Japanese Universities and Westerners: Gendered Advantages

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Introduction

There is a wide disparity in how well-integrated foreigners are in Japanese universities. In some universities, foreigners are well-integrated, while in others foreigners receive differential treatment. There are differences in: promotional opportunities; salary; expectations and work requirements; access to funding; receiving tenure; status; and number of classes taught. Bonuses, which are often substantial, six months salary in some cases, are also sometimes different for foreign staff. Apart from differences between Japanese and foreigners, in the foreign population there are also differences between foreign women and foreign men. A large number of foreign teachers are westerners, and there are many more foreign men than foreign women employed in universities. Research shows that, in Japan, foreign women are disadvantaged compared to foreign men (Taylor & Napier, 1996). Using unstructured interviews, this pilot study examined professional acceptance of western women. The research found that there was a large perceived gap between foreign women's acceptance and foreign men's, and that the gap was greater for those in full-time versus part-time employment. While Japanese women's employment situation in well-paid and high-level jobs has improved somewhat, this may not be the case for foreign women in Japan. This paper highlights some areas that need to be further examined regarding foreign women educators in Japan.

Gender Segregation Worldwide

Gender segregation at work is the main cause of the gender wage gap, with women generally segregated in low-prestige jobs receiving lower wages (Gonas & Karlsson, 2006). Detailed examinations of Europe, North America, Asia, Oceania, the Middle East and North Africa show surprising similarities in the extent of segregation, with over half the world's workers in occupations where one sex dominates by 80% or more (Anker, 2001). The segregation into job categories has little relation to abilities, but is based, in part, on factors such as gender stereotypes. Research has also shown that gendered occupational segregation by sex corresponds to false stereotypes for women, such as; caring; household-related skills; manual dexterity; greater honesty; physical appearance; disinclination to supervise others; less physical strength; less math/science ability; less willing to travel; and less willing to face physical danger and use physical force (see for example, Anker 2001; Gonas & Karlsson,

2006; Walby, 1988).

These categories correlate to female-dominated, low-paid occupations. Research on gender-segregation, (Anker, 2001) which included Japan, showed that male dominated occupations are seven times more common than female-dominated, and therefore males face less competition. Female occupations are also viewed as less "valuable" and are lower paid (Anker, 2001; Gonas & Karlsson, 2006; Walby, 1988). Inherent gender capabilities can be dispelled as the reasons for some jobs being "male" and others "female". Rather the social, cultural and historical factors are of paramount importance in determining the extent to which occupations are segmented by sex, and this varies from country to country (see for example Anker 2001; Gonas & Karlsson, 2006; Walby, 1988).

Japanese labour system

The Nenko living wage theory describes the Japanese gender-segregated employment system, with male entitlement to secure, higher-paid employment. Traditionally, life-long employment required a flexible labour force to balance changes in the economy. Women comprised and continue to comprise the majority of this low-paid temporary employment. The United Nations found that the Japanese wage gap is the greatest of all industrialized countries. Women earned 66.5% of male workers' earnings in 2002 (WEC, 2003: p. 49). Unequal opportunities for promotion account for part of this gap, and 30% of companies admitted they promote males faster than females (Yuasa, 2005).

In Japan, part-time work is inferior to full-time, and it is dominated by women, with males comprising only 26% in 1995 (Broadbent, 2002, p. 58). Broadbent also stated that choosing to work part-time is not really a choice, as part-time workers "in Japan, due to age restrictions, have little choice but to work part-time" (p. 59). She further observed that in "Japan's gender contract a woman's role is indispensable to complement male full-time workers who form the backbone of Japan's corporate society" (Broadbent, 2002, p. 60).

Women's educational relationship to employment

In terms of the number of years in education, Japan has a 6-3-3-4 educational model and the Japanese employment system, including universities, has traditionally been based on a strict progression starting after graduation from school. Women's proportion of college participation has been increasing while men's leveled off in the 1970's. Since 1975, the percentage of females has exceeded males in post-secondary education (Stedham & Yamamura, 2004, p. 235). In 1970, only 18% of university students were women, but by 2000, it was 36% (Stedham & Yamamura, 2004, p. 235). Yano (1997) stated that while there have been changes in education, these have not continued to benefit female employees.

