

'License to drink': White-collar female workers and Japan's urban night space

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Ethnography

2015, Vol. 16(1) 25–50

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DOI: 10.1177/1466138113506632

eth.sagepub.com



Abstract

This article examines the contradictory processes that have given women a greater access to Japan's urban night space as the increasingly flexible work environment offered them white-collar employment opportunities and enhanced women's economic resources, which in turn generated shifts in commercial practices to de-problematize drinking for women and a proliferation of diverse drinking venues. This study contends that these changes, which are largely commercially driven and not necessarily reflecting a stronger social acceptance of women drinking in public late at night by the broader Japanese society, nonetheless legitimize women's place in the once male-dominated urban night space by recognizing women's contributions to the night-time economy as consumers, hence affirming also the importance of white-collar work for women as a valid realm.

Keywords

drinking, flexible work, gender, Japan, white-collar work, urban night space

Asano Ayumi, Ebata Erina and Fujita Fukuyo were considering whether to order another bottle of wine when Asano's mobile telephone rang. It was her husband, calling to assure Asano that he had returned home to attend to their child as they had previously agreed, and so she could have her turn to stay out late that Friday evening in July 2011. On hearing the news, Ebata instantly ordered a second bottle of wine for the women to while away another hour in the *izakaya* (Japanese-style restaurant) in Gaienmae before they headed for Shinjuku's Kabukicho district to check out Club Tosca,¹ a new host club that Fujita had read about on the internet several months ago but which the women had been too busy to visit until that evening.

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To their relief, the 'top hosts' were as entertaining as the reviews had said. For three hours, these young, able-bodied, fashionably-attired men constantly complimented and teased the three women, listened and sang to them, joked and danced with them, as well as drank with them. The hosts in other clubs the women had visited had also provided similar services, but those at Club Tosca were particularly gentle and attentive, and less aggressive too in persuading the women to order expensive champagne. For these reasons, the three friends willingly ordered more bottles of champagne than they had planned, costing them a total of 1.6 million Japanese yen (US\$16,648).

It was an expensive visit for the three office workers – and especially for the ethnographer – but they felt the money was worth spending. Forty-year-old Fujita is single and keeps a demanding job as manager of overseas sales, while 42-year-old Ebata is a divorced single mother who works as recruitment consultant, and Asano, a 47-year-old mother of two, works as senior manager at an international audit firm. Since they often work long hours and are required to drink regularly with co-workers and business associates, these women have very little time and space to themselves, and limited opportunities to spend the money they earn. Going out drinking with people unconnected to the office is thus relaxing, fun and productive. Whenever they would meet, which occurs five to seven times a year, the three friends would eat and talk over drinks and cigarettes till very late, usually in a small and quiet bar that caters mostly to a female clientele. Occasionally, they would extend their night out by watching a strip show, going to an SM club, having an erotic massage or visiting a host club.² Of these, the women find host clubs particularly 'therapeutic' (*iyashii*) and 'liberating' (*kaiho-sareru*), as they are able to experience a momentary reversal of the prevailing gender order in the workplace and the wider Japanese society – where women are in a subordinate position relative to men – by having men perform servitude to women instead. These women seek mainly 'to play'³ (*asobu*), that is, to drink and engage in drinking-related entertainment activities, which they see as posing little or no real threat to their work or family life. After all, a diversity of drinking and entertainment services is available for women in Japan today, assuring them it is acceptable and legitimate for them to do the same.

It is not uncommon nowadays to see white-collar female workers in many cities across Japan drinking till late at night, in the company of men, in women-only groups or alone. On Friday evenings especially, not only are pubs, bars and *izakayas* in busy business districts and quieter parts of cities packed with hordes of white-collar workers both male and female, but many small venues too are crowded with women. If one takes a walk in certain districts such as Dotonburi in Osaka and Kabukicho in Tokyo (see Figure 1) late at night and follows the directions on the gigantic billboards prominently displaying countless countenances of fashionably attired young men, one would also find women drinking and flirting with male hosts. Sights such as these would have turned heads and drawn heavy criticisms from observers in Japan three decades ago, when drinking late at night in the public arena was a form of 'play' (*asobi*) widely acceptable for



Figure 1. Host clubs in Tokyo. Photo by author.

and regarded as an important part of the lives of working men but not women, for whom *asobi* in the public sphere was confined to activities during the daytime, and in their roles as wives, mothers and participants in the local communities where they resided (Allison, 1994; LeBlanc, 1999).

