

# Education of Japanese Women and Study Abroad: A Historical and Contemporary Analysis

日本人女性の教育と海外留学：歴史的な背景と現状分析

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## Summary :

This study focuses on the historical beginnings and the contemporary situation of Japanese women studying abroad. The opening of Japan by the American Black Ships of Commodore Perry of 1854 signaled a new era for foreign nationals beyond the few Chinese and Dutch traders who were given permission to enter Japan. In turn, over time Japanese nationals were granted permission to travel overseas. From the diplomatic and educational journey that the Iwakura Mission engaged in from 1871 to 1873 to the United States and Europe in the early post-war era of travel, with Japanese businessmen engaged in international trade, Japanese men have stood out as the gender that traveled to destinations overseas. However, it can be well argued that at many levels and in many situations, it is Japanese women who stand out as the true internationalists.

## 和文抄録：

本研究は日本人女性の海外留学の歴史的な始まりと現代事情について論じている。1854年にペリー提督の黒船到来によってもたらされた日本の開国は、それまで入国許可があった中国とオランダの貿易商以外の外国人に対して新しい時代を示した。その代わり、日本国民は日本政府によって時間をかけて海外渡航の許可を与えられた。1871年から1873年にかけて外交と教育を目的とした岩倉使節団の米国や欧州の視察以降、冷戦初期にかけて日本人男性が国際貿易に携わって渡航していたことが注目を浴びていた。しかし、海外との関わりにおける様々な場面とレベルにおいては、日本人女性の方が真に国際的に外交と教育に貢献してきたことを主張したい。

**Key Words :** Japanese women, study abroad, internationalist, cosmopolitan, Equal Employment Opportunity Law, lifestyle, interpreter/translator, MBA, womenomics

キーワード：日本女性、海外留学、国際派、国際人、男女雇用機会均等法、生き方、通訳者・翻訳者、MBA、ウマンノミックス

## Introduction

With the Bubble Economy of the 1980s and a rapidly appreciating Japanese yen, overseas travel became a very feasible option for Japanese women. Although most overseas assignments provided by Japanese companies are still predominantly given to Japanese men, it has been Japanese women that are increasingly making the choice to travel and study overseas even if it is entirely done by their own funding. From the promotion of women's education by such respected historical figures and role models as Shimoda Utako and Tsuda Umeko in Japan's not too distant past to the expansion of opportunities provided by contemporary study abroad, Japanese women are forging a new destiny for themselves. In addition, from the aspect of internationalization, Japanese men have contributed greatly to Japan's economic development in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

However, the 21<sup>st</sup> century will most likely belong to Japanese women as they go forth and take their rightful place on a more equal level with their male counterparts. Many women in Japan may feel a strong desire to be involved with the outside world in general, and the West, in particular. It is a fact, though, that gender based stratification in the workplace has also compelled many ambitious and talented Japanese women to try to gain language and other skills while they are overseas in order for them to lead fulfilling lives. Japan's women have proven to possess a very high level of adaptability when dealing with other cultures. Japanese women are most likely to be involved in international exchange on many levels and seem to be the more 'internationalist' in their thinking and approach when dealing with the world beyond Japan's shores.

## Background to Educating Japan's Women

During the Meiji era, many early liberals in Japan were proponents of education for women. Many of these liberals were scholars who started to question and challenge Confucian concepts and ideals which prevented women from receiving an education. One such scholar, Fukuzawa Yukichi, believed that women were born equal to men and that they should be educated inside and outside the home (Rose 1992, 56). Until this time, the education of women was almost entirely focused on preparing and training them to manage and look after the household as obedient wives. These liberals promoted the concept of new forms of education which would train women to be mothers of a Japan whereby they would, in turn, be able to nurture and train their sons to be loyal subjects and disciplined soldiers of the Japanese state.

