

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WOMEN EXECUTIVES IN JAPAN AND ROMANIA

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Abstract: *Around the world employment of women on an equal bases allows companies, industries and countries to make better use of the available talent pool, generally with potential growth implication. In Japan, since 2013, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has been a ceaseless advocate for the increase in the number of female employees for the revival of the economy, and many governmental programs in support of working women have been put in place. However, the traditional Japanese management systems of lifetime employment, enterprise unions, seniority systems, together with a group-oriented and risk-adverse orientation make things change slowly. In Romania, the second country analyzed in this article, women entrepreneurs also face professional stereotypes, difficulties in getting specific jobs, traditional prejudices and a collective mentality related to women's place in society. This article explores and compares how Romanian and Japanese cultures, societies, and economies have either encouraged, or discouraged, the growth of female entrepreneurship on their own territories, and analyzes how the best emerging female executives can be supported in the future in order to maximize their potential. The analysis is based on the data provided by OECD, the World Bank, the Global entrepreneurship monitor, Japan statistics, the legislations of the two countries and the literature related to the two social environments. The findings indicate that although there are many similarities between the two countries, the percentage of female executives in Japan is much smaller than the one in Romania. This is due to the fact that Japan, with all the governmental programs in action, for the moment, still has a stricter social and work environment, a weaker maternity and childcare legislation and a higher gender gap.*

Keywords: women executives, Japan, Romania, Japanese business culture, Romanian business culture.

JEL classification: B54, F43, R28.

1. Introduction

Worldwide, the companies with more women in senior executive positions report stronger financial performance, better reputation and brand advantages. However, the number of female CEOs remains very small: on a global perspective, women make up only 5% of Fortune 500 CEO's and only 4% of FTSE companies (Weber Shandwick, 2015). This issue is generally the effect of the cultural and organizational issues that prewmoving through the corporate pipeline. Also depending on the geographical area, the society, the culture, etc., the barriers that women executives face can be stronger or weaker, allowing them more or less access to high-level jobs.

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As far as Japan and Romania are concerned, in the first chapter we chose to explore how the Japanese mentality, culture, politics and economics affected women entrepreneurship and the number of female executives, as well as the barriers that they have faced etc. The second chapter analyses the same aspects in Romania, while the third chapter makes a comparison between the two countries and suggests ideas on how the situation of female executives can be improved and how they can be supported to maximize their potential. The hypothesis that guided the analysis is that, despite the different historical, economic and cultural backgrounds, the situation of female executives in both countries is very similar.

The reasons for choosing these two countries begin with the interest of the authors in the topic of female entrepreneurship, one for the Romanian side and the other for the Japanese one, their location (one in Romania and the other in East Asia) and the worldwide enthusiasm in topics related to Japan. The purpose of the paper is to show what are the development probabilities of executives women in the two countries, based on the premises that the two are located at different development levels and in both women have generally less chances for promotion than men have.

2. Women executives in Japan

Traditionally, a Japanese woman's work life was short: only until her marriage. If she continued working afterwards, it was considered a big loss of face to her husband. Due to this cultural expectation, employers would not "train female employees for jobs beyond making tea or greeting customers" (Subhash and Norton, 1993). At the same time, women were and, in many cases, are still considered as only part-timers and had/have jobs of auxiliary nature, with no supervisory capability (Subhash and Norton, 1993), smaller salaries and lesser opportunities for advancement. Moreover, because the Japanese companies use seniority (that discriminates the short-term employees) and life-time employment systems, women do not have many chances of becoming equal to men at work and gaining promotions to managerial positions. Last but not least, women are excluded from in-company rotation and training programs that are necessary in order to advance. The training received is a minimal one, only related to the way of greeting customers, how to bow, how to use the polite language and perform reception activities, such as answering the phone. One of the reasons for this is the fact that the training is expensive for the company and the costs can be balanced only after a new employee has gained several years of experience. Therefore, in the case of women, where the chance of quitting is high, it would be considered a loss for the company (Subhash and Norton, 1993).

However, as anywhere else in the world, in Japan too, the role and status of women has been continuously changing based on economic, cultural and historic conditions. For example, if after the Second World War, Japanese women were needed in the workplace and a high number of them were employed, in the 1960's, when the country became prosperous, women were sent back home by their husbands in order to look good in terms of social status (Cook and Hayashi, 1980) and as a sign of the family's affluence. From the 1980s however, women began going back to work again and becoming approximately 50% of the labor force in 1990 ([Labor force participation rate, female; The World Bank](#)). However, in the post bubble economy, they were laid off again, women being the first to lose their jobs in harsh economic situations.