Changes began to take place in Japan's urban night space after the country slipped into a prolonged recession from the early 1990s, as flexible work gradually replaced the practice of lifetime employment to become the dominant work norm and drew many women into the white-collar workforce. This later prompted many businesses – especially producers of alcoholic beverages and drinking establishments – to re-focus their marketing strategies to tap the enhanced economic resources of working women. Having a greater access to the urban night space to engage in activities that were once symbolic of masculinity and becoming active and significant contributors to the country's night-time service economy thus affirm the importance of white-collar work for women.

This article traces these transformations by following the after-work drinking activities of 56 white-collar female workers in several cities across Japan during 80 months of fieldwork⁴ since January 2002. It interprets the transformations as the unintended and accidental consequences of the flexibilization of work in post-bubble Japan which has re-configured the symbolic significance of the urban night space from a sphere once defined mainly by gender into a realm that is less gendered and more market-oriented. This article contends that flexible work can have a positive and meaningful effect on urban transformations that shape the lives

of individuals occupying a subordinate position in society by opening up new possibilities for them to re-arrange the unequal power dynamics in the gender order of a society and mitigate their dependent, structural position in that society to reposition themselves from being marginalized subjects to becoming active players and important agents in the night-time economy in post-bubble Japan.

Re-visiting flexible work and urban nightlife with a gendered lens

Richard Sennett's (2000: 176) short essay 'Street and Office: Two Sources of Identity' offers a poignant account of how 'the street' as a market space for consumption has become an important source of identity for individuals to cope with the frustrations, alienation and 'disturbed identities' in an increasingly flexible work environment, where 'the office' or the workplace decreases in importance as a site for developing any stable identity or coherent biography. Short-term work and frequent job change are said to prevent many individuals from experiencing any sense of loyalty to 'chameleon corporations', and also from having much involvement with co-workers (2000: 178). However, Sennett notes that it is precarious for individuals to rely on 'the street' as an alternative source for alleviating the disenfranchisement they might be experiencing or for identity-making, since capitalism too has become 'flexible' today with businesses constantly revising their strategies in their search for profitability to create an 'ever-shifting, external market reality' that 'has also disturbed identities based on place' and is thus hardly dependable as a source of security or stability for one's self-identity (2000: 176).

While Sennett's accounts are insightful, they are limited in offering a meaningful understanding of the diverse ways in which a flexible work environment can shape the lives of different categories of individuals in a given society and across varying cultural contexts. The impact of flexible work is true mostly of men, and not women. Work has cultural meanings, and the corporate workplace is rarely constructed as the main site for women to acquire or establish their social identity and a sense of belonging. The socio-historical construction of gender in a society, as Sherry B. Ortner (1999: 224) notes, plays a critical role in shaping women's labor patterns, economic conditions, consumption practices and position in society differently from those of men's, and a shift in any of these factors could in turn also transform individuals' positions, statuses and identities in ways that problematize established boundaries of gender difference. The opportunities and challenges generated by flexible work for men vary markedly from those for women, and so shifts in work patterns can lead to consumption patterns that could positively transform individuals' gendered positions and statuses (Papagaroufali, 1992).