With the advent of the Meiji era, the Japanese authorities took a special interest in education. In 1872, the Meiji leaders instituted a system of compulsory education. At the outset, it appeared that this new education system would be egalitarian as both girls and boys were to receive the same four years of compulsory education. However, as funding costs were to be covered by local areas throughout the country, it was very unlikely that young girls would receive the same education as their brothers. Most parents were reluctant to pay school fees for both girls and boys to attend school. As a result, girls were the ones who would often be kept at home to engage in housework and farming tasks to a far greater extent than boys. Thus, priority for boys' education left many girls behind. This was reflected in low attendance rates for girls. In 1878, attendance rates were 53.4 percent for boys and a mere 22.5 percent for girls. The enormous gap between boys' and girls' school attendance rates at primary school was not closed until circa 1900, when tuition fees were abolished (Furuki 1991, 6 and Tachi 1984, 188 in Mackie 2003, 25).

A new educational policy under the Meiji government in 1879 saw boys and girls put into separate classes in the latter years of primary school (Kodama 1981, 17 in Mackie 2003, 25). Under the new policy, girls' education was reformed to train them to be 'good wives and wise mothers,' as outlined in 1887 by Mori Arinori, the then Minister for Education with the job of implementing the new educational policy:

If I summarise the point regarding the chief aim of female education, it is that the person will become a good wife (*ryosai*) and a wise mother (*kenbo*); it is to nurture a disposition and train talents adequate for [the task] of rearing children and managing a household...The basis of national wealth is education and the foundation (*konpon*) of education is female education. The encouragement or discouragement of female education, we must remember, has a bearing on national tranquility or its absence. (Mori translated by Nagy 1981, 17 in Mackie 2003, 25)

In 1874, the first Women's Normal School (Tokyo Women's Higher School, now Ochanomizu Women's University) was established. By 1898, there were thirty-four public high schools for girls, with a total enrolment number of around 8000. Under the Girls' High School Act of 1899, each prefecture was required to have at least one public girls' high school. By 1900, there were fifty-two high schools for girls with an enrolment of 12,000 students (Furuki 1991, 102-3 and Nagy 1981, 44 in Mackie 2003, 26). Despite this advance, the development of tertiary education for women took much longer. This was due to the fact that their education was kept back to the level of high school, while Japanese men could go as far as the Imperial University (later Tokyo

University) or the private universities. To deal with this discrepancy, mission schools became the source as major providers of education for Japan's women.

### **Umeko Tsuda: Japan's Study Abroad Trailblazer**

As part of the Iwakura Mission, five young women travelled to the United States and Europe on a fact-finding and educational tour in 1872. These five women were left in the United States to receive an education. Three of them stayed for a full ten years. Kuroda Kiyotaka, deputy head of the Hokkaido Colonization Board, was one of the supporters of the proposal to send the young women to be educated in the United States. Kuroda Kiyotaka stated clearly the importance of women's education from the standpoint of nation building: 'efficient colonization requires able men; able men are raised by educated mothers; to produce which schools for girls must be founded' (Furuki 1991, 9-10 in Mackie 2003, 26). He went on further to state that in Japan, like other imperial nations as, 'few who were educated could escape interpellation as colonizing subjects' (Inderpal 1996, 8 in Mackie 2003, 26).

In spite of all the effort and time spent acquiring language and other skills while in the United States, upon their return to Japan in 1882, there was little official interest in taking advantage of the new-found skills these women had worked so hard to obtain. Two of the five married, while Tsuda Umeko (1865-1929, born Tsuda Ume), the youngest, was initially employed as an English tutor and interpreter to members of the Meiji government. In 1885, a private Christian girls' school, *Meiji Jogakko*, was established by Iwamoto Yoshiharu. The school stated a commitment to the principles of a liberal education: 'For all students to develop freely, for each student to follow their chosen path, to develop their natural talents to the utmost...' (Maruoka 1985, 45 in Mackie 2003, 26).