> Not only employment but matriculation rates are now higher amongst women than among men. Accordingly, women's educational choices in the 1980's rapidly changed from women's colleges to co-educational colleges, from junior colleges to four-year colleges, and from liberal arts to science courses. Compared to the changes in the educational system, changes in the employment system have been sluggish. During the prosperity

of the late 1980's, companies aggressively recruited women. However, in the current recession, as companies downsize, it appears that many companies consider their female workforce a convenient tool for adjusting their payroll （pp. 205-206）.

Gender stereotypes have an affect on positions that carry status and power. Analysis of sex segregation in the U. S. shows that this gender stereotyping is still pervasive. Keisler （1975） stated that perceptions "about the suitability of women and men for different types of work are based largely on gender stereotypes that are inaccurate" （in Marini, 1990, p. 110）. Marini （1990） stated that "because the characteristics ascribed to males are also those important for gaining access to positions of power and privilege, gender stereotypes create expectations for performance that negatively affect evaluations of women's past and expected future performance in high-level jobs" （p. 110）.

Often the discussion of the gender gap turns to the choices women make and how women choose to sacrifice remuneration and prestige for flexibility and lack of responsibility. However, the gender gap is not created by women's choices. Women can only choose from the limited availability, and from the range of jobs that allow them to fulfill their social roles. Marini （1990） stated,

> whereas socialization shapes the choices of individuals by conditioning their desires and expectations, allocation involves action by others that channels individuals into positions on the basis of sex, irrespective of their desires and expectations. Allocation is pervasive in the workplace （p. 110）.

Japanese women's employment

The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was ratified by Japan in 1985 （Iino, 2002）. Japanese women's participation in the workforce has increased, and may have surpassed some western countries, although there is still a full-time versus part-time work divide. Iino （2002） found that nearly "half of all women aged 15 and older have jobs, and women now account for 40% of the entire work force" （p. 3）. The rates for other countries, compared to Japan, are 57.7% in the United States and 55.2% in the UK, 48.3% for Germany and 48.2% for France. Worldwide, generally, there has been a shift from permanent to non-permanent status and this is also true in Japan. According to Iino （2002）, when the Equal Employment Opportunity Law （EEOL） of Japan was passed, 70% of women who were employed were in permanent positions, and this has dropped to 53% （p. 5）. Iino also found that in Europe part time salaries are close to full time salaries. For example, they are 90% of full time salaries in the Netherlands and Germany, 80% in France, and 70% the UK （Iino, 2002, p. 5）. While European countries are protecting their growing part-time workers, the wage gap in Japan between full-time and part-time is wide.

The EEOL has been described as being ineffective and has been highly criticized. Stedham & Yamamura （2004） found that it was ineffective partially because it relied "on moral suasion ... and has been deemed largely ineffective in preventing workplace discrimination ... The EEOL was amended in 1997 to prohibit discrimination in all areas of employment including

recruitment and promotion and to require employers to address and prevent sexual harassment (Kodansha International, 1999)" (p. 236).

In 1970, the majority of working women were single, but by 2000 the percentage of married working women was 61% (Statistics Bureau, 2004 in Stedham & Yamamura, 2004, p. 237). Between 1970 and 2000, women moved into some all-male occupations and professional positions (Stedham & Yamamura, 2004). While the number continues to be low, it has been suggested, however, that Japan's traditional discriminatory system is changing (Renshaw, 1999; Usui, Rose & Kageyama, 2003).

Foreign women in Japan

Foreign women perform well in Japan, and their levels of professionalism are in no way lower than foreign men's. Volkmar and Westbrook (2005) stated that foreign "women can often override the constraints and attitudes that attach to Japanese women and attain male status within a company in Japan (Yoshihara, 1989), enabling them to apply their individual potential to their work to a much greater extent than local women, and more importantly, be recognized for doing so" (p. 465).

