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Female Professionals in the Japanese Tourism Industry

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The market for Japanese outbound travel doubled in size from 5.5 million in 1986, to 10 million in 1990, and over 12 million in 1993. Among this expanding market, Japanese female travelers have outpaced male travelers, expanding from 38% in 1988, to 42% of the total market in 1992 (Japan National Tourism Organization 1993). Past studies have agreed that the Japanese female market segment, especially that of young females, has been, and will continue to be, the most powerful and potential market segment (Japan Travel Bureau 1993; Morris 1990; Nishiyama 1989; Nozawa 1992; Travel Journal 1993).

While past studies highlighted the Japanese female market as having the greatest potential for further growth, virtually no studies have been done on the Japanese female as the supplier for Japanese outbound travel. This research note examines the role of women and their status in the Japanese tourism industry by investigating the historical and current working environment and conditions for Japanese female professionals in tourism-related industries—by identifying how Japanese female professionals have contributed to the rapid expansion of the Japanese female outbound travel market, and by speculating on future roles of female workers in tourism-related businesses in Japan.

The 1947 Japanese Constitution provided the legal equality between men and women in Japan, though changes and improvements in the workplace for Japanese women have been slow until the 1970s. Some companies set the retirement age for female workers as early as at age 30s and 40s, compared to age 50s for men, and chances for promotion were virtually nonexistent for female workers, even those with 20 years work experience (Iwai 1993:155). Gender equality in the workplace was first justified in Japan in the 1986 Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEO Law), which mandated equal opportunity for men and women in job recruitment, firing, placement, and promotion. Some regulations, which were originally enacted to protect women in the labor force, such as late-night work and holiday work, were relaxed in this law.

Prior to the EEO Law in 1986, however, Japanese women in tourism-

related industries made some significant gains as a result of the 1964 Olympic Games and the Japanese government's deregulation on overseas travel for its citizens in the following year. The Olympics and deregulation greatly increased both inbound and outbound flows in Japanese tourism and led to an increase in all tourism-related jobs. This provided opportunities for female workers who worked at travel agencies to diversify their job categories from traditional "behind the screen" jobs, such as ticketing and visa document arrangements, to reception and customer services at tour desks or ticket counters.

The 1971 Travel Agency Law also impacted positively on Japanese female professionals in the industry by introducing five major systems to facilitate transactions among travel agents and tourists. Among them was the Certified Travel Service Supervisor System, which required any travel agencies and their branch offices to place more than one travel service supervisors certified by the national examination (Japan National Tourist Organization 1993:48). This system allowed female workers to become supervisors and led them to expand their job opportunities and responsibilities. One third of the successful applicants for the first Certified Travel Service Supervisor exam in 1972 were women (Japan Travel Bureau Foundation 1993:15-44).

The 1986 EEO Law impacted the working environment for the Japanese female workers in the tourism-related businesses in an indirect and unique way. Beyond letting some organizations introduce "multi-track employment," the lifting of restrictions, such as those prohibiting overtime and night work, provided the opportunity for female Japanese workers to be overseas tour escorts; for flight attendants to extend their working hours; and for female workers in the hotel sector to work the night-shift. It should be noted that a female leader from the tourism industry played an important role in finalizing the EEO Law. In a public hearing at the House of Representatives to substantiate the final content of the prospective EEO Law in 1985, a leader from the Japan Women in Travel Club (JWTC) addressed the necessity of lifting restrictions in order to establish a true employment equality between men and women in tourism. The JWTC leader explained how historic restrictions limited the abilities of female workers in tourism to challenge their professional capabilities, and compared working conditions and environment for women in Japan against those of other member countries of International Federation of Women's Travel Organizations (The House of Representatives 1985).