In 1885, the Peeresses' School (*Kazoku Jogakko*) was also established and provided Tsuda with her first government position. After teaching at the school for several years, Tsuda returned to the United States to continue her studies in biology at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania. In 1899, another prominent intellectual during the Meiji era, Shimoda Utako (1854-1936, born Hirao Seki), founded the Jissen Girls' School and the Jissen Girls' Polytechnic (presently Jissen Women's University and Jissen Women's Junior College). In 1900, Tsuda Umeko established *Joshi Eigaku Juku* (Women's English College, now known as *Tsuda Juku Daigaku*, or Tsuda College) as Japan's first tertiary educational institution for women.

Soon after, in 1901, Naruse Jinzo's *Tokyo Joshi Daigakko* (Tokyo Women's University) was established. In 1903, the Japanese government passed an Act establishing vocational colleges

for women. *Joshi Eigaku Juku* was given the status of vocational college, which then allowed its students to be accredited as teachers in the educational system (Furuki 1991, 111 in Mackie 2003, 26). However, although there were some women who attended imperial regional universities before the Second World War, women could not receive credit for attending classes at national universities until 1946 under reforms headed by the Allied Occupation.

### **Educational Reforms after the Second World War: General Headquarters (GHQ) Initiatives**

From the destruction of the Second World War and Japan's defeat, the women of Japan were at last able to obtain equality with regards to receiving an education. This came about due to a series of educational reforms that were instituted under the direction of the Allied Occupation. In March 1946, George D. Stoddard headed the United States Education Mission to Japan. The organization consisted of twenty-seven members in charge of making recommendations on educational reforms to the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, General Douglas MacArthur. Just before the Mission arrived in Japan, at the recommendation of General MacArthur, a committee of twenty-nine Japanese scholars and educators had been organized with Tokyo University President Nambara Shigeru as the head of the committee (Fujimura-Fanselow and Kameda 1995, 103).

The United States Education Mission was determined to liberate Japan's education system from its pre-war and wartime militaristic and ultranationalist influences and features by promoting decentralization and democratization. In addition, another goal was to remove discrimination against women. Under the leadership of Nambara Shigeru, the Japanese Education Committee also discussed and debated important issues with regards to the reorganization and democratization of the Japanese education system.

Upon completion, the report was submitted to the Education Mission as well as to the Japanese government and was in agreement with the Report of the Education Mission in both spirit and content (Osada 1961, 294-95 in Fujimura-Fanselow and Kameda 1995, 103). Based on the recommendations of the United States Education Mission, equality of educational opportunity for women was guaranteed in several provisions of the new Japanese Constitution enacted in 1946. These provisions were incorporated in 1947 in the Fundamental Law of Education.

Article 26 of the Japanese Constitution defines the basic right of all boys and girls to receive an education. It also obligates adults to make sure that they receive such an education. The Fundamental Law of Education sets forth in more detail the aims and principles of education in

accordance with the spirit of the Constitution: Nine years of compulsory education is provided free of charge for both boys and girls; coeducation, which was formerly limited to the elementary school level, was now recognized by law and extended to all levels of the educational system. A common curriculum for both boys and girls was instituted in schools. Women were now allowed to attend the same schools and attend the same universities as their male counterparts.

Coming into effect in 1949, thirty-one of the women's higher educational institutions in existence — two national, three municipal, and twenty-six private — were elevated to the status of college or university under the new system of higher education. Moreover, many of the other existing higher educational institutions were given the title "short-term college" (*tanki daigaku*), or junior college (Fujimura-Fanselow and Kameda 1995, 103). Most of these junior colleges are usually designed as women's educational institutions.

Japan experienced its high growth period in the 1960s as it rapidly industrialized. With this rapid industrialization social structures and human relations were transformed. As technological innovations advanced, economic growth accelerated at a staggering pace. However, it can be said that it was the invisible work of women employed as cheap labor which sustained the Japanese economy from the bottom to bring about this growth. This has been the case ever since the Meiji Restoration commenced in 1868 (Hara 1984, 190-191 in Fujimura-Fanselow and Kameda 1995, 104).

