

A COMPARISON BETWEEN WOMEN EXECUTIVES IN JAPAN AND ROMANIA

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Abstract

Around the world, entrepreneurship, and more specific women entrepreneurship is promoted as a solution for economic problems. In Japan, since 2013, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has been a ceaseless advocate for the increase in the number of female entrepreneurs 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: J01.

1. Introduction

All around the world, 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 24% of senior management

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positions (IMF). This issue is generally the effect of the “cultural and organizational issues that prevent [women] moving through the corporate pipeline” (*Women matter: An Asian Perspective*, 2012, p. 3). 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.

Regarding the two specific countries that are the subject of this analysis, Japan and Romania, 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 compares the situation in the two countries, presents the similarities and the differences at the level of female entrepreneurship, and at the same time, 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 analysis has been performed based on the specific literature related to the two countries' environments (social, political, etc.), the legislations of the two states in this field and on the data provided by the Global entrepreneurship monitor, Statistics Japan, OECD and the World Bank.

2. Women executives in Japan

The present times are of major transitions for professional women, even in countries as culturally and socially strict as Japan. Women now have the chance to deny the “conventional notions of femininity and to negotiate new gender roles” (Aronsson, 2015, p. 1), to break through the glass ceiling and become an example for the next generations of women to come. Also, with the support of *Abenomics*¹, which pushes the companies to accept more female employees and to promote women in high positions, their success and acceptance seems inevitable. However, the traditional culture and mentality is hard to change and it might be raising certain obstacles. Therefore, let's begin by analyzing how the Japanese society and culture has encouraged or discouraged the growth of female executives until now.

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, p. 254). 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 (Ibid, p. 267), smaller salaries and lesser

¹ The term is a blend of words of Abe and economics (similar to Clintonomics and Reaganomics) that refers to a set of policies of the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

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 company training programs that are necessary in order to advance. The training they receive 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 (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.

Due to the 1985 Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEOL) that guarantees equal treatment and opportunities for women, Japanese women have been employed in professional career tracks for many years. However, the institutionalized prejudice has kept them on lower positions than men, the access to high position jobs having been open mainly to men. If in the United States, the glass ceiling is an obstacle during a certain stage in a woman's career, in Japan, this barrier exists throughout a woman's life (Arronson, 2015). 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. At the university level, 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 (OECD), which gives them less chances of finding a good job with access to advancement in a company after graduation.

For men, however, their choice of major does not affect their career options, being able to obtain positions in government, banking, etc., even if they had an unrelated major at the university. In many cases, the university or college finds jobs for the female graduates, and generally those jobs are as OLs (Office Ladies). The duties of an OL are usually to serve tea and do some clerical work. If they refuse the job, the college and the family will lose face, so they are not given much other choice but to accept it. Moreover, as the common mentality believes that the purpose of attending a good school is to find a good husband, usually having a job as an OL is considered a better choice for women, because they will quit it anyway after getting married or becoming pregnant (Aggarwal, ed., 1999).

On the other hand, the employers consider OL jobs to be temporary or part time positions and pay their female employees smaller salaries and provide them with less benefits than for their male counterparts. Also, for being part time employees, women are excluded from the internationally known Japanese resource practices, such as lifetime

employment, job rotation, group bonuses, seniority promotions, and from the informal communication and decision making processes (which generally take place at night gatherings and dinners, when women are generally missing, in some cases due to house chores) (Aggarwal, ed., 1999, p. 217). At this level it is very important to mention the “male network” that keeps men informed at all times, in touch with other members of the same or similar level from other companies, and which includes activities generally performed by men: dinners, visits to karaoke rooms, playing golf, etc. The women who are granted access here are of a high status given by a high position in the company, government, etc. Nevertheless, as Cook and Hayashi (1980) said, Japanese women are 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 not in the same positions as men and sometimes not even in the same department, but in a division specially created for women. Also, the women that are in managerial position 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, p. 215).

Also, as mentioned before, the most common types of companies run by women were and still are 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).

Unfortunately, the Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEOL) mentioned above was not supported by affirmative action policies, measures of enforcement and punitive measures, being rumored that it was only created in order to satisfy the ratification of the United Nation’s Convention to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and that it has been strongly opposed by the Japanese academics and politicians of that time, who argued that the changes could “alter the unique successful culture” of Japan (Rawstron, 2011, p. 4). Also, as a reaction to this law, Japanese companies created a system called “Two track employment system”, in order to mask a gender-based discrimination. The system works as follows: the new recruit can choose between an integrated or management track (*sougoushoku*) with long hours of work, opportunity to be transferred and fierce competition (that is usually proposed to men) or a general, or clerical track (*ippanshoku*), with shorter working hours, rare transfers and limited promotions, which is generally proposed to women (Ibid.).