Studies have documented how the flexible work regime in Japan has led to the rise of insecurity, anxiety and even a sense of hopelessness among many Japanese, but they are extensively focused on men and youths (Allison, 2012; Brinton, 2011; Miura, 2005). The recession in post-bubble Japan has also been described as an

'ice age' for women seeking employment in a shrinking job market (Miller, 1998, 2003), but scholarship has yet to explore the white-collar work opportunities that had emerged for women, or consider how women as historically 'non-core' employees have never depended on a corporate workplace to establish their social identity nor develop much attachment to their employer as Japanese men would, or used to do. As Mary C. Brinton (1993: 87) comments, the education system and corporate policies in Japan during the 1980s were designed to prepare women for family roles rather than the pursuit of professional careers. Ann Waswo (1996: 154) also observes that the white-collar work opportunities available to women during the bubble decade were based on employers' perception of women as 'an under-utilized resource' and a 'cheap source of labor'. Women's labor has always been 'flexible'. The lack of a sense of belonging to an employer is thus less problematic for them than their male counterparts. While the flexible work environment generates as much job insecurity and anxiety for women as it does for men, women's *flexibility* was probably one of the chief reasons for the higher rate of increase in the number of female corporate employees than that of white-collar male workers since the 1980s, despite the economic recession and the shrinking job market in Japan.

Keeping a white-collar job means being exposed to long hours of work and having to engage in after-work drinking. While this means women are spending more time outside the home, they also gain the ability to appropriate the legitimation once dominated by men to justify drinking as a necessary extension of work. As the commercial sector of the night-time service economy began tapping into women as a new market of consumers, it also generated shifts in women's consumption practices and lifestyles. As Linda McDowell (1997: 7) notes in her study on the influx of women into London's investment banking industry in the post-Thatcher era of neoliberal capitalism, women are presented with serious challenges in 'a man's world' that still restricts women's professional career advancement, but since 'the City had opened its doors to women' it has offered new opportunities that expand the limits of women's work, consumption, social relations and lifestyles in ways that had long been denied to all but a minority of professional women. In the case of Japan, the recognition that many white-collar female workers have gained as viable consumers helps affirm the importance of white-collar work for this gendered category of the population whose 'proper place' in Japanese society has historically been designated to the private realm of domesticity and not in the public sphere of salaried work (LeBlanc, 1999). There has thus been a positive change that has enabled women to gain a stronger sense of self in the once-masculine, urban night space (Ho, 2012b; Ueno, 1998).

Sennett is right in pointing out the negative impact of flexible work and also of flexible capitalism on destabilizing individuals' sense of self and identity. Yet, the profit motives of commercial practices and urban transformations can also offer new possibilities for economic and social realizations, and for broadening horizons that present certain socially disadvantaged individuals with key resources that represent – in Jonathan Ilan's (2012: 6) words – a 'solution' to their position at the bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy. While a study by Paul Chatterton and

Robert Hollands (2002) on the transformation of British cities since the late 1980s does not discuss the issue of gender, it indicates how the widespread acquisition of traditional pubs by large corporations led to the permanent replacement of pubs by trendy, 'exclusive' and 'up-market' bars, nightclubs and music venues to become the 'mainstream' night-time entertainment that targets the enhanced resources of young working adults, both female and male. This not only gave the young British adults greater recognition and legitimacy as consumers vis-à-vis older men who used to dominate the British pub scene in the past, but also turned urban nightlife into a dynamic, culturally creative and productive sphere. Similarly, this article argues that white-collar female workers in Japan can also be viewed as having gained from their greater participation in urban nightlife the ability to re-position themselves as marginalized individuals in a society that persistently places women in a subordinate position relative to men.

White-collar work opportunities for women in Japan's post-bubble era of flexible work