In tandem with rapid industrialization and economic growth, the educational levels of the Japanese people rose as well. The percentage of girls within the appropriate age group entering upper secondary school (tenth through twelfth grade) doubled within a mere twenty-five-year period. In 1955, 47.4 percent of girls were enrolled in high school and increased to 95 percent by 1979. During this same period, the percentage of young women studying at junior colleges increased eightfold and the number of women in four-year universities grew approximately six times.

#### **The 1985 Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEOL): Enforcement of Law Still Has No Teeth**

In 1980, the Japanese government signed the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Five years later, in 1985, Japan's Diet signed the milestone Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEOL). The law was finally passed and put into effect in 1986. Despite this legislation, Japanese women are still far behind their male counterparts in status in the Japanese work place. Even with the two major revisions to

the EEOL passed in 1997 and 2006, disparity in employment status and wages between males and females has only worsened.

The problem with the law is that it is rarely enforced. The EEOL *encourages* employers to not discriminate based on gender in all stages of the employment process. This includes recruitment, hiring, training, compensation and promotion policies as well as when employees retire. If employers are in violation of the law, there are no explicit penalties imposed on them (Brinton 1994, 229). Without the law having any teeth or if it is not enforced, then many Japanese women and men are essentially powerless in dealing with abusive or noncompliant employers. As well, with the existence of the EEOL, companies are under no obligation to interview or hire women. The law stipulates that companies must treat men and women equally, at least with regards to starting salary and initial benefits. Lam (1993) points out that some companies will interview female applicants only after all the male applicants have been exhausted (Lam 1993 in Hendry 2013, 162). It is still assumed in Japanese society that women will quit work after marriage or after they have their first child. A change in societal thinking beyond the workplace is needed before many Japanese firms move away from discriminatory hiring and employment practices towards women.

### **Increase in Non-regular Employment among Women and Wage Disparities with Males**

The deregulation of the labor market has seen an increase in non-regular employment. The numbers of employed women have increased significantly, from roughly sixteen million in 1987 to twenty million in 1997 and twenty-three million in 2007. Most of this increase can be attributed to non-regular or temporary employment and part-time work. According to the National Women's Education Center, the proportion of non-regular employees among all female workers rose from 37 percent in 1987 to 44 percent in 1997, and 55 percent in 2007. The corresponding figures among Japanese male workers were 9, 11, and 20 percent for the same time periods (Kokuritsu josei kyoiku kaikan 2000, 43, table 3-8, Nakano in Fujimura-Fanselow 2011, 259).

In 2007, 42 percent of Japanese women aged thirty-five to fifty-four were working as regular employees. This figure pales in comparison to their male counterparts when one considers that 90 percent of males in the same age group were employed as full-time regular employees. The increase in non-regular employment in the late 1990s showed that females under age thirty-five were far worse off than their male counterparts. In 1997, 29 percent of women were employed in a non-regular fashion. By 2007, this figure was a staggering 47 percent. Japanese males employed as non-regular workers were 13 percent in 1997 and 23 percent in 2007 (Ibid., 43,

figure 3-6, Nakano in Fujimura-Fanselow 2011, 259). On the wage front, women's status has not seen much improvement. According to statistics from the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, in 2008, wages of female general workers were 69 percent of male's salaries (Koseirodosho 2008b, Nakano in Fujimura-Fanselow 2011, 260).

The attempt to promote gender equality seems lacking especially with regards to women in positions of power or authority. Anthropologist, Yoshio Sugimoto points out the differences between men and women in the two-tier structure of the Japanese employment market. It seems that most of the establishments in Japan are satisfied with women holding a subordinate role employed as *ippan shoku* (ordinary employees), who play less important roles in the workplace. The common assumption is that women are better suited to such work roles. This is in contrast to male employees, who are more often employed as *sogo shoku* (all-round employees) whose roles are far more substantial, with much investment placed in their training and development (Sugimoto 2010, 167). Sugimoto portrays the severe reality of Japan's gender inequality in Table 6.1 from his book *An Introduction to Japanese Society, Third Edition*.

