

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 The Motive and Purpose of the Study

Following industrial advancement, the profile of female labor participation in Taiwan has changed significantly. In the agricultural era, most women worked as domestic laborers, along with their families. In the manufacturing era, many young women joined production lines in factories before their marriage. In the era of services-centered economies, women participation in the labor market has grown significantly. While women have continued to dominate traditionally female oriented occupations, some have entered into professional occupations that were previously male-dominated.

The motivation for this study comes from my experiences with female co-workers, and the report, *Progress of The World's Women 2005: Women, Work, and Poverty* (Chen et al., 2005), from United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). According to this report, some females in the age group of 55-65 have been unpaid domestic workers for many years. They have no opportunity to be economically independent and have to depend either on their father, husband, or children. However, an increasing number of females are now becoming economically independent due to their personal incomes. On the other hand, many females in their 30s are suffering the burden of double responsibilities of job and family, struggling to strike a balance between career development and family demands. In *Progress of The World's Women 2005: Women, Work, and Poverty* (Chen et al., 2005), it is argued that there are still many women suffering from low wages or are unpaid household workers.

The continual plight of these poor women has prompted me to examine the past conditions and future trends in female labor force participation, and if possible, to find

ways to enhance female labor force participation.¹ In order to understand the development of female labor force participation globally, I not only examine Taiwan but also consider member countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

The purposes of my study of international female labor force participation are:

1. To understand salient factors that determined and influenced female labor force participation.
2. To be aware of the trend of female labor force participation in OECD countries.
3. To realize the trend of female labor force participation in Taiwan.
4. To ascertain the impact of economies becoming knowledge-based, the growing number of part-time jobs, and the trend toward dispatched work on female labor force participation.
5. To frame policy recommendations to improve the quality and the quantity of female labor force participation in Taiwan.

1.2 The Major Issue and the Background

In tandem with economic development, there is an increasing trend of female labor force participation in Taiwan. Since Taiwan's female labor force participation rate was much lower in earlier years, the government has continuously paid attention to enhancing female labor participation rate.² By promoting education, job training, kindergartens and care centers, female workers in Taiwan have been empowered and their burden has been reduced. These functions have not only enlarged their will to work,

¹ The labor force of a country consists people of working age (usually above a certain age and below retirement age; e.g. 16 years old -65 years old) who are actively employed or looking for work. The labor force is also the total number of people employed and unemployed.

² Labor force participation rate is the ratio between the labor force and the overall population of the same age range.

but have also given women more opportunities and time to participate in the labor market. Meanwhile, the changes of the industrial structure also improved female labor force participation.

From agriculture to service-oriented industries, female labor force participation rate has risen amazingly. Additionally, changes in social values have also lead females to go out to work rather than being housewives at home. In 1980, female labor force participation rate was 39.25% only, but it went up to 48.12% in 2005, representing a 9 percentage point increase in 26 years. The average rate of labor force participation in Taiwan from 1980 to 2007 is shown in Table 1-1. Although the rate in Taiwan is increasing, it appears that there is still large room for growth, when compared to advanced countries of the world.

Here, data of OECD member countries have been considered for studying international female labor force participation. There are 30 members of the OECD, which are market democracies. The member countries are spread over Europe, Asia, America, and Oceania area. These member states are Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, and United States. OECD works as a forum and provides reliable information. Governments of member countries can exchange information on policies and experiences of improving economic and social development. Moreover, one of the major missions of OECD is to boost employment, which is one of my purposes too.³ That is the reason why I chose OECD countries to conduct the study of female labor force participation. I feel that studying the development of female labor force

³ For more information about the missions of OECD, please refer to its official website, <http://www.oecd.org/>.

participation in these countries will lead to better and deeper understanding of how female workers have grown and developed in the global economy.

Table 1-1: Labor Force Participation Rate in Taiwan— 1980-2007

Unit: %

Year	Total	Male	Female
1980	58.26	77.11	39.25
1981	57.82	76.78	38.76
1982	57.93	76.47	39.30
1983	59.26	76.36	42.12
1984	59.72	76.11	43.30
1985	59.49	75.47	43.46
1986	60.37	75.15	45.51
1987	60.93	75.24	46.54
1988	60.21	74.83	45.56
1989	60.12	74.84	45.35
1990	59.24	73.96	44.50
1991	59.11	73.80	44.39
1992	59.34	73.78	44.83
1993	58.82	72.67	44.89
1994	58.96	72.44	45.40
1995	58.71	72.03	45.34
1996	58.44	71.13	45.76
1997	58.33	71.09	45.64
1998	58.04	70.58	45.60
1999	57.93	69.93	46.03
2000	57.68	69.42	46.02
2001	57.23	68.47	46.10
2002	57.34	68.22	46.59
2003	57.34	67.69	47.14
2004	57.66	67.78	47.71
2005	57.78	67.62	48.12
2006	57.92	67.35	48.68
2007	58.25	67.24	49.44

Source: Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting, and Statistics, Executive Yuan,

R.O.C., <http://www.dgbas.gov.tw/>.

1.3 Research Framework

Data of OECD member countries and Taiwan have been treated as representative of global trends in this study, to see how female labor force participation has progressed over the years. The framework is constructed on the basis of trends in OECD countries and Taiwan.

Related factors that influence female labor force participation are also taken into consideration. These factors are divided into four parts, personal, family, social, and economic. Personal and family factors, such as age, education, marriage, and household chores, have considerable and observable effects on the decision to join, or retire from, the labor market. Social and economic factors, such as the status of the economy and social values in a country, are also major factors that influence the growth of women employment in the labor market. After building up the framework of female labor force participation in each country on the basis of these four factors, international comparison is made.

Since the trend of female labor force participation is the focus, contemporary issues related to changes in economies that impact female labor force are also considered. These related contemporary issues consist of two parts; one is the new economy, and the other is the development of atypical employment patterns.⁴ Representative indicators are knowledge-based economy, part-time jobs, and dispatched work.

1.4 Research Methods

The source of this thesis is mainly from analyzing the secondary data, which

⁴ The new economy is facilitated by the revolutionary technological advances, including high-speed telecommunications, powerful personal computers, and the internet. It contains the whole package of "information economy," "network economy," "digital economy," "knowledge economy," and the "risk society."

includes surveys, investigations, and the series statistical data across time of Taiwan and OECD countries. The secondary data will be applied to statistical tables and figures, with which this study will analyze how female labor force participation changes and how it develops in these years.