Japan's urban nightlife has always been dynamic and vibrant in so far as all my informants could recall. However, half of the 56 women who started working in the 1980s did not experience the dynamism and vibrancy in the same way as their male counterparts or younger women entering the workforce after the mid-1990s. Asano remembers the frequent late-night drinking she had with co-workers and business clients, in addition to the long hours of audit work she did in her first job as trainee in a medium-sized accounting firm in 1986. Though sleep deprived and exhausted, Asano would often meet up with friends for a second or third round of drinking to relax and have some fun. With Japan's economy expanding at a phenomenal pace, jobs were in abundance, and all of Asano's friends had money to spend, which they often did in bars and clubs that were open till dawn. Tokyo was a 'party-town', Asano says. Yet, there were limits to how much women could party. A typical evening was a round of drinks with colleagues immediately after work, but the female co-workers would part company with the men who often adjourned elsewhere for subsequent rounds of drinking, in places known as *mizushobai* (literally, 'the water business', which refers to entertainment for men) where women worked – as waitresses, hostesses or prostitutes – catering to male pleasure. The women went instead to 'gender neutral' places such as restaurants, karaoke lounges and café bars which Asano says were 'uncomfortable' at times because these were also pick-up joints for men. Out of curiosity, Asano had – like several other women under study – ventured to a few of the limited number of host clubs available at that time, but found them 'too expensive and unfriendly towards young women'. As she recalls,

We did not feel welcomed at all... even if we could afford to pay for the expensive drinks. What amused me the most was that several hosts even dared tell us not to play in host clubs which they said were places for 'bad women'.

Asano explains to me that even bars and clubs were commonly viewed as venues for 'bad women'. Like several other informants I interviewed, Asano and her friends had on numerous occasions been mistaken as prostitutes, 'actresses' in the pornographic industry, or women eager to have sex with men, especially foreigners. Tokyo at night might have been a 'party town' in the 1980s, but Asano calls the city's nightlife an arena where only *otoko no asobi* (male play) was legitimate, and one in which *onna no asobi* (female play) had no rightful place.

What Asano meant was there is a greater tolerance in Japan of men engaging in activities such as drinking and visiting entertainment establishments such as hostess clubs, or even having paid sex, than of women, which many studies have also observed (Allison, 1994: 101; Borovoy, 2005: 45–6). This is due to the socio-historical construction of gender in Japan which has since the early days of modernization at the beginning of the Meiji period in 1868 defined the public realm of salaried work as masculine and relegated women's proper place in society to the private realm of domesticity. The public sphere has been bifurcated from the private sphere by gender and occupation, with each being segregated further spatially and temporally. Drinking and late-night entertainment activities were not only widely regarded as an important and necessary extension of work for men, but urban nightlife was, at the height of Japan's economic success during the 1980s, also strongly symbolic of productive, corporate masculinity, and perceived as the exclusive domain of the valorized, middle-class masculine ideal of the *sarariman* (white-collar male workers), who have been widely depicted as drinking and playing in bars, hostess clubs and karaoke lounges to forge male bonding, revitalize themselves to enhance work productivity, and reinforce the corporate identity of their employers whose entertainment expenses were endorsed by the state in the form of tax rebates (Aida, 1972; Allison, 1994).

The dearth of drinking venues and late-night entertainment places for women in the 1980s shows how commercial practices mirrored the gendered nature of work in Japanese society where only male, and not female, office workers were regarded as *shakaijin*⁵ (working adults). Despite a considerable increase in the number of white-collar female workers from the 1960s to the 1980s, and despite also an increase in the number of women being offered management-track careers during the same period of time (Ho, 2012b: 90), few companies took their female employees' career pursuits seriously (Roberts, 2005). For my informants, to be regarded as 'non-core' members of the corporate workplace was to be excluded from most of the late-night drinking activities engaged in by men. The legitimate form of 'play' for women then was confined to the day, and in public places such as schools, markets, shopping malls and the local communities, where women interacted in their expected gender roles as wives, mothers and caregivers (LeBlanc, 1999; Hendry, 1997).

The situation was to change from the mid-1990s. As more companies replaced full-time positions with temporary and part-time ones to save on staff costs during the recession, Japan's white-collar male workforce gradually shrank while the white-collar female labor force expanded.⁶ According to official statistics, there were 18.34 million female corporate workers in 1990 (JILPT, 2013: 21). By 2010,

the figure had jumped 27 percent to 23.29 million. However, women accounted for 42.6 percent of all company employees in 2010, and they occupied mostly the lower strata of the corporate job market. Only 45.3 percent of all female corporate employees in 2010 held full-time positions, a stark contrast to 80.1 percent for men (2013: 33).

