

What do Japanese women want from traveling today?:

An examination of new and earlier research data

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Abstract

As people's spending on travel and tourism is on the increase (Japan Tourism Agency), the Japanese female market is becoming important, since more than half of the Japanese population today is female. However, not many companies seem interested in understanding the sense of values and the hierarchy of importance that exist in the lives of Japanese women as well as how Japanese women act today and what they want in life. Needless to say, these factors are important for any group considering the value of the female market in order to stimulate the Japanese economy. The purpose of this research paper is to pursue what Japanese women want from travel, and new data from a survey conducted for this paper are examined in relation to previous data about Japanese females today.

Keywords

female economy, female market, individuality, tradition, travel

1. Introduction

Globally, women are supposed to be half the working-age population ⁽¹⁾, and if women can participate in the global economy equally to men this could add \$28 trillion in global GDP growth by 2025 ⁽²⁾. Meanwhile, the size of the female economy has an impact on approximately 64 % of all purchases worldwide over a variety of categories [Silverstein et al., 2009]. It is also suggested that if the global economy is to prosper, it needs to establish policies and reforms in each country to empower women. Given these factors, the female market may be a key or even a panacea for the Japanese economy, which suffers from stagnant growth and a decrease of population, among other problems.

1.1 Female population

According to data from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications Statistics Bureau ⁽³⁾, the total population of Japan was approximately 125 million in 2017, of which the female population accounted for 51.4 % (the ratio was 51.3 % in 2015). Looking at the ratios of female population in Japan by age group, the 65 to 69 year-old group is the biggest (3.95 %) and the second is the group of 40 to 44 year-olds (3.79 %). By 2030 the Japanese population is expected to drop to approximately 116 million, and 37.7 % of the population will be over 65 years old by 2045. Japanese life expectancy reached 80.98 years for men and 87.14 for women in 2016 ⁽⁴⁾ and continues to increase. Japan is definitely the world's most rapidly aging society, and it is likely to have more women than men in the future.

1.2 Wages

According to a statistical survey conducted by the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry of Japan on the structure of wages for 2017 ⁽⁵⁾, the average wage for Japanese males and females together was approximately 3.04 million yen: around 3.35 mil-

lion yen for males and 2.46 million yen for females. Wages for females were at their highest ever in Japan and were 0.6 % up from the previous year. The disparity in wages between males and females was the smallest amongst the data collected since 1976 (the value of disparity is 73.4 at males = 100, and the closer the value is to 100, the smaller the gap). In other words, wages for females are on the increase to a large extent, and the difference in wages between males and females is getting smaller (see Table 1).

Table 1: Average difference in wages by sex and the ratio of change from the previous year

Year	Males (yen)	Change (%)	Females (yen)	Change (%)
2013	3,260,000	-0.9	2,326,000	-1.2
2014	3,296,000	1.1	2,380,000	2.3
2015	3,351,000	1.7	2,420,000	1.7
2016	3,352,000	0.0	2,446,000	1.1
2017	3,355,000	0.1	2,461,000	0.6

Source: Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare of Japan, 2017.

Wage differences by age group are shown in Table 2. On the whole wages for females are on the increase, except for the 30-34 year-old age group. The 65-69 year-old and 60-64 year-old age groups for females made increases of 3.8 % and 2.8 % respectively, while the ratios of the same age groups were -3.6 % and 1.0% for males. The highest average wage group for women by age is the 50-54 year-olds at 2.7 million yen and the average wage from 40 to 59 years-old is over 2.6 million yen. These figures indicate that the wage gap among age groups is getting narrower between males and females, and the image in Japan of women being useless in the work force now seems to be out of date as well.

1.3 How much money is spent on tourism?

An economic indicator analysis for 2018 was reported by

Table 2: Average wage differences by sex and age group, and the ratio of change from the previous year

Age groups	Males' wages (yen)	Changes (%)	Females' wages (yen)	Changes (%)
20-24	2,105,000	0.7	2,025,000	1.5
25-29	2,481,000	0.9	2,259,000	0.4
30-34	2,890,000	0.7	2,416,000	-0.7
35-39	3,241,000	0.1	2,540,000	0.2
40-44	3,587,000	-0.6	2,624,000	0.4
45-49	3,947,000	-1.6	2,682,000	0.1
50-54	4,240,000	-0.4	2,700,000	0.2
55-59	4,122,000	0.1	2,629,000	1.3
60-64	2,941,000	1.0	2,243,000	2.8
65-69	2,610,000	-3.6	2,201,000	3.8

Source: Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare of Japan, 2017.

the Japanese Cabinet Office in March 2018 ⁽⁶⁾, and it states that consumer spending on travel and other leisure activities is on the increase. Consumer spending on travel was approximately 25 trillion yen in 2017 and this is about a 1 trillion yen increase since 2012. Out of the 25 trillion yen (up by 1.3 % from 2016), 21 trillion yen was spent on travel inside Japan (of which 13 trillion yen was spent on tourism) and 4 trillion yen was spent on travel overseas. These figures indicate that domestic travel is increasing steadily.