In 1995, the Labour Standards Law was revised and changes have been made regarding the number of overtime hours for women per annum (until the revision, the limit was 150 hours), of the working time (before, women could not work between 10 p.m. and 5 a.m.), approval to work during holidays or in “dangerous” occupations such as mining (Rawstron, 2011). These changes generated many debates regarding women in the Japanese overwhelming working environment and whether they can really be a part of it or not. Japanese women are expected to shoulder the majority of household burdens, in a country where men work some of the longest hours in the developed world (OECD) and at the same time women are also supposed to be in charge of the chores inside the house, take care of the family’s elders, the education of the children, house management, etc. All

of these aspects, together with the high costs of life and education, the lack of high quality childcare options and childcare leave benefits, and the lack of opportunities to reenter regular employment after maternal leave, determine young Japanese women to postpone marriage, delay parenthood and have fewer children (OECD Better life index).

However, 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 *sansokuhirunetsuki* (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” 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.*).

Another reason for women preferring to stay at home could be represented by the fact that, although during university the Japanese women are accepted and treated equally with men and are told that they can do whatever they want to in the work place after graduating, the reality is much different. Soon after employment (more or less two months, experts say), many Japanese women seek psychiatric help for depression and lack of self-esteem, due to discrimination, dull assignments and fear of losing face in case of quitting (Renshaw, 1999).

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 business²; intimidation by the majority of people’s choices³; fear of maternity harassment (or *mataharai* 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

² As Donna Fujimoto Cole, president and CEO of Cole Chemical, pointed out in her interview for Brookings, at <http://www.brookings.edu/events/2016/02/08-womenomics-female-entrepreneurs-japan>

³ Fujiyo Ishiguro, president and CEA of Netyar Group Corporation, pointed out in her interview for Brookings, that in Japan many women tend to choose what they can do, not what they really want to, due to the cultural expectations for a woman but also to the group mentality and unwillingness to be different than others. Video at <http://www.brookings.edu/events/2016/02/08-womenomics-female-entrepreneurs-japan>

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, the female manager ratio was 10 % in 2013 and where the labor-market gender gap is second among the advanced countries, next to South Korea. 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 (*Ibid.*).

3. Women executives in Romania

Romania is a former communist country that is still struggling with a deeply corrupted environment. 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 and 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 entrepreneurs 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 exists⁴ and is observing the strict standards of the European Union. However, in reality, it is just a “law for display” (Mihaela Miroiu⁵ in Sova, 2015). 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

⁴Title 1, Article 4 of the Constitution (since 1991) “(2) Romania is the common and indivisible homeland of all its citizens, without distinction of race, nationality, ethnic origin, language, religion, sex, opinion, political affiliation, wealth or social origin.”

⁵ Professor at National School of Political and Administrative Studies Bucharest, expert in feminism and gender studies.

certain number of men and women. Moreover, the mentalities according to which women are not capable of intellectual creations, only of teaching others the ideas and theories created by men (Mihaela Miroiu in Sova, 2015), and proverbs such as “Men should wear pants and women skirts”⁶ and “A woman’s place is in the kitchen,”⁷ indicate that the image of a Romanian woman is behind her man, working outside to support and deliver his work, or inside the house, as a wife, mother, housekeeper for him and the family.

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 and so an intense propaganda of emancipation and freedom for women through work began. Women, through their efforts as producers, mothers and wives, contributed to the meeting and exceeding of the plan, to the blossoming of communism and of the country. Paid employment became the solution for the emancipation of women and the way to demonstrate equality with men (Padurariu, 2014).

The second period (“Golden Age”) was characterized by a strict pro-natalist policy. In 1966, the anti-abortion decree was implemented and it represented a new stage in the standardization of the brutal status of women. They became reproductive beings, were kept under strict control and were supposed to have at least four children by the age of 45, making Romania one of the strictest communist countries regarding abortions.

In 1973, during a meeting of the Communist Party’s Central Committee, Nicolae Ceausescu defined the women’s status and role: “The highest honor for women is to give birth, to give life and raise children. There can be nothing more dearly for a woman than being a mother” (Banciu, Chipea and Bancila, 2012). He understood well the power, determination and the talents of women as an important element in the construction of communist Romania.

After the fall of communism, many laws related to equality of chances had been adopted. In 1999 - the law concerning the paternity leave, in 2000 – the law concerning the prevention and sanctions against discriminations, in 2003 – the labor code, in 2006 – The National Strategy for equality between sexes 2006-2009, in 2010 – The National Strategy for equality between sexes 2010-2012 and in 2010 – the law concerning the child care leave and the monthly allowance for children, etc.

