



Takako Suwa with grinding workers in the factory of Daiya Seiki Co.

SERIES

*Yamato
Nadeshiko*

A Back-Street Workshop Principal

With around 4,000 factories, Ota City, Tokyo is a center for Japan's leading manufacturers. Most of them are small, with ten or fewer employees, but many possess world-class technology. **Takako Suwa**, president of precision metal working company Daiya Seiki Co. (38 employees) in Ota, speaks out forcefully through government conferences and the media about the current situation and future of manufacturing in this part of the capital. Osamu Sawaji of *The Japan Journal* interviewed Suwa.

Daiya Seiki was founded by your father, Yasuo Suwa, in 1963. What do you remember about your childhood?



Takako Suwa: Our family lived on the second floor of the factory so I grew up smelling the oil and hearing the sound of the machines. When my mother could not take care of me, my father often took me in his car to visit clients. I remember playing by myself in the parking spaces of these clients.

My older brother died in early childhood, so from my senior high school days I thought I would probably take over the company some day. At my father's recommendation, I studied engineering at university, and after graduation worked for around two years as an engineer for a large automotive parts manufacturer.

Takako Suwa, president of Daiya Seiki Co.

Your father passed away suddenly and as his daughter, you took over as president of Daiya Seiki. Is there anything in particular that you try or aim to do as a female president?

After leaving the automotive parts manufacturer, I joined my father's company. At that time, I thought that layoffs should be undertaken in the company's loss-making divisions, and proposed this to my father. Then, I was laid off. I had totally failed to understand why my father refused to consider layoffs, although it was evident that they would boost profits. His top priority was to save his employees' jobs.

After that, when he died suddenly in 2004, I was away from his firm, but in answer to the urging of the

employees, I succeeded him. I believe that the sense of economy that I nurtured when I was a homemaker is helpful to the management of the company, and I try to behave like a mother in the company. For example, newcomers must exchange a "diary" with me for their first one-month period. By taking notes of what they did and what they thought on a daily basis, they can recognize their own development. In addition, the diaries help me, as manager, to manage individual employees.

What does your company produce?

We manufacture gauges. Components for precision machinery including automotive engines need to have precision on the order of microns. Gauges are used to check if components are produced in micron-order precision. For example, more than fifty different gauges are used in the manufacture of engine pistons. Of course, these gauges must also have micron-order precision. Machinery alone cannot produce such ultra-high precision gauges. At the final stage, they are manually polished to correct errors. Workers use their sense of touch to check the products. Experienced workers are capable of detect-

ing an error of one microns or one thousandth of a millimeter, by touching them with their hands. As a result of this work, cars are on the roads worldwide.

In September last year, Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda toured our company. At that time, I told him a story about these experienced workers. He answered, "They have god hands." Nurtured in the Japanese manufacturing industry, techniques like these can be proudly demonstrated to the rest of the world. Young employees have a strong sense of mission to acquire and maintain these techniques.

You must have heavy daily responsibilities as president. How do you relax?

It is classical ballet that relaxes me. I started learning it in my thirties. When I became president, I happened to see a classical ballet lesson for adults in a sports club. When I was a child, I was passionate about classical ballet. Hearing that it was possible to start learning ballet in

adulthood, I started taking lessons. I take at least three lessons a week. When I put work away from my mind and do ballet at a place totally different from the factory, I feel refreshed. Now, ballet is my emotional support.