At school, girls are "pushed" to choose the major that is more feminine, such as arts, and boys to choose the one that is more masculine, such as science. In universities, the trend of choosing the "appropriate" major based on the student's gender seems to continue. Women tend to study secretarial skills, English, international relations, psychology, literature and economics (Dirk, 2016) which gives them less chances of finding a good job with access to advancement in a company after graduation. The women who are granted access here are of a high status given by a high position in the company, government, etc. Nevertheless,

(Hidaka, 2010), Japanese women are still perceived as inferior due to the fact that they don't hold jobs of the same status as men do.

However, some companies accepted women to hold managerial positions, but in divisions especially created for women. Also, the women who are in managerial positions are generally employed in medium and small size firms, not in large Japanese corporations. An analysis made in 1999 indicated that "most women managers work in their own family-run businesses (33%), or are employed by foreign firms (67%)" (Aggarwal, ed., 1999). Also, as previously mentioned, the most common types of companies run by women continue to be in fields such as clothing, real estate agencies, beauty industry, etc. The number of female presidents in the beauty sector amounted to 35.1% in 2014, 34.4 % in the cosmetic retail business and 29.9% of the total in the senior health care field (Kameda, 2014).

It is important to mention that Japanese women are not held back only by patriarchy. Many women from wealthy places like Tokyo prefer to stay at home and enjoy the *sansoku hirune tsuki* (three meals and a nap) life style, instead of the stressful *salaryman* one (*Japanese women and work. Holding back the half the nation, 2014*). Mariko Brando, the author of the book "The dignity of a woman" (2006) points out that many women who are married with high-ranking executives of big companies prefer to have a part time job in a small company or even a supermarket, considering that they don't need a high-status job to enjoy a high status (*Ibid.*).

Among other reasons emphasized during the present research, the most important are: the lack of a system that ensures an easier access to loans for women, some banks being hesitant of lending money to women due to their gender (Kameda, 2014); lack of mentors and fright to start a business; intimidation by the majority of people's choices; fear of maternity harassment (women are forced to retire when they become pregnant or give birth) or *matahara* in Japanese - in a survey conducted in 2014, 26.3 % of women reported experiencing *matahara* and 27.3 % said they know somebody who has experienced it (Ryan, 2015); the Japanese concepts of harmony preservation and conflict avoidance, which make many women give up instead of fighting for their rights; long working hours; *nomination* (*nomu* = to drink and communication) – which is an essential part of maintaining interpersonal relationships with the colleagues, customers, etc. and usually takes place after work, until late at night; short vacations, etc. For married women and working mothers these last mentioned obstacles are very difficult to surpass, due to the housework that also needs to be done by them and the time and attention their family needs. However, in the last years (more specifically since 2013), Abe Government has been encouraging more women to enter the workforce and has created hundreds of thousands of new jobs under *Abenomics*, even though many of these are part time. However, the rising demands of working women, do not come with better opportunities and work conditions provided by the Japanese corporations. In order for real changes to take place, the society has to be shaken to the core. Or at least, the companies that fail to meet the governmental requirements of the newly created environments should be punished.

Nevertheless, the government has set a target of "30% female leadership representation in various fields of Japanese society" by 2020, when Tokyo will host the Olympics (Japan: Women in the workplace, 2015).

Be that as it may, the numbers are ambitious, especially in a country where female representation in the parliament's lower house was 8 % in 2013 and the female manager ratio was 10 % in 2013. Also, Japan is well known for a slow promotion pace, the age limit for getting promoted tending to be higher, especially in case of women (Ishizuka, 2014). Nevertheless, the Japanese Government has taken a step forward in including more women in the economic field and in creating more gender diversity at the management level, in order to fix the mounting fiscal deficits and the population problems (Ishizuka, 2014).

3. Women executives in Romania

Romania is a former communist country, still struggling with a deeply corrupted environment (Transparency International Romania, 2015). The long years spent under communist control reduced the female entrepreneurial capacities and in many cases, successful models for the young generations are missing. However, by becoming a member of NATO since 2004 and of EU since 2007, new challenges have arisen and the country had to learn how to activate and compete with its European counterparts. Also, by beginning to have access to structural funds from the EU, a financial support platform was created for opening new businesses and improve their skills (Piti, 2015).