These statistics suggest that the changes to the composition of Japan's workforce did not alter the traditional gender hierarchy in the corporate workplace, but that women continue to be perceived by many employers as an under-utilized, expendable and cheap source of labor, as they were during the 1980s when an unprecedented number of women were offered white-collar jobs including management-track careers to help fuel the rapidly growing economy (Lam, 1993: 198). The increased recruitment of women in the post-bubble period was also endorsed by the government, though this time its concern was to overcome a labor shortfall due to an aging population and declining births, which was exacerbated by an increased withdrawal of young Japanese and adult men from the workforce due to frustrations and disappointments generated by an increasingly flexible work regime (Brinton, 2011; Genda, 2001).

As I learned from the executives of 26 companies responsible for hiring, few employers had consciously intended to reduce the number of male employees and increase that of female workers. More women are being hired because they are more 'employ-able' than men. As explained by Tanaka Takehiko, the chief operating officer of a company with 700 employees:

Times have changed . . . women fit better with our corporate strategy in today's competitive environment, which is to focus on staff productivity and the company's bottom line. Unlike men, women are more willing to work for a lower salary, settle for a lesser position, and accept changes to their daily tasks with few or no complaints.

This is true of many women I interviewed, who admit they were – and still are – willing to work on less favorable terms than their male peers out of the need to achieve or maintain economic independence in a difficult economic environment. I know many men and women who lost their job during the prolonged recession, but, interestingly, only my male informants say they had felt 'embarrassed' to take up flexible job assignments even though they needed to support their family. Women, on the one hand, generally saw part-time and temporary jobs as opportunities to make ends meet, as a temporary measure to tide over hard times in order to maintain some degree of economic independence that they had been accustomed to. For some others, such as Ebata and Fujita, flexible work had served as a springboard to help them secure a full-time position at a later stage.

Sixteen out of 34 women in this study who were working in the mid-1990s had survived the recession in a similar way, while 12 women among the remaining 22 who entered the labor market after 1995 had also settled for a temporary or part-time position as their first job. These many women have more than merely survived. In crossing the private-public divide to enter and remain in the male-dominated public

sphere of salaried work, they have gained a higher degree of economic independence, with some even climbing up the corporate ladder to become corporate managers. Women managers may still constitute a small minority of all corporate managers in Japan today, accounting for less than 10 percent, but their number has nonetheless tripled in percentage terms since the 1980s (Rebick, 2005: 118). Whether they are in a managerial position or otherwise, having a white-collar job has altered women's life trajectories, and led them to develop aspirations and understandings of self based more on work, and less on – or together with – the family (Ho, 2012b). As salaried work increases in importance, it also intensifies the need for good social networks that could offer opportunities for women to attain jobs outside their existing workplace, and to establish relations with people unconnected to the office or the home with whom they could engage in a range of consumption activities such as shopping, dining and drinking after work, which many women have come to regard giving them the necessary 'personal space' (*jibun no kukan*) and 'personal time' (*jibun no jikan*) that suit their demanding lifestyle. Flexible work can thus be seen as a blessing in disguise for women in Japan.

And as the changing job market is altering women's work patterns, social relations and lifestyles, other broader transformations are also taking place in post-bubble Japan. One prominent change is the growing emphasis on work-life balance among many individuals who view work and leisure as more important than marrying and forming a family. As statistics indicate, fewer Japanese women – as well as men – are pursuing marriages, more are marrying late, more are willing to initiate divorce when marital situation turns for the worse, and more married couples are having fewer or no children.⁷ Some studies suggest that more married women are demanding sexual fulfillment in marriage, the lack of which has prompted some to seek sexual gratification outside marriage with men who are not their marital spouse and through commercial sex (Hatano and Shimazaki, 1997; Ho, 2008). More recently, a growing number of middle-aged and older women in Japan have begun asserting themselves by visibly displaying their interest in South Korea's popular culture – namely, television dramas and their idolizing of Korean actors, singers and music groups – by attending concerts and fan events late at night (Ho, 2012a). Some of these changes have been said to be signs of increasing individualization in Japan, particularly among women, leading Karen Kelsky (2001: 90) to describe the post-bubble period in Japan as *josei no jidai* (women's era).