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).

⁶ In Romanian: Omul să poarte nădragii și femeia fustele.

⁷ In Romanian: Locul femeii este la cratiță.

One of the most important aspects for a working woman is the law that prevents the employer from firing someone that is pregnant or is currently on maternity leave / parental leave. The company has to receive her back on her (or his, in case of fathers that take parental leave) previous position after the leave is finished. Statistics indicate that 95% of the persons that take the parental leave resume their work at the end of it (Marinescu, 2016). This support is extremely important for women that 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 segregation⁸, 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, cultures, and religions, 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.

As noticed in chapters 2 and 3, there are many similarities but also differences in the conditions and the barriers that women executives face in the two countries, due to the specificity of each society and culture.

In order to see clearly what the differences and similarities are, some more statistical information is required.

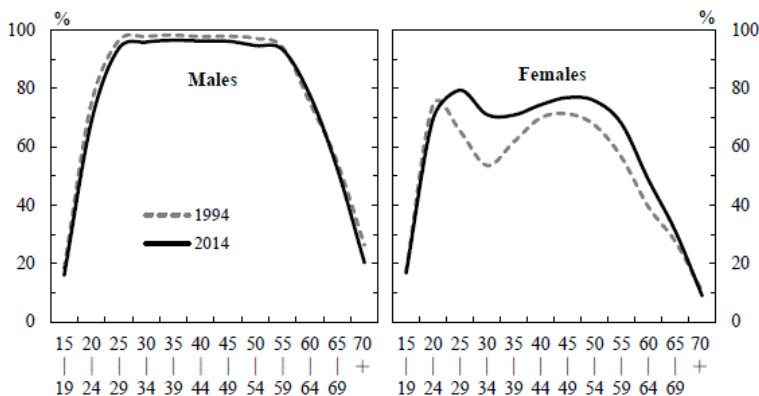
⁸ Horizontal segregation refers to masculine and feminine professions, while vertical segregation means exclusion of women in higher level jobs (even in typically female professions).

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)

Table 1. Statistical information: South Korea and Romania. Source: World Bank – www.worldbank.com, Trading Economics – www.tradingeconomics.com and European Commission – <http://ec.europa.eu/>, Instat - <http://www.instat.gov.al/>, OECD - <https://data.oecd.org/eduatt/adult-education-level.htm#indicator-chart>,

As it can be observed in the table above, there are almost no differences between the percentage of female population and female labor force, the fertility rate, indicating similar environments. Regarding the female labor force, it is important to mention that the difference in between the two countries comes 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).

This difference appears from the fact that the Japanese women leave the labor force when they get married or become mothers and then rejoin the labor force (generally in part time jobs) after their child has grown, creating an M-shaped curve in the female labor participation by age groups, as follows:



Source: Statistics Bureau, MIC.

Figure 1: Labor Force Participation Rate by Gender in Japan.
Source: Statistics Japan: <http://www.stat.go.jp/english/data>

Returning to the information from table 1, we can observe other differences in the number of female representation on boards, where Romania ranks ten times higher, in the number of female CEO's, where Romania is just around 3% above and in the number of self-employed women, where the difference is very high, more than 28 times.

Here it is also important to mention the fact that, based on a research made by Credit research agency Teikoku Databank in 2014, 50.9% of the Japanese women in top positions took the job from their husband or a blood relative. Only 34.7% built the business from scratch and only 7.9% are in their position due to internal promotions (Kameda, 2014).

Another aspect to take into consideration when analyzing the differences is the fact that Romania has a more relaxed work environment, shorter extra working hours, no compulsoriness to socialize after work, higher support in maternity leave and the security of still having the job when returning.

Regarding the gender pay gap, the last element in the table above, 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 fields they choose to 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 and live in the old model breadwinner / housewife style (Economist).

Japanese women, as the author Lefcadio Hearn said, are the most wonderful aesthetic products of Japan (16). 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 sanposagatte*, 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, this mentality also 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, p. 16), 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, in many cases they will give up trying, therefore, to reluct against this socio-cultural issue is the biggest challenge for female entrepreneurship in Japan.⁹

5. Support for female executives to maximize their potential

As mentioned before, in the last years the Japanese Government tried to encourage women with business and career aspirations through a series of policies, such as promoting women leaders, funding and support to nurture female entrepreneurs. 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 focused as much as the Japanese one is on women empowerment (GEDI, 2015).