In Hofstede's (2001) model of cultures, Japan was rated as a highly masculine society that puts severe constraints on women's roles. Specifically, in Japan, women's work is highly constrained (Usui *et al*, 2003); however, modernized Japanese women and men, including Japanese feminists, are contesting these traditional biases. Adler (1988) found that for foreign women, there may be fewer barriers than for Japanese women, due to the *gaijin syndrome.*

The introduction of the Equal Opportunity Assistant (EOA) in 1986 in Japan may have resulted in changes in the number of women managers (Volkmar & Westbrook, 2005, p. 467). The number of "women directors, section managers, and chiefs has increased by 5.9, 15.4 and 19.4 percent respectively (Japan Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2002)" (Volkmar & Westbrook, 2005, p. 467). However, they found that improvements for foreign women have not necessarily occurred (p. 474). They found that living and working in Japan, compared to a decade ago, is still a difficult adjustment due to gender biases for women professionals. Napier and Taylor (1995) reported that for foreign women in Japan, 32% of their respondents believed they were "worse off" than the foreign men who were in the same job position.

Western women, as well, face stereotypes that are generally recognized in the West as playing a part in constraining women's advancement into high-level positions. IBM (2007) for example stated,

> (g)ender stereotypes can create several predicaments for women leaders. Because they are often evaluated against a "masculine" standard of leadership, women are left with limited and unfavorable options, no matter how they behave and perform as leaders. In this study we focus specifically on three predicaments, all of which put women in a double bind and can potentially undermine their leadership.
>
> Predicament 1: Extreme Perceptions — Too Soft, Too Tough, and Never Just Right.
> When women act in ways that are consistent with gender stereotypes, they are viewed

as less competent leaders. When women act in ways that are inconsistent with such stereotypes, they are considered unfeminine.

Predicament 2: The High Competence Threshold — Women Leaders Face Higher Standards and Lower Rewards than Men Leaders …. Women leaders are subjected to higher competency standards. On top of doing their job, women have to: Prove that they can lead, over and over again; Manage stereotypical expectations constantly.

Predicament 3: Competent but Disliked — Women Leaders Are Perceived as Competent or Liked, but Rarely Both …. When women behave in ways that are traditionally valued for men leaders (e. g., assertively), they are viewed as more competent, but also not as effective interpersonally as women who adopt a more stereotypically feminine style.

In sum, gender stereotypes misrepresent the true talents of women leaders and can potentially undermine women's contributions to organizations as well as their own advancement options.

Rationale and methodology

Previous studies on western women in Japan found that in the early 1990's, western women had advantages over Japanese women because gendered expectations on foreign women were not as stringent (Taylor & Napier, 1996; Usui *et al*, 2003). It was also found, at that time, that there was a gap between foreign women's level of professional acceptance compared to foreign men. With the improving situation of Japanese women relative to men, one may surmise that the situation for western women relative to western men would also have improved. However, in a recent study, Volkmar and Westbrook (2005) found that, in the case of foreign women managers, foreign women's situation had not improved. This pilot study examined the hypothesis that western women would feel disadvantaged compared to western male counterparts.

Hypothesis: Western women teaching in Japanese universities perceive themselves to be at a disadvantage *vis-à-vis* western men teaching in Japanese universities.

Methodology

The research methodology used semi-structured and unstructured interviews of thirty women teaching at universities in Japan. They were queried about their background and their organization(s). Their responses were written down, and participants were encouraged to elaborate on their work situations and their perceptions. The interviews, while open-ended, were somewhat structured to keep the focus on job perspectives, work perceptions and gender issues in relation to working in Japanese universities.

All participants had English as their mother tongue. While there are other university teachers with various mother tongues, the employment climate for English speakers was assumed to be slightly different, as finding work may be more competitive for English speakers. All those surveyed were presently working, half working full-time (tenure, limited term and non-limited term contracts) and half part-time (working at 2 or more different universities). All were hoping to improve their work situations, and were in the job market

either informally making inquiries and connections, or formally by sending out resume packages. All those surveyed were residing full-time in Japan, and all had been in Japan long-term or saw themselves as residing long-term, over 10 years, or living in Japan permanently due to family and community ties.

Results and Discussion

Overall, those interviewed felt that they were disadvantaged compared to male westerners. Table 1 provides a summary and shows that the majority of women perceived foreign men to be advantaged. Comments on their perceptions were quite varied, and have been categorized as follows:

Table 1.