Commercial de-problematization of drinking for women

Signs of 'greater individuality' have indeed emerged in post-bubble Japan, as they have elsewhere outside Japan where sites for establishing social identities and the objects of collective rituals are said to have shifted from the family, the company and the local community towards the market and the individual (Hochschild, 2003: 43). In Japan, however, the trend was commercially initiated and ideologically instituted. Discourses on the 'individual' began proliferating from the mid-1980s

following a series of educational reforms implemented by the state as an ideological tool, as a response to the business community's call for the government to educate the future generation of workers to be 'ready' to work and be more competitive as soon as they enter the workforce, and help corporations save on staff training cost (Cave, 2001). Discourses such as *jikohakken* (self-discovery), *ujitsukan* (self-fulfillment) and *jibunrashii seikatsu* (leading a lifestyle of one's own choice) soon permeated into almost every aspect of life, from schools and the workplace, to public forums and the consumer market (Dore and Sako, 1998). Many Japanese, my informants included, gradually embraced these as new ideals that are better suited to their needs to help them make sense of their lives in recessionary times when neither the state nor the company could offer solace or security. Eventually, businesses too incorporated these discourses into their marketing strategies by demasculinizing products, services and places, including alcoholic beverages, apartments, bars (especially *izakayas*), cigars, cigarettes, computers, diving, energy drinks, golf, professional photographic equipment, sailing, sport utility vehicles and love hotels (Ho, 2008: 39). Interestingly, it was during this period of segmented marketing that women gained greater recognition as 'individuals', albeit as viable consumers.

Japan's beer makers such as Asahi, Kirin, Sapporo and Suntory were the first among alcohol producers to aggressively target women from the mid-1990s by introducing *happoshu* (low-malt beer) and a diversity of low-alcohol products in trendy designs and colorful cans, and promoting these products using commercials that portrayed female models as drinkers in their own right (see Figure 2) and not as objects of male desire, which women were often represented as in the past. Encouraged by the effectiveness of their business strategies in expanding the feminine market,⁸ brewers continue to target women even today by associating products aimed at both men and women with sports and adventure, as well as with nature, freshness and innocence. Some brewers later extended this new marketing practice to include other alcoholic beverages that they also produce. Suntory launched a new campaign in early 2009 to promote whisky to women by portraying actress Kato Koyuki⁹ in commercials as an independent, confident and knowledgeable drinker of whisky who enjoys a whisky-soda mix known as *Highball*. This representation departed markedly from those in past whisky commercials, in which women were mostly depicted as housewives serving whisky to men, preparing whisky for male guests, or drinking alone while waiting for their husband to return home from work. *Highball* reportedly became immensely popular in Japan among men and women, though more strongly among the latter, whose demand led to a burgeoning of establishments serving the drink, from 15,000 to more than 40,000 across Japan during the first five months of 2009 (*The Japan Times*, 25 September 2009).

Highball continues to be popular even today. During my visit to Tokyo in June 2013, I found the drink available almost everywhere: from cheap eateries to high-end bars, with women being the main consumers. Many venues have become *Highball* bars where customers are offered a wide selection of local and imported



Figure 2. Woman in beer ad displayed in an izakaya. Photo by author.

whisky (see Figure 3). This perhaps explains why Suntory has persisted in maintaining the new image of women in its commercials to this day, with the latest launch in Spring 2013 portraying actress and singer Miho Kanno also as an active drinker enjoying whisky in the company of fellow white-collar workers. Suntory's improved business prospects enabled the company to successfully raise US\$4.7 billion when it listed the shares of its non-alcoholic beverage operations on the Tokyo Stock Exchange in June 2013 (Yamaguchi, 30 May 2013). Sasaki Kuniharu, a director at one of Japan's largest advertising firms handling the accounts of several brewers including Suntory's, would not rule out the possibility of his client listing its remaining operations in the future, attributing the 'renewed investors' confidence in the growth of Suntory's alcoholic operations' to Japanese women having actually 'saved our clients' business'.