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:

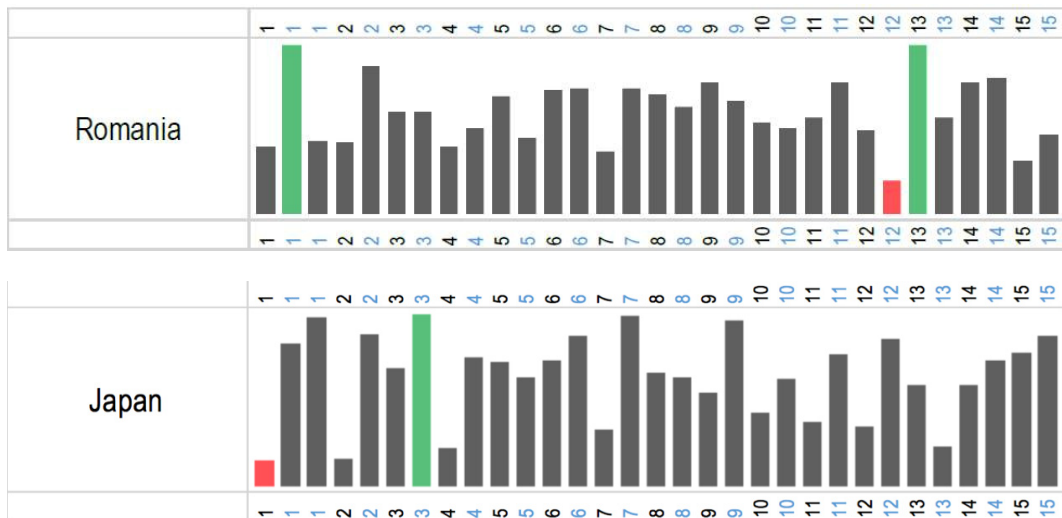
FEI Results by Country

Pillar	Indicator	Pillar	Indicator	Pillar	Indicator	Pillar	Indicator
1	Opportunity Recognition	4	Know an Entrepreneur	8	Highly Educated Owners	12	New Technology
1	Equal Rights	4	Internet and Networks	8	SME support and training	12	R&D Expenditure
1	Market Size	5	Executive Status	9	Innovativeness	13	Business Gazelles
2	Perc. Of Skills	5	Access to Childcare	9	Monopolized Markets	13	Female Leadership
2	Secondary Education	6	Opportunity Business	10	Entrepreneurship Ratio	14	Export Focus
3	Willingness to Start	6	Bus Freedom & Movement	10	Labor Force Parity	14	Globalization
3	Business Risk	7	Tech Sector Business	11	New Product	15	1st tier financing
		7	Tech Absorption	11	Technology Transfer	15	3rd tier financing

Individual level indicators are listed in black; Institutional level indicators are listed in blue

 Highest score  Lowest score

⁹ <http://gemconsortium.org/country-profile/76>



In order to propose ways to support the future women executives in both countries, a deep analysis of the indicators from the above tables could help us see the areas where each country is failing and work on creating policies and programs to fix them. 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 entrepreneurs 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 issue to be improved in both countries 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 the creation of more facilities is not easy to be made, another option could be softer immigration rules for nannies, in Japan's case. Or perhaps implement the usage of the "Yokohama method" (Fumiko Hayashi, the mayor of Yokohama, managed to reduce, after her election in 2009, the city's child-care waiting list, the longest in the country at that moment, to zero in just over three years. She managed to do that by bringing private firms into the sector and creating the day care facilities that were necessary) in many other locations.

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).

However, the 2014 Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) report indicated as challenges for the Japanese entrepreneurs the social and cultural pressure and negative influence that impacts them greatly and pushes them to give up the idea of entrepreneurship

(GEM, Japan). This indicates the fact that even if there are many policies and support from the government, the aspects that have to change are the mentality of the society regarding working women and the Japanese corporate world, which for the time being is more appropriate for men and not attractive enough for women.

In the case of Romanian entrepreneurs (not only for women, but for men as well) the next three elements: more supportive government policies, promotion of entrepreneurial education and easier access to finance sources, were the main challenges to focus on in the near future (GEM, Romania). Another issue to work with are the physical infrastructure (roads, utilities, waste disposal, and communication), aspects which support the new developing firms and which are in need of urgent improvements, Romania ranking the lowest in between the countries from the same category, as follows: Croatia, Hungary, Lithuania and Poland (GEM, Romania).

In the end, it is important to mention the fact 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 not quit 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 *shikataganai* (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 a little better on this level, with stricter protective laws and real implementation, support for women to take parental leave and come back 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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