	Full Time (N=15)	Part Time (N=15)	Total (N=30)
Worse off than foreign men	12	8	20
Same as foreign men	3	5	8
Better off than foreign men	0	2	2
Total			30

Japanese Nenko living wage and male entitlement

The Nenko system of male entitlement is also applied to western men living and working in Japan and this was perceived as giving western men an advantage. Japan is a "gaku-reki shakai" where academic record governs one's place of employment, and education determines one's job and social status. This system has traditionally advantaged Japanese males. Japanese women's childrearing and family care work traditionally took women out of the workforce during the crucial years where human capital is invested in employees, leaving them disadvantaged. This system is changing. Whatever the cultural rationalizations are that are used to support this traditional system based on gender and age, when the same system is applied to foreign workers who have not been brought up and educated in the Japanese system which channels individuals into appropriate institutions, the system becomes problematic. Foreign women are often not interested in adopting the non-career roles that Japanese women occupy, yet they are not privy to the advantages that are accorded the main breadwinner of the family that Japanese and foreign men receive. The participants, therefore, perceived that they were disadvantaged by the assumption of male-as-breadwinner, especially when they, themselves, were often the main breadwinner of their family.

The United Nations has deemed the Japanese system of employment based on age as being indirectly discriminatory against women (Koedo Shizuka, Kansai University presentation, October 2007). With fairly strict role expectations of childrearing and family care, and with a severe lack of childcare options and shouldering of home responsibilities by Japanese men, Japanese women are often forced to choose between family responsibilities or careers. Should they choose both, the burden is extreme. Participants in this study constantly men-

tioned their experiences losing potential jobs to less experienced, less academically qualified young western men.

Participants also mentioned their experiences on hiring committees where they saw this bias in action. One participant mentioned how she had to struggle throughout a hiring process to combat these biases, where the young men's resumes were consistently forwarded to the acceptance list. She saw this preference to male applicants, especially young men, as such an ingrained response from the hiring committee at every step along the way in the hiring process. Another participant mentioned that the biases were so ingrained that it was such an unconscious, unintentional response, often from people who truly felt they were being equitable. One participant mentioned how the most qualified person's resume, a women's, "got lost" during the initial stages of the hiring process which resulted in not being able to contact the women to come in for an interview. A number of participants, because they had clear hiring guidelines combined with a real consciousness of the potential biases, felt that some of these biases could be somewhat curtailed, but that it required constant awareness.

Women who perceived themselves to be the least disadvantage were those who had come to Japan in the 1980's and early 1990's and who were qualified when they came, and found full-time positions quite easily during that time. They came at the time of the economics bubble, and often walked into jobs through casual connections or when there was a need for a foreigner in a department. There was a sense among women who had come to Japan more recently that the women who came in the 1980's and early 1990's may not understand how difficult things are for western women now. Furthermore, the continuing practice of using connections as a part of the hiring process may not be a comfortable role for foreign women who are in the position to influence hiring and promotions. Using connections is not consistent with western cultural expectations that reject practices that are perceived to be nepotistic. These women have few role models of their own to guide them in using their status, and they may not be comfortable exercising their influence in this way due to its perceived unethical nature. In general, they did not see the need to act as connections and role models. This could be connected to their relative ease of finding employment versus the changes in the economy that are affecting the current employment situation in Japanese universities.

Recruitment through connections

Full time job postings, in general, have to be posted publicly. There are sites in both Japanese and English, though some of the postings are only posted in one language and those without Japanese would not be accessible to those without the language or without someone to translate for them. Jobs may also be posted only on the university homepage or in the university's publications. Part-time jobs are sometimes posted on the Internet, but often these are passed on through connections or recommendations from other schools. However, hiring, to a large extent, still is done through personal connections.

Recruitment has traditionally been based on private connections, but with the process of democratization, has slowly been replaced, at least officially, by more transparent hiring practices. Shimbori (1981) stated,

(i)n the area of recruitment, as a result of institutional 'democratization', hiring practices have come to depend more on 'formal' or 'objective' criteria, rather than on personal or private connections like *gakubutsu.* Now, at least officially, vacancies are publicized and policies of open competition are adopted.