Makers of *shochu*¹⁰ (an alcoholic drink distilled from barley, sweet potatoes and various types of vegetables) too have benefitted significantly, though only after the



Figure 3. Highball bar. Photo by author.

'health craze' had begun in Japan from the early 2000s when the demand for a diversity of health products became widely popular (*The Japan Times*, 20 July 2004). *Shochu* producers saw this as an opportune moment to also promote *shochu* as a 'healthy drink' suitable for women, in the hope of revitalizing sales and shedding the image of *shochu* as a cheap, low quality beverage, given that *shochu* was for a very long time perceived as a drink for the poor and impoverished, and drunk during festivities mostly in the southern parts of Japan (Higuchi et al., 2007: 1849). With the government's agreement to reduce taxes on various food materials, *shochu* makers quickly expanded their production to also distill *shochu* from buckwheat, chestnut, green pepper milk and pumpkin (NTA, 2006: 40). New *shochu* bars soon began sprouting across the country, and a wider variety of *shochu* too was added to the menus of many *izakayas*. The '*shochu* fever' – as one informant describes it – was so intense during the first six months of 2005 that I received

more invitations to *shochu* parties than I could possibly attend, and participated in only 47 in Tokyo and three in Osaka. Among the most enthusiastic of the new ‘*shochu* converts’ was Asano, who had insisted on having almost every gathering with Ebata and Fujita at a place where she could try a ‘new’ flavor of *shochu*. I recall her telling me at that time that ‘drinking has never been so fun and exciting as it is now’. The ‘*shochu* fever’ had subsided a little during my recent visit to Tokyo, but the drink – like *Highball* – appeared to have found a permanent place in the menus of many establishments with an alcohol license.

Similarly, another beverage, *nihonshu*¹¹ (Japanese rice wine commonly known as *sake*), also had a facelift. The successful attempts made by *shochu* producers convinced many *sakaguras* or producers of *nihonshu* that it was time to turn their business around by modernizing the image of the beverage from being the typical drink for *oyaji* (middle-aged or older men) and a ‘traditional drink’ consumed during festivities and formal occasions. A variety of fruit-flavored *nihonshu* cocktails were introduced in fancy packaging and varying quantities to attract young women. Connoisseurs were hired to introduce food recipes that include *nihonshu* in magazines widely read by housewives and those read by working women. Courses were also offered to groom female sommeliers to organize *nihonshu*-tasting events for women. *Sakaguras* that had expanded overseas engaged the services of western experts and mobilized media reports to persuade Japanese customers of the global popularity and ‘cosmopolitan’ image of *nihonshu*, an image perceived by many as appealing to women. Several *sakaguras* went further to recruiting women to market their products. Togashi Michihiko’s 160-year-old family business was among *sakaguras* that had nearly filed for bankruptcy in the early 2000s had the 44-year-old not reacted quickly to redesign the company’s logo and introduce trendy packaging to target women and young adults. As Togashi remarks,

The old way of doing business was good for the old days when men ruled the world and women served men (*laughs*). Our world is different now. Japanese men alone cannot keep us alive today. My family business would have vanished had women not come to our rescue (*laughs heartily*).