Day trips inside Japan are becoming popular, and this is popular particularly among people in their 70's and older, as it increased by 34 % in the 5 years from 2012 to 2017. Their spending in 2017 accounts for slightly under 600 billion yen, which comes to a third of total spending after the 20's and 60's age groups (slightly over 600 billion yen for each group). Traveling overseas is also on the increase except to Oceanian countries, and this increase is particularly pronounced among people in their 40's, 50's, and 70's.

2. Research

Japanese females' purchasing power has been examined so far, together with the current trends in Japanese tourism in general. This section will examine changes among Japanese females in terms of their sense of consciousness.

2.1 Aim and method

In the period from February to April, 2018, a survey for this

research paper was conducted on 159 Japanese females (aged between their 20's and 70's) in the Kansai area, Japan. In the survey six questions were asked to examine women's awareness on individual and traditional aspects of personal characteristics. Each question offered four answers to choose from—1. Very much agree; 2. If anything, agree; 3. If anything, not agree, and; 4. Not agree at all—and the answers were tallied by categorizing them into two groups of “Yes” (1 and 2) and “No” (3 and 4). The missing values in each question were excluded, and thus the total numbers of respondents for each question became 157 for Q1 and Q4, 156 for Q2, Q3, and Q5, and 155 for Q6 (see Appendix for questions).

2.2 Results

Table 3 shows the data collected from the survey. In the area of individuality, 81 % of the respondents think that sustaining harmonized social relationships has priority over individual success (Q1) and 60 % of them like working with other people (Q2). Simultaneously, 69.2 % of the respondents believe that the glory of success is something to obtain individually (Q4) and 77% of them prefer a job in which their personal creativity is encouraged and exercised (Q5). In the questions related to the traditional aspects of Japan, 67 % of the respondents find that it is more comfortable for them to live by dissimulating their own individuality or individual character in Japanese society. Furthermore, 89.6 % of them seem to prefer keeping a sense of moral indebtedness and obligation, a view which has

Table 3: Percentages of answers to each question in different age groups

Age	Q1		Q2		Q3		Q4		Q5		Q6	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
20-39	75	25.0	59	41	68	31.8	36.4	63.6	80	20.5	9.3	90.7
40-59	79	21.1	58	42	73	26.8	29.2	70.8	78	22.2	6.9	93.1
60-79	88	11.9	63	37	59	41.5	26.8	73.2	75	25.0	15.0	85.0
Average	81	19.3	60	40	67	33.4	30.8	69.2	77	22.6	10.0	89.6
	$p < 0.001$		$p < 0.001$		$p < 0.05$		$p < 0.001$		$p < 0.001$		$p < 0.001$	

been part of Japanese traditional traits and thinking for many years [e.g. Benedict, 1946].

A large number of previous studies have suggested that Japanese are becoming more individualistic and, at the same time, that they are a collectivist nation, i.e. exhibiting the traditional tendencies of Japanese [e.g. Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Kitayama, 1998; Nisbett, 2003; Shigemasu, 2016, *inter alia*]. The result of this new research agrees with the results of the previous studies, and regardless of age difference Japanese are more individualistic than before while still maintaining their traditional aspect. They are on the whole trying to keep harmonious social relationships and not to be outstanding for any particular reason, but at the same time they wish to be different from others and to have experiences special to themselves.

2.3 Overview: Changes in consciousness of Japanese females

Today the Japanese younger generation is said to have a stronger tendency towards individualism [e.g. Kashiwagi and Hiraki, 2014]. Moreover, Japanese females have begun changing their thinking in response to recent domestic and global trends ⁽⁷⁾.

Suzuki [2003] compared and examined the sex-role attitudes of Japanese females based on surveys conducted in 1972 (among Japanese women in Kobe City), in 1986 (among Japanese females in Tokyo), in 1987 (among Japanese females in Kanagawa), and in 1988 (among American women in Massachusetts, USA). The purpose of these surveys was to examine the attributions of sex-role attitudes among Japanese women. In these surveys, female respondents were asked to rank four roles, “mother”, “wife”, “person”, and “female”, by what they thought as important for themselves.