Table 6.1 Proportion of women in positions of power

Positions	%
Female members of Parliament (a)	
House of Representatives (2009)	11.3
House of Councilors (2007)	17.4
Female members of prefectural legislatures (2007) (b)	8.0
Female business managers	
at <i>juyaku</i> (director and above) level (2006) (c)	1.2
at <i>bucho</i> (department head) level (2007) (d)	4.1
at <i>kacho</i> (section head) level (2007) (d)	6.5
at <i>kakaricho</i> (subsection head) level (2007) (d)	12.4
Female union leaders in Rengo (Japanese Trade Union Confederation) (2007) (e)	6.9
Female high-ranking officials at grade nine or above in the national Bureaucracy (2008) (f)	2.2
Female judges (2008) (g)	15.4
Female prosecutors (2008) (g)	12.2
Female lawyers (2008) (g)	14.4
Female principals (2007) (h)	
At primary level	17.9
At middle school level	4.9
At high school level	5.3



Female full professors in universities (2007) (h)	11.1
Female presidents in universities (2007) (h)	7.1
Female journalists in newspapers (2009) (i)	14.8

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Sources:

- a) Compiled by the Secretariats of the House of Representatives and Councilors.
- b) Compiled by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications at the end of 2007.
- c) Toyo Keizai Shimposha 2006. The figure covers 3,849 major companies listed on Japan's six stock exchanges.
- d) Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare 2007e. The survey covered only enterprises with 100 or more employees.
- e) Japanese Trade Union Confederation 2007. The figure covers members of the executive committee of national industrial unions (*tansan*).
- f) National Personnel Agency 2008. The figures include the top five grades, the so-called designated posts (*shiteishoku*), and grades seven to ten.
- g) Data from the Secretariats of the Supreme Court, the Ministry of Justice, and the Japan Federation of Bar Associations. See Kokuritsu Josei Kyoiku Kaikan 2009, p. 169.
- h) Ministry of Education and Science 2007.
- i) Japan Newspaper Publishers and Editors Association 2009.

Source: Sugimoto Yoshio, *An Introduction to Japanese Society, Third Edition*, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 168.

**Dealing with Career Limitations: English as a Weapon of the Japanese Woman**

Throughout the late post-war period, languages, in particular English, have become a weapon of choice among ambitious Japanese women. They are perceived to be indispensable to women who want to survive in Japan's corporate world. Kelsky mentions the following about Matsubara Junko, from her book *Eigo dekimasu* (I can speak English), who writes, "For men, business comes first and English only second, but for women English is always first" (Matsubara 1989, 76 in Kelsky, 2001, 100). She continues with saying, "Essentially, in the case of women, if you cannot speak English, you have no chance of getting your foot into the business world" (Matsubara 1989, 54 in Kelsky, 2001, 100).

English allows women to monopolize the ever growing need for bilingual people to facilitate Japanese economic interactions with the rest of the world. For example, in 1993, over 90 percent of NHK broadcast interpreters were women, and one industry source reported that 90 percent of the interpreters and 60 percent of the bilingual guides she dealt with were female

(Seo 1993, 12 in Kelsky 2001, 100). Women monopolize the field of interpreting to such an extent that men are now being encouraged to consider interpreting as a possible career choice.

### **Study Abroad: The International Advance Continues**

As mentioned in previous sections, the diminished role of women in Japan is noted as one of the major impetuses driving so many Japanese women overseas. The concept and nature of Japanese studying overseas has changed remarkably over the past three decades. Kelsky writes:

From the 1950s through the 1970s, *ryugaku* was the privilege of elite, management-track males who were sent by their corporations to earn MBA degrees at high-ranking U.S. business schools. In the 1980s and 1990s however, such men gradually came to be almost entirely eclipsed by independent, self-funded women: in 1998 nearly 70 percent of all Japanese studying abroad were female (ICS 1998 in Kelsky 2001, 102). So popular is language study in the United States that classes at many English-language schools since the 1980s have almost entirely comprised Japanese women. (Matsubara 1989, 145 in Kelsky 2001, 102)