In time, women started to get more involved in different fields and have access to higher-level jobs. However, an analysis made by the European Commission in 2014 indicated that in Romania men receive a monthly payment with 9.7% better than women, with only 9% of the companies' board members and 11% of the CEO's being women. Moreover, Romania ranks 27 by the number of women in the Parliament (11.5%), as shown in the research performed by The Permanent Electoral Authority in 2013. Why these low numbers?

As in many other countries, women executives from Romania are equally qualified and have similar competences with men, but at the decision level, the relations are discriminative and asymmetrical. The legislation that supports equality between sexes exists and is observing the strict standards of the European Union. However, in reality, it is just a "law for display". The gender wage gap still exists (10% in 2014, OECD) and in some cases women receive a job just because the legislation requires that a certain type of company, political party, etc. should include a certain number of men and women.

During communism, the party and the state supported women getting involved in the public sphere, breaking the economic barriers imposed by the old traditions and leaving the children in the care of public organizations, naming them "equal socialist workers" and "mothers of the nation" (Massino, 2014).

There are two distinct phases during the communist regime regarding the status of women: 1. policies for empowerments at the beginning of communism (1948-1965) and 2. aggressive pro-natalist policies (decree after anti-abortion 1966-1989). The first phase represents the period when in Romania there was an acute need of women labor, thus generating an intense propaganda of emancipation and freedom for women through work (Padurariu, 2014) and second period ("Golden Age") was characterized by a strict pro-natalist policy. After the fall of communism, many laws related to equality of chances had been adopted. Concerning the maternity leave, the 2005 law (updated several times until 2015) consists of: 63 days of pregnancy leave before birth and 63 days of maternity leave after birth. The monthly child allowance represents 85% of the net average income earned in the last 12 months. There is also a parental leave that both mothers and fathers can take: up to 2 years, with an allowance of 85% from the average net income earned in the last 12 months, maximum 1.200 lei / month (around 300 \$) (European Commission).

One of the most important aspects for a working woman is the law preventing the employer from firing a pregnant person or who is currently on maternity leave / parental leave. The company has to receive the person back on her/his previous position after the leave is finished. Statistics indicate that 95% of the persons who take parental leave resume their work at the end of it (Marinescu, 2016). This support is extremely important for women who want to combine career with motherhood.

Regarding the Romanian career women, their profile is as follows: ambitious, married, with children, average age 36 years, university graduate, devoted to business, working 60 hours/week, independent. The main motivations for Romanian women to open a business are as follows: to be their own boss, personal desire to start a business, opportunity to increase the quality of life, money, contribution to society, etc. (Ramadani, Gërguri-Rashiti, Fayolle, 2015). Their strong points are social networking, intuition, patience, more

experience gained from multitasking and child rearing, chance to create women friendly corporations and businesses for other women and minorities.

The barriers that they encounter are related to educational choices (women tend to choose more feminine fields that also come with smaller incomes and less access to executive positions), vertical and horizontal occupational segregation, social perception of a woman's strength, knowledge and skills, difficulty in accessing capital and lack of positive examples (Cojocaru, 2014).

In terms of entrepreneurship (both female and male), in 2013, Romania was the first country from the EU regarding entrepreneurship intentions, 27% of Romanians declaring they wanted to start a new business. However, the problem arises in the sustainability of entrepreneurial initiatives, where the country is located on the last but one place in Europe (European Commission) (Scarlatescu, 2013).

4. Comparative analyses between women executives in Romania and Japan

As seen in the previous chapters, both Romania and Japan, by their history, traditions and cultures, have discouraged women working in executive levels, but their governments have tried hard, for the improvement of their economies, to advance the conditions of work for female employees and to give them the necessary support to continue working and being promoted.

In order to clearly observe the differences and similarities between the two countries, some more statistical information is required.