In 1991, "*Ryokogyo wo Chushin to shita Kanko Gyoukai ni Kansuru Josei no Yakuwari ni tsuite no Kenkyu Houkokusho* [A report from the study on the women's role in the Japanese tourism-related business with an emphasis on that of the travel industry] was published in Japanese by the Japan Travel Bureau Foundation (JTBF), an affiliate of Japan Travel Bureau (JTB), the largest travel agency in Japan. Conducted by a study group consisting of female-only professionals in JTBF and the other tourism-related organizations, they analyzed Japanese females, from both the demand and the supply sides. The study addresses a comprehensive description of the current working conditions and environment for women in Japanese tourism-related job categories, including those who work in the sectors to cater Japanese tourists abroad, such as travel agency and airline sectors. Among travel agencies, the study discovered that JTB provided equal employment opportunity in its recruitment even prior to the EEO law in 1986. The company also increased the number of females in management level jobs. The working conditions and environment in Japan Airlines (JAL) were examined in the study as an example from the airline sector. The study found that JAL, which had set a woman's retirement age separately as early as in their 30s in early 1970s, intro-

duced the system of multi-track recruitment in 1986, immediately after the EEO Law came into effect. The company also formed a "Ladies' Project Group" in 1991 to promote further advancement of the women's working conditions and environment in-house. Thus, the study discovered that in general, working conditions and environment for women in the supplier side of Japanese outbound travel had been improved even prior to the EEO Law (Japan Travel Bureau Foundation 1993:26-28).

With a close examination of the demand-side of the Japanese female outbound travel market, the JTBF study also concluded that its rapid expansion has created more job opportunities for female professionals in the Japanese tourism industry. The study found that female consumers are more specific in their needs and wants, stricter in their ratings, and highly conscious of the quality of the overseas tourism products and services provided. In addition, women's needs for travel overseas are more frequently diversified than male travelers especially depending on their stages of life (i.e., whether single, married, with or without children). Therefore, outbound travel goods and services targeted to female consumers need to be more varied in types, itineraries, and the range of activities overseas. In order to satisfy these diversified needs and wants, female professionals bringing the perspective of "female consumers" are highly reflected in the product planning and designing. The willingness displayed by those tourism industry organizations to adapt female professionals' ideas is perceived as "women-friendly." Thus, the growth in the Japanese female outbound travel market has raised the status of female professionals in the Japanese tourism industry (JTBF 1993:125).

With historical transitions in the improvement of working conditions and environment, tourism-related jobs (including travel agencies, airlines, hotels, and tourism attractions) are currently very popular among Japanese female college and university graduates. Two travel agencies and one airline were ranked among the top 10 in a 1993 survey among female university students as their "most desirable companies to work with" after their graduation (Nikkei Shimbun 1993). Another recent survey, conducted among both male and female workers in tourism-related industries in Japan, discovered they rated their workplace as "woman-friendly." The survey found that 98% of male and 86% of female respondents considered their jobs "favorably-oriented and more suited for women," and the place "where feminine ideas and abilities can be reflected and valued highly" (Travel Management 1993:8).

In summary, Japanese female professionals in the tourism industry advanced in the hierarchy of the workplace even before the 1986 EEO Law was enacted. The tourism industry receives a positive image and perception in Japan, and is rated as "women-friendly." There seems to be a correlation between the growth of the Japanese female outbound market and the improvement of the working conditions and environment for female professionals in travel-related industries: This fast growing market, which is increasingly upscaled in its needs and wants, has educated the female professionals in the industry to be both sophisticated travel planners and providers of tourism services.

With an optimistic outlook for the further expansion of the Japanese female outbound market, more chances for female professionals to advance their status in the workplace are expected in the future. At the same time, Japanese female professionals' ideas and abilities should not be limited to designing and planning tourism products and services for female consumers, but should go beyond the gender barrier. There must be no border by gender where a real equality exists in the workplace. The awareness of both male and female professionals toward their job responsibilities must be raised to create a real equality in the work environment and to provide better tourism products and services for the fast growing Japanese outbound tourism. □□

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Independence for Western Women Through Tourism

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When considering the role of women in the guest-host relationship of tourism, it is often the women of the host environment who draw the attention of researchers. They are the group acted upon as providers of a hospitable temporary stopping place for guests, as makers of cultural artifacts, and as the receivers of outside influences and/or abuses. The study of female hosts' labor, exploitation, and gender roles, as observed by outsiders, and often as a result