As well, in *Eigo dekimasu* (I Can Speak English), Matsubara Junko points out, “U.S.-Japan trade friction might soon be resolved—right now Japan doesn’t export Toyotas and Nissans so much as female study abroad students” (Matsubara 1989, 145 in Kelsky 2001, 102). With regards to some recent data, according to a report issued by the Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO) in May 2013, the total number of Japanese university students engaged in study abroad programs in fiscal 2011 was 36,656. The number of Japanese males studying overseas was just 34.3 percent with a number of 12,588. As for Japanese female university students, the number was double that figure at 24,068 (Japan Student Services Organization, 2013). That is to say, in percentage terms, Japanese female university students studying overseas comprised an astonishing 65.7 percent of the total.

### **Status of Japanese Women in the Work Place: A Cause to Turn Overseas?**

As a testimony to the rigid gender stratification in Japan, the majority of women point to discrimination in the workplace as their motivation for study abroad. Kubota Kaori and Ishizaki Reiko, two friends in their mid-twenties who both spent two years studying at Sacramento State University of California, said, “We already could see that there was no future at work [*saki ga mieru*]. If we wanted to have any kind of real career, we knew we had to study abroad.” Kitahara Satoko, a bilingual securities trader in her early thirties, talks about her study-abroad

experience at Loyola University: "The reason that I first decided to study in America was that Japanese society is male-dominated...When I thought about how I could get my foot in the door, the first thing that came to mind was to study English in the United States and get qualified abroad" (Kelsky 2001, 103).

The Japanese women who embark on study abroad, for the most part are self-funded. In contrast to this, many Japanese males receive support from their employers for study abroad. Although there are certainly some Japanese males paying their way when studying overseas, women still make up the majority of Japanese students studying abroad. Matsubara points out, "Women must quit their jobs entirely and leave for study abroad not only unemployed, but shouldering the total burden of cost themselves" (Matsubara 1989, 52 in Kelsky 103). Many of these women, some saving money by living with their parents while they work, will spend tens of thousands of dollars to get an education that will hopefully set them up on a rewarding career path. They embark on such an expensive investment in order to get the skills and training so that they can work overseas or so that they can compete against other women or especially men in the domestic job market in Japan.

### **Japanese Women MBAs**

During the last decade, the number of short-term study abroad opportunities has been increasing for Japanese nationals. One facet of study abroad that has been on the increase is Japanese taking MBA degrees at top U.S. business schools. The number of Japanese women taking MBAs is particularly noteworthy. Many Japanese women working in Japanese companies discover after a few years of work that they are not in line for promotion and that the path to the upper echelons of the Japanese corporate structure are reserved exclusively for men.

Japan's internal labor market is still a rigid place that allows for little opportunity for entry and exit from the labor force. Journalist Sasaki Kaoru interviewed a Japanese female financial professional by the name of Mochizuki Shinobu on her motivation for getting an MBA. Mochizuki had lived in Wisconsin for a year during high school and went back to the United States to work in Japanese securities firms in both Chicago and New York. When she found out that she would not be promoted by her Japanese firm, she decided on taking the MBA route. After completing the MBA program at Columbia, she was hired as a securities dealer by Merrill Lynch Securities. She describes her elation by saying, "Sometimes it's hard to wake up in the morning, but when I think of how miserable I was at those Japanese companies, I am so grateful for the chance that I have now, that before I know it I am jumping out of bed" (Sasaki 1993, 216-18 in Kelsky 2001, 104).

The reward seems worth the effort put forth for most Japanese women MBAs. However, there is quite a sacrifice to be made. The self-funded MBA comes with the heavy cost of tuition and living away from home. A Thunderbird MBA holder, Noda Kaori, talks about her experience of having to live very modestly while the company-sponsored Japanese men drove expensive cars and would travel to far-away places for vacation. She mentions, "We female students had to shell out \$10,000 for just one semester's tuition. Even if we could finally go on a single much-anticipated trip, we had to stay in the cheapest hotels, nibble on bread, and calculate our leftover money at the end of each day" (Noda 1992, 146-47 in Kelsky 2001, 104-105).