Table 1: Statistical information: Japan and Romania

Country name	Japan	Romania
Population in 2015	127.02 mil	19.87 mil
Female population	51.4% (2015)	51.6% (2015)
Female graduates from tertiary education	48.2% (2014)	52.9% (2014)
Female labor force	49% (2014)	49% (2014)
Total fertility rate	1.4 children / woman (2014)	1.32 children / woman (2014)
Female representation on boards	1.1% (2014)	11.9% (2013)
Female CEOs	7.4% (2014)	10.0% (2013)
Self-employed women	0.9% (2015)	29.1% (2013)
Gender pay gap	26.59% (2014)	10.0% (2014)

Source: Trading Economics – www.tradingeconomics.com, Instat <http://www.instat.gov.al/>, OECD <https://data.oecd.org/eduatt/adult-education-level.htm#indicator-chart>, 2015

As it can easily be observed, there are almost no differences between the percentage of female population and female labor force, the fertility rate, thus indicating similar environments. Regarding the female labor force, it is important to mention that the difference between the two countries resides in the type of employment: in Japan, 36.9% of the total are employed in part time jobs, while in Romania the percentage is of only 5.5% (OECD, 2015).

Regarding the gender pay gap, the last element in the table, the difference is more than double, indicating a higher level of equity and gender equality concerning payment in Romania. However, in both countries, despite the educational gains, women continue to fall behind men in income, politics, employment, business ownership, etc. This is due to cultural norms and societal expectations, but also to the chosen fields of study. For example, men

dominate majors such as engineering, computer sciences, manufacturing, while women focus on education, humanities and arts, health and welfare, fields that are less remunerative.

Moreover, analyzing the percentages of male and female employed persons by occupation, Japan Statistics 2014 indicated that men are more prominent in construction and mining (98.4%), transport and machine operation (97.3%), while women were prominent among medical, health services (75.3%), clerical work (59.7%) and accommodation, eating and drinking services (62.1%).

In Romania, women are prominent in health and social assistance (59%), private household (67%), other services (52%), education (49%), hotels and restaurants (42.6%) (Popescu, 2016).

Compared to their Romanian counterparts, Japanese women are the managers of the family and the house, they assume total responsibility for the family, giving freedom to the husband to only be in charge of the economic production and no other aspects (Renshaw, 1999, p. 28). On the other side, Romanian women share with their husbands both the economic production and the house management, giving more time to women for other activities.

The present social trends in Japan present a new type of men and women, called herbivore men and carnivore women. Carnivore women refer to women that are active and more internationally minded, while men are taking low-responsibility jobs and do not want to get married, living in the old model breadwinner / housewife style (*Japanese women and work. Holding back the half the nation*, 2014).

Japanese women, as the author Lefcadio Hearn said, are the most wonderful aesthetic products of Japan. They are seen by foreigners and Japanese men as "precious possessions, pleasing to behold, docile and manageable" (Renshaw, 1999, p. 16). Also, the term *Ryosaikenbo*, which means good wife, wise mother, introduces the traditional idea of a woman as house organizer, child and husband caretaker. Another expression, *onna ha sanpo sagatte*, meaning that a woman should walk 3 steps behind her husband, represents the traditional view of how a couple should behave in public and what is the place of each of them in the society: man first, woman second. Moreover, the Confucian belief supported the supremacy of men and said "As a samurai, be with a woman in public itself is bad", indicating again the place of a woman far from the man. All these theories indicate that a woman's place is not near a man, in the public space at least, the same mentality being applied to the work environment.

This adds to the idea of the filmmaker Juno Itami, who declared that a Japanese woman is supposed to renounce men and family in order to succeed "on the rough road to corporate success" (Renshaw, 1999), indicating the society's inflexibility towards women working.

Moreover, in a country like Japan, where the people's opinion has a big influence upon others, if the attitudes toward women working are negative, most often they will give up trying, the biggest challenge for female executives in Japan being to reluct against this socio-cultural aspect.

5. Support for female executives to maximize their potential

As previously mentioned, in the last years the Japanese Government tried to encourage women with business and career aspirations through a series of adopted policies. The press has been naming the prime minister's approach as "Womenomics" (increased participation of women in the economy), and is considered a pillar for the prime minister's campaign for economic revitalization.

However, as the 2015 Female Entrepreneurship Index indicates, Japan ranks only forty-fourth place, substantially lower than other comparable economies. Romania, on the other hand, ranks 10 places higher, even though the political discourse is not as focused on

women empowerment as in Japan (GEDI, 2015). We found no significant differences between women executives and entrepreneurs.