These objective criteria usually refer to the number of publications and academic qualifications. Renshaw (1999) argued that "Japanese men use their 'old boy networks' to get information, projects and jobs. Male networks often consist of school classmates across company and political borders that connect them with power sources" (p. 235). Success in finding employment in Japan still depends to a large extent on making connections. Usui, Rose and Kageyama (2003) found that one's "success in job mobility is often the result of direct and indirect personal relations, and formal and informal channels of network relations. Women are outside the network of these relations that lead to positions of leadership and decision making" (p. 114).

Participants in this study perceived that they were disadvantaged when applying for posted jobs. It was generally felt that often a job was created with a specific person in mind, and that the postings were not really *open.* Many participants stated that jobs were posted, but there was a western man who already had been *chosen* for the job. Women who were more qualified would be passed over. This is easy to do in the Japanese hiring process, as the job requirements become very fluid in the search process, and emphasis can be shifted to the desired candidate's qualifications. Participants mentioned that they knew men who have no publications, or who have never done a presentation yet were offered permanent full-time jobs, which was an advantage they felt they would never have. In fact, the official reason for rejection that women most often heard was a lack of sufficient publications.

Participants perceived that they were disadvantaged because it was hard for western women to make connections or that connections didn't benefit them as they did western men. The separation of the sexes in Japan in both work and socializing gave western men an advantage. Western men could bond with male colleagues, which is where job connections are forged. The Japanese custom of going out drinking and going to male entertainment venues, sex-clubs and other male venues after work is unwelcoming to women. It is a part of many western men's experiences, and this is also where business in Japan is often transacted and where job information is passed around. Women are disadvantaged by being excluded from this male socializing custom. Women perceived this as archaic behavior that has been somewhat eradicated in western countries, yet this practice is adapted by many western men in Japan, leaving women disadvantaged and outside of the network of information and connections.

One area where women felt particularly disadvantaged was the influence that western men wield with their western male friends and acquaintances. A number of women mentioned that there were certain schools and departments that were particularly bad in terms of not hiring women. The fact that some foreign men came to Japan to escape strong, competent women was also mentioned as contributing to the fact that there were few or no women in some schools or departments. Western men's role as the *gatekeepers* that bring in the foreign male

teachers, while ignoring potential female teachers, was a key area of perceived disadvantage for many women.

While Japanese policies have been enacted, for example the EEOL, to ensure more equitable treatment of women, western women felt they had no recourse for this inequality. The fact that there is very little that has been done to ensure that western women are treated equitably was mentioned by most of the participants. This is clearly an area that needs attention in the university system.

Maintaining relationships

In Japan, a lot of weight is given to cooperating with colleagues. If full-time teachers have a personal objection to a potential candidate this is given a lot of weight, and the potential candidate most likely will be excluded. This is one area where participants felt strongly disadvantaged. It was perceived by participants that a woman's character was found to be a larger part of the discussion in the hiring process compared to a man's character. A number of participants mentioned that they had been cross-examined or felt like their personality had been dissected. One participant mentioned that she was told that the school was reluctant to hire a western women and that this came from having had a problem with a woman in the past, inferring that one past problem made the university cautious about all western women. It was perceived that western men are given a very broad range of acceptable behaviour, possibly with an even broader acceptable range of what is considered professional behaviour. Women found that for them the range was much narrower, and the restrictiveness was a difficult aspect of their professionalism.

In general, connections were seen as being difficult to form or not fruitful for the women. Forging connections with western women in tenure positions or positions with hiring power was not seen to be a viable strategy, as there are few western women in these positions. It is difficult to get facts on westerners in university employment but a look at most university staff pamphlets, which list all teachers with their pictures, shows how few western women there are, usually only one if any, in a department or center. The number of Japanese women in these positions is also small, since the majority are younger women hired during the recent adjustments, and their status and power is often not sufficient enough to be effective. One participant did mention that a senior Japanese woman had been her connection and that this contributed to her success in getting her job.

The "gaijin" factor

The *gaijin affect* may free western women from some gendered expectations. Volkmar and Westbrook (2005) claimed that while the *gaijin affect* does somewhat free "foreign women from the gender-based inequalities that apply to Japanese women, it does not address the level of gender-based inequalities between foreign women and foreign men that is reflective in their own parent (... western) culture" (p. 468). They found that women's disadvantaged position had not changed over the decade from the early 1990's. The lack of women colleagues has been found to hinder adjustment rates for expatriate women. Volkmar and West-

brook also found that women "rate their adjustment lower in countries with fewer women in the workforce" (p. 11). Participants mentioned the need to have more women colleagues and more foreign women as colleagues.