With regards to how important it is for these Japanese women to choose the right MBA program, Matsubara explains, "For men who are funded by their companies, it doesn't matter where they take their MBA. Their life will not be any different...But for women, their professional lives will be significantly altered depending on whether they have an MBA from Harvard or Idaho" (Matsubara 1989, 54 in Kelsky 2001, 105). There is obviously more at stake for the Japanese females taking these MBAs than their male counterparts. The very institution they graduate from could be a decisive factor in their employment and career prospects.

### **The 'Marginal Woman'**

In their journal article, "Japanese women studying abroad, the case of the United States," published in the *Women's Studies International Forum* in 2004, Hiroshi Ono and Nicola Piper refer to the Japanese women MBA students with the term 'marginal woman.' Marginal would be alluring to the fact that many of these ambitious women are assigned to menial and repetitive tasks and are not provided with training or prospects for promotion like the males in Japanese companies. The words of Genichi Saito, a human resource specialist cited in the Aspect study sums up the situation of Japanese women MBA students as follows:

The motivation underlying women's pursuit of an MBA differ greatly from men's. In simple terms, many women are fed up with the ways in which Japanese firms do not use their resources to their full potential. Many talented women joined top Japanese companies after the enactment of the Equal Employment Opportunity Act but they are still assigned to low-end jobs. Men have opportunities for overseas studies or work assignments but women's opportunities are limited. Within two to three years of joining the firm, women seek reemployment as a result of their discontent. If they're going to find another job, it may as well be one rank up. In order to do so, they must study more... Skilled women seek MBA degrees for these reasons. (Aspect, 1991a, p. 15 in Ono and Piper 2004, 111)

The Japanese women MBA holders, no doubt should be on the verge of reaching higher levels in the corporate structure. The exclusion they face in Japan or within Japanese companies comes at a high cost in lost use of talent.

### ***Akogare* towards the West**

The relationship of Japanese women with the West goes beyond the practical element of wanting to secure a proper position and status in the workplace. Study and travel abroad is used as a means to embrace the West and find a new identity. In a September 2000 interview with one Japanese woman, Nagaki Mitsuko, Kelsky dove into the concept of Japanese female *akogare* (a feeling of yearning or longing for) with the West. Nagaki Mitsuko explains about this *akogare*:

We Japanese got the idea that to have an American family was to live in a big white house with a great big yard in front, with a spacious entry, and pictures of the family all over, and there's a cake or pie that Mom just baked, and lots of ice cream, and homemade jelly....It's an image of abundance [*yutakasa*], and big, really big love [*aijo*]. You feel like you want to be inside that, that you want to be one of those people, and that that *akogare* is why you want to marry a foreigner. The stories Sleeping Beauty and Cinderella were just so seductive [*akogareppoi*]. And of course all these picture books, and Disney stories, all had princes who had white faces. That's why we have so much *akogare* for the West! Because Japanese fairy tales are not about love or romance...they're moralistic [*dotoku kyoiku*!] Not the kind that feed little girls' dreams....Of course, there were princes and shoguns in Japan from long ago. But no one has *akogare* for that! Shoguns? [Makes a face] Japanese shoguns were no gentlemen....But those princes of Western stories never had affairs, they were kind to women, they were gentlemen, they didn't abuse women but protected them, so naturally Japanese girls all just flew to their side. (Kelsky 2001, 148-149)

Many Japanese are exposed to these Disney stories while they are growing up. When one considers the absolute success of Tokyo Disneyland, and stores around Japan sporting Disney products, one gets a sense of the Japanese image of Disney in particular, and the West or United States in general. Perhaps for many young Japanese women who are very much acquainted with Western fairy tales, Hollywood movies and other forms of popular Western culture, the next step is to actually be participants in this culture through study or work abroad. The Japanese woman idealizes the concept of the freedom of expression that goes with the culture of many Western nations. Young Japanese women are especially more likely to identify with the

American ‘individualist’ culture. It is often by participating in this culture that Japanese women can attain a new and invigorating *ikikata* or lifestyle. In fact, many Japanese women state that they “want to grow” or “see the United States” or even “experience a different world” as reasons for studying overseas (Minamikawa 2006, 38).