Also, the FEI analysis by country indicates the fact that Japanese women rank low in the Opportunity Recognition and high in the Willingness to start, while Romanian women are positioned low in the field of R&D Expenditures and high in Equal rights and Business Gazelles, as follows:

FEI Results by Country



Figure 1: Female Entrepreneurship Index – results by country

The indicators above can help identify the hot points of each country, in order to determine ways of supporting the future women executives by creating dedicated programs and policies. For example, Romania needs to work on increasing the expenditures in research and development, improve the financing system, training in the Tech sector businesses and creating networks for women to meet other successful women and learn from their experiences. In what Japan is concerned, with the exception of the opportunity recognition that was mentioned before, other fields that need improvement are the perception of skills (which indicates the access to training for women who wish to become entrepreneurs), the network to meet and discuss with other entrepreneurs and the support for female leadership. Another improvement measure is the increase of day care centers to support women to come at work in higher numbers after the end of maternity paid leave. If this is not an easy task, another option could be softer immigration rules for nannies, in Japan's case. Or perhaps implementing an expanded usage of the "Yokohama method" (Fumiko Hayashi, the mayor of Yokohama, after her election in 2009, managed to reduce the city's child-care

waiting list, the longest in the country at that moment, to zero in just over three years, by bringing private firms into the sector and creating the necessary day care facilities).

Based on OECD's report, in 2014, Japan increased childcare leave benefits from 50% to 67% of the wages (comparable with Romania that has 85% of the average net income over the last 12 months) in support of a better work-life balance and labor market participation for women. Also, the Japanese Government has established a "new certification system for employers who create an employment environment that is favorable to raising children and encourages a better work-life balance" (OECD 2014)

In the end, it is important to mention that, if the two countries do not work harder in accepting and promoting women in executive positions, they might lose a big number of high level and well prepared graduates to foreign companies. In Japan, if the international companies understand the necessity of complying with the working needs of Japanese women, such as support and encouragement to continue working after marriage, the same training and promotion opportunities as for their male colleagues, support in career development, no compulsory socialization or client care after work, so that women can also take care of their families (Subhash and Norton 1993), they can benefit greatly from the high number of highly educated Japanese women. In the case of Romanian women, there are many who tend to emigrate, considering the country poor, corrupted and without opportunities (Stanculescu and Stoiciu, 2012), Romania thus losing a high number of well trained and educated women who could contribute to the economic growth of the country.

6. Conclusions

The time for change has come. Not using women in the labor force represents a waste of talent, money and time. In both countries analyzed in this article, half or more of university graduates are female and both countries are in need of well-trained executives in order to improve their activities in the fast changing business environment and in the purpose of economic growth.

In order for this to happen, the two countries need to find ways of changing the mentality of their own population regarding working women, provide more understanding and support towards working mothers, sharing the household and children rearing responsibilities, better child care services, etc.

Programs such as the ones suggested by the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to increase the number of women in executive positions in the next years, are a step forward and make way to new perspectives. However, without the legal mechanisms and institutions to monitor and penalize discrimination of any kind against women at work, no major changes are possible. Problems such as maternity harassment (*matahara* in Japanese) and forcing women to quit working after getting married, not accepting them back on the same position after returning from maternity leave are urgent and need to be dealt with as soon as possible. Other issues are related to the traditional Japanese management systems of lifetime employment, where women are not included, enterprise unions, seniority systems, a group-oriented and risk-adverse orientation, the culture of maintaining the group harmony and conflict avoidance, as the expression *shikata ga nai* (there is nothing I can do about it) implies and finally the mentality of "the stake that sticks out gets pounded", indicating the conformity of the Japanese society.

Romania ranks slightly better on this level, with stricter protective laws and real implementation, support for women to take parental leave and return to continue their work afterwards. Also, the work environment is more relaxed and there is no compulsory after work communication. However, Romanian women face discrimination regarding educational choices, vertical and horizontal occupational segregation, social perception of a woman's place, difficulty in accessing capital and lack of positive examples, challenges which are also encountered at their Japanese counterparts.

Despite their different backgrounds, the Romanian and Japanese women seem to have a similar fate and tend to be hindered in their successful careers by resembling barriers related to societal pressure and male attitudes towards working women. If these aspects will not change, the economies of both countries will have to suffer and will not have the opportunity to gain the economic growth they desire.

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