratic welfare regime. Nevertheless, in our classification, differences were observed among the Nordic countries. Sweden, Norway and Denmark were close to each other in Figure 1, but Finland stood away from the former three. Secondly, considerable differences were identified between countries in the conservative welfare regime. Specifically, France and Germany were considerably distant from each other in Figure 1. The former showed a relatively ample provision of childcare services within this grouping of countries, while the latter displayed a relatively poorer provision. By the same token, Greece was positioned at a considerable distance from the remaining countries in the category of the conservative regime. Thirdly, the Netherlands stood distant from the Nordic countries in Figure 1, indicating considerably weak governmental intervention in terms of support for families with children. Nevertheless, according to Esping-Andersen's typology, the country was regarded as a hybrid of the social democratic and the conservative-corporatist regimes. Fourthly, Esping-Andersen (1997) argues that Japan is a hybrid of the liberal and the corporatist regimes. According to Figure 1, however, Japan stood close to Italy and considerably distant from the UK.

This implies that liberalism has a weak influence on Japanese family-friendly policies.

The findings of our analysis also differ from the classifications presented by Chesnais (1996). He classified European countries into 'nations of families' and 'nations of individuals' according to differences in family-related policies. In concrete terms, countries included in the first group tended to adopt policies based on a 'breadwinner-father, homemaker-mother, and dependent children' model of the family, and their policies were designed to strengthen this family model in its function as an agent for bringing up children. On the other hand, countries in the second group tended to recognize diverse family types (single parent families, etc.), and implement policies designed to promote a flexible combination of childcare and employment. Chesnais took Germany and Italy as representative of the former type, while the UK and Sweden are representative of the latter. However, as seen from Figure 1, the UK and Sweden stood apart from each other, which indicates that the two cannot be classified as members of the same group from the perspective of childrearing-support policies.

Summary and Conclusion

In recent years, EU countries and Japan have developed family-friendly policies in response to their fertility rates falling below the replacement level. In this paper we compared Japan and the EU Member States in terms of maternity leave, parental leave, and childcare services.

The present analysis firstly revealed that, with regard to the length of maternity leave, Denmark was highest among EU countries, followed by Italy. In contrast, Germany and Sweden had the shortest leave with 14 weeks. Japan also had 14 weeks of maternity leave, as short as Germany and Sweden. As for wage compensation during maternity leave, Austria, the Netherlands, Greece, Germany, Portugal, Spain, and Luxembourg guaranteed a 100 per cent provision of pre-maternity wages; the UK and Ireland had the lowest level of wage compensation. The Japanese level of wage compensation was comparatively low and slightly above the Irish level.

With regard to parental leave, the longest periods were allowed by France, Germany, and Spain. In contrast, the Netherlands and Belgium granted the shortest period; that of three months. The leave period granted in Japan was one year, no shorter than those of its European counterparts. Japan's figure was almost equivalent to Norway's provision. As far as monetary allowance is concerned, we found four types of provision during the parental leave period: (1) no cash benefits; (2) a fixed cash allowance; (3) a fixed percentage provision of the pre-birth salary; and (4) a combination of cash allowance and wage-proportional provision. The type of cash benefits allowed during parental leave in Japan belonged to the third type, which included Finland, Norway, and Italy.

As for childcare services, a high proportion of children aged 0-2 using childcare arrangements was found in Denmark and Sweden, while the proportion of children was low in Greece, Austria, and Spain. Japan revealed a medium level of childcare provision for this age group. With regard to the proportion of

children aged 3-5, France, the Netherlands and Belgium showed high figures, with childcare services available to almost 100 per cent of children. In contrast, Japan showed the lowest percentage of children in this age group placed at childcare arrangements. The proportion of children was also low in Greece and Ireland.

Secondly, the results of our multi-dimensional scaling suggest that, based on patterns of governmental support for the bearing and rearing of children, countries can be grouped in four clusters. Japan belonged to the fourth cluster and stood close to Italy on our two-dimensional configuration of countries. As far as this evidence shows, family-friendly policies in Japan are not very different from those in European countries. Rather, Finland's position on our two-dimensional configuration was distinctly distant from its geographical EU neighbours. Therefore, it is safe to say that Japan is in the same league as Europe where the patterns of its family-friendly policies are concerned.

Finally, it should be borne in mind that the pronatalist effect of governmental policy intervention is not clear (Lutz 1999). As seen in Figure 1, the UK's position was widely distant from France, and thus the two countries' governmental policies stood at variance with each other. Despite their differences in governmental support for the bearing and rearing of children, both countries yielded similar levels of fertility. The period total fertility rate for the year 2000 was 1.65 in the former country and 1.89 in the latter (Council of Europe 2001), although this index is affected by a change in the timing of childbearing. This suggests that a demographic response to governmental policies is bound to be complex. Therefore, international comparative research needs to be conducted on an individual basis in order to thoroughly examine, and bring forward our understanding of the relation between governmental policies and reproductive behaviour.

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