### **Womenomics: The Key to Japan’s Growth?**

A study conducted by Wall Street’s leading investment bank, Goldman Sachs, coined the phrase “Womenomics,” long before we in Japan had heard the term Abenomics. Always ahead of the curve, the study points out that Japan is at a crucial juncture with regards to its demographics, economy and overall social structure.

The World Economic Forum Report in 2012 on Gender Equality showed that Japan ranked 101 among 135 countries, well below the OECD average. With this in mind, many women in Japan are delaying marriage if not completely giving up on it. While the female employment rate has risen to a record level of 60%, it is still considerably behind many OECD countries. If this figure was to rise to 80%, matching the male employment rate, the study estimates that approximately 8.2 million workers could be added to Japan’s workforce. This, in turn, could potentially increase the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the Japanese economy by as much as 15% (Goldman Sachs 2010, 1).

Putting statistics into perspective, roughly 43% of Japanese women have completed tertiary education compared with the OECD average of 29%. In fact, within Japan itself, the university enrollment rate for 18-year old females at 76.5% is slightly higher than that of equivalent males in university at 76.2% (Goldman Sachs 2010, 11). Not having these women fully participate in Japan’s workforce appears to be a considerable lost opportunity for the Japanese economy, and naturally leads to much frustration among ambitious, hard-working Japanese women.

### **Policies to Embrace the Internationalist Japanese Women**

Moreover, the International Monetary Fund reports that the working population in Japan will decrease by 40% in the next 40 years. By 2050, the percentage of the population aged 65 years and older will increase from 24% to 38%, which will represent a ratio of one worker per retiree. As the population ages along with a corresponding decline in the birthrate, it is obvious that action must be taken. Women need to be encouraged to realize their full potential in the work force. Company attitudes need to adjust to the new reality that they cannot ignore the needs of women as employees and as consumers. Prime Minister Abe’s administration has proposed to add 250,000 new daycare facilities in the next few years to accommodate working women with

young children (Larochelle 2013, 16). This would allow many career women to keep working and make the most of their skills and education. By doing this, the problem of Japan's declining birthrate would be addressed.

Flexible working hours could be introduced as well. These steps would be of benefit to men as well by freeing them up to help with child rearing and house chores and take some of the burden off of women. In addition, the Japanese government is now considering a target of 30% women holding senior positions by 2020. In Prime Minister Abe's cabinet there are only 2 females out of 18 members. During the last election only 9 women were among the total 79 candidates from the Liberal Democratic Party. In an international survey conducted by the Inter Parliamentary Union, Japan slipped to 124<sup>th</sup> in terms of female participation in the national parliament (Larochelle 2013, 17). In terms of women in participation at the top political level, there is much room to grow. The same also goes for using women's talents and skills that they have acquired overseas.

## Conclusion

In the second decade of the new millennium, women in most major industrialized democracies have seen their status and position in society vastly elevated and improved. For the women of Japan, the same can be said to only a certain degree. Women's roles in management are still far lower compared to their counterparts in other major OECD economies. Japanese women have seen their status improved since they were given the right to vote under the Allied Occupation and the administration of General Douglas MacArthur. Nevertheless, a gap in overall thinking between men and women with regards to gender roles still permeates Japanese society. Japanese women seeking to find their role and identity will continue to see studying abroad as a way to expand themselves, their role in Japan and the international market place. Fully utilizing Japanese women and allowing them to realize their potential by fully participating in the Japanese economy and society is not just good for Japan, it is the right thing to do.

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