In the survey of Japanese females in 1972, a total of 65 % chose “mother” and “wife” as what they thought important for them (43 % for “mother” and 22 % for “wife”). In the surveys of Japanese females in 1986 and 1987, a total average of 58.75 % chose “female” and “person” as what they thought important for them (33 % for “female” and 25.75 % for “person”), while a total average of 41.25% chose “mother” and “wife” (24 % and 17.25 % respectively). These results show that Japanese females’ self-perception changed to a great extent in only about 15 years. As Suzuki indicates, females who chose “wife” and “mother” are likely to put more importance on tradition and those who chose “person” and “female” have a stronger tendency towards individuality. In this sense, Japanese women are shifting from a tradition-directed tendency to an individual-directed tendency in respect to sex-role attitudes. The result of the survey in 1988 of American women was a total of 96 % for “person and “female” (83 % for “person” and 13 % for “female”), and this proves the point that Japanese are becoming more individualistic along with the well-known view that America is the nation of individualism.

Recently, the term *Koto-shohi* appears very often in Japanese articles related to the economy. In effect, *Koto-shohi* means to

consume experiences rather than to consume materials. Many surveys have been conducted on the web about *Koto-shohi* as well as about trends among Japanese females, as *Koto-shohi* is increasing in the Japanese female market ⁽⁸⁾. Those surveys suggest that females tend to travel with their own goals to accomplish, to travel alone, and that they favor scattering their memories of experiences through media such as SNS in order to express who they are and what kind of life-style they are trying to have. Those surveys also indicate that this trend is not only prevalent among the younger generation but among those who are in their 60’s and over as well. The report by the Japanese Cabinet Office similarly points out the relation between the development of SNS and tourism. In research conducted by the Consumer Affairs Agency of Japan, people were asked what kind of activities they try to undertake in order to post pictures on SNS, and about 70 % answered with travel. This reflects a recent trend of people searching for places and objects which are instagrammable. All of this indicates how people today are in search of expressing who they are.

Japanese women’s interest in themselves today and in their future is getting stronger, as some other surveys also suggest ⁽⁹⁾. These tendencies agree with the results of this paper’s survey, which suggests that Japanese females are becoming more individualistic and are interested in achieving something by themselves. Many surveys also suggest that Japanese traditions in life-style, culture, history, design, and so forth are not only attracting foreign travelers from overseas but Japanese travelers too. The results of this research indicate that new approaches to the female market, or to the female economy, do not necessarily mean denying Japanese traditions at all.

3. Conclusion

Today, Japanese females are conscious of maintaining harmony in social relationships and sustaining Japanese traditions, but they are also positive about the idea of exerting their abilities and expressing who they are. With this in mind, a key point for stimulating tourism in the female market is to supply opportunities for women to realize and express their individuality and to achieve something, so that a woman can feel that she has become someone different from the person she was before she made her trip.

Plainly, the life-courses of Japanese women are undergoing change, and this will affect their travel habits and inclinations in the future. Further and more detailed research on Japanese women’s tourism is necessary, and it should take current changes into consideration.

Notes

- ⁽¹⁾ McKinsey Global Institute. <https://www.mckinsey.com/mgi/overview>.
- ⁽²⁾ World Economic Forum. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/>.
- ⁽³⁾ Statistics Japan, Nihon no tokei. <http://www.stat.go.jp/data/nihon/pdf/17nihon.pdf>.

- ⁽⁴⁾ Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare of Japan. <http://www.mhlw.go.jp/>.
- ⁽⁵⁾ Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare of Japan. <http://www.mhlw.go.jp/toukei/itiran/roudou/chingin/kouzou/z2017/index.html>.
- ⁽⁶⁾ Monthly topics no. 53 by the Cabinet Office, Government of Japan: Recent economic indicator and its background. http://www5.cao.go.jp/keizai3/monthly_topics/index.html.
- ⁽⁷⁾ Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare. <http://www.mhlw.go.jp/>.
- ⁽⁸⁾ E.g. <https://ferret-plus.com/9231>, <https://www.oricon.co.jp/news/2058238/full/>, <https://www.gfk.com/>, <https://www.nikkei.com/>, <http://www.mlit.go.jp/common/001237341.pdf>, <https://wondertrip.jp/column/46229.html/2>, inter alia.
- ⁽⁹⁾ E.g. Woman's is a company specializing in marketing to women. <https://www.womans-jp.com/company>.

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(Received April 16, 2018; accepted May 30, 2018)

Appendix

Contents translated from the original Japanese	
Q1	Preserving harmonized social relationships has more priority than individual success.
Q2	I prefer working together with other people in a situation where no one is given special authority.
Q3	It is easier to live without exhibiting individuality in Japanese society, as the proverb says: "The nail that sticks up will be hammered down."
Q4	Success should be a goal to be pursued in a group, not for the glory of the individual, in many cases.
Q5	I prefer working in a situation where individual creativity is encouraged and exercised.
Q6	A sense of moral indebtedness and of obligation are out of date.