Women perceived that the the *gaijin affect* advantaged western men tremendously. The ideal of the western male and all the characteristics attributed to westerners were being conferred onto the average individual western man who was mistakenly treated as being exceptional. While participants perceived they were also treated as *exotic*, this did not necessarily confer expertise to their professionalism as it did for western males.

In highly masculine cultures (Hofstede, 2001) such as Japan, women are highly constrained in the workplace (Renshaw, 1999; Usui *et al*, 2003). However, it has been proposed that as foreigners in Japan, western women would have more success because of the *gaijin affect* (Adler, 1988), since "foreignness trumps gender" in how women are perceived and treated in Japan. Adler (1988) stated, "(f)irst and foremost, foreigners are seen as foreigners" (p. 244) and the rules that constrain Japanese women don't necessarily apply to foreign women. Participants mentioned that, in general, relative to western men, they were constrained. They perceived that they had more flexibility than Japanese women, were able to participate more in the workplace and while they received more resistance from western men, at times, got less resistance from Japanese men than Japanese women receive.

Women's colleges

There were two participants, both part-time teachers, who felt that they had benefited from being a woman because the schools, both women's colleges, had wanted a women teacher. Being a woman was perceived as being beneficial for getting work at women's colleges. While women's colleges tend to pay teachers less than the more prestigious co-educational institutions, they are often perceived as providing one of the best work environments, according to some of the participants. However, the existence of women's schools is more threatened by the economic downturn and the falling birth-rate, leading to an overall less secure work situation.

Women leaving Japan

The number of western women available to teach in Japanese universities is much less than western men. One reason may be the number of women who leave Japan due to lack of satisfactory employment. This is evidenced by a number of comments pointing to western women being disadvantaged. Terminating employment is one strategy used when it is difficult or impossible to adapt to expatriate conditions (Caligiuri & Tung, 1999) and western women are frequently using this strategy and exiting Japan. All of the participants mentioned they knew several women who had left Japan because they were unable to find appropriate work. Additionally, out of the women interviewed, there were a number who were planning to leave Japan, due to their frustration over the lack of satisfactory work.

Conclusion

This research covered western women's perceptions of their work in Japanese academia in relation to western men's. While this research highlights only their perceptions, it none the less highlights some areas of concern that require further examination. Very little information is available about foreign workers in academia in Japan. This paper, therefore, attempts to highlight an area where more research is needed. Hofstede's (2001) model of national cultures is one of the most widely used frameworks. He describes Japan as a masculine society, and while there has been a lot of criticism of his categorizations, Japan does seem to be a difficult place for many western women working in academia.

While changes in cultural values and attitudes do change in time, deep changes take a long time (Hofstede, 2001). Chizuko Ueno, a leading Japanese feminist sees this system as almost unshakeable, and stated, "if you look at Japanese men individually, they seem very soft and tender and kind. But once they get organized, they become a kind of a big wall across which it is very hard to cross. So it is gender-biased rules and practices that protect male privileges" (Prideaux, 2006).

Stedham and Yamamura (2004) stated that due to legislation in Japan, women's roles have been impacted, but the changes on men have been less dramatic (p. 238). They stated that although "women in the workplace required men to make adjustments, a dramatic change in men's self-concepts and perceptions is unlikely" (p. 238). In their research they found that women believe more strongly in the importance of equality (p. 240) and that assumptions about the sexual division of labour persist. Japanese women are benefiting from Japanese policies that are trying to rectify the gender equality; however, there is little in place to protect foreign women at the moment.

Despite all the advances in Japan in terms of women's employment, Volkmar and Westbrook (2005) found that, for foreign women professionals over the last decade, "Japan has not necessarily become a less difficult or challenging assignment" (p. 474). More needs to be done in the way of researching foreign workers in Japan, particularly in light of the fact that the foreign population has been increasing. The traditional isolation that foreigners experience in Japan may hinder knowledge of expatriate difficulties in Japan and this paper highlights some of the challenges faced in academia for foreign women in the hope that the existing inequalities can be challenged.

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