Of all the efforts made by producers of alcoholic beverages in Japan, the modernization of *nihonshu* was probably the most significant given the drink’s strong association with ‘Japanese tradition’ and the historical image of *nihonshu* as a symbol of masculinity. *Nihonshu* was, and still is, the main drink used in Japanese *Shinto*-style wedding ceremonies. It is also the only alcoholic beverage served during *sumo* wrestling training and matches where there are strict codes on purity that bar women from participating in the sport and from approaching the wrestling ring. Unlike the past when only men were permitted to work in the production process of *nihonshu*, many *sakaguras* today are offering ‘training courses’ for a fee to anyone who is interested in participating in the making of *nihonshu*. That one of the most conservative and resistant industries has undergone radical changes to acclimatize to the changed economic environment by promoting

nihonshu to women marks a significant shift in the symbolic gendering of alcohol in Japan.

With many of these commercial entrepreneurs having joined in the trend of de-masculinizing alcoholic drinks to expand their female clientele, importers of wine – a business that is dominated by Japan's four large brewers – have had little difficulty in raising both the quantity and variety of their imports, as well as selling them to women. Wine has for a long time been regarded by many Japanese as a drink that represents 'high culture' and 'sophistication'. Japanese women find this image particularly appealing, and have been the main targets for promoters of wine-tasting events, some of whom have been recruiting female sommeliers to further stimulate consumption among working women and housewives. Japan's wine market today is said to be dominated by women (Vinexpo, 4 February 2011), whose consumption has raised the country's total wine consumption from an annual average of one liter per person in the mid-1990s to nearly 3.0 liters per person in 2009 (USDA, 2011).

The new images of alcoholic beverages were purely augmented by business decisions with the state's endorsement for coping with difficult economic realities that happened to have positively sanctioned drinking for women. Women as a category were an untapped market of consumers that presented themselves as an ideal solution to a practical problem at the right time, for both the industry and the state. Given that alcohol tax has consistently been the fifth or sixth largest source of tax revenue in Japan,¹² the alcohol industry has always received strong support from the state, in the form of tax rebates, reduced taxes on some materials used to produce alcoholic beverages and cuts in export duties. The National Tax Agency, for example, further deregulated the industry in August 2006 when it announced plans to ensure the 'sound development of the liquor industry' in its 'shift from quantity to quality' by easing restrictions on the issuance of liquor licenses to permit alcohol sales through a diversity of retail outlets including convenience stores, supermarkets and drugstores, and also to allow drinking establishments to operate in areas outside those permitted by the country's zoning laws (NTA, 2010: 48). The deregulation plan was to trigger an even more radical, feminizing change to Japan's urban nightscape, which had been transformed considerably since the mid-1990s by the proliferation of a wide variety of drinking establishments.

Re-interpreting the symbolic significance of drinking and alcoholic beverages

Why have many women responded positively to the improved commercial representations when women who drink are historically portrayed in Japan – especially in the media – rather disparagingly as alcoholics and 'bad women' who work in the *mizushobai* industry such as hostesses (Gotoh, 1989)? Despite these conventional perceptions, and despite also that women still are 'non-core' players in the corporate workplace, white-collar work has enabled women to appropriate the

legitimation that after-work drinking is as an important part and necessary extension of their job as it is for their male counterparts. As Asano and her friends often remark, drinking is 'natural' and 'necessary' for working adults, both male and female. More importantly, the new representations of women drinking had occurred at a time when the meaning and significance of drinking for white-collar workers have also changed radically for both men and women, from being a predominantly group-oriented, corporate-based activity to becoming an individual-focused and self-interested pursuit. Employers in Japan today may still expect employees to go out drinking for the purpose of enhancing relations and work productivity, but flexible work has over the years led to high staff turnover in many companies and hence weakened employer-employee bonds considerably so that drinking today becomes a means for individuals – especially corporate managers – to manage competitive, disharmonious and conflicting relations among workers in order to keep one's job, protect one's position and improve one's promotion prospects. Numerous managers – female and male – have said to me that drinking with colleagues is a costly but necessary means of protecting their jobs because of the substantial amount of time, money and emotional labor they are required to invest. Some describe it as a futile 'second shift' because the group solidarity forged through drinking lasts only momentarily, since neither they nor their subordinates expect to remain in one workplace for more than five years.

At the same time, drinking with non-colleagues has gained in importance for developing new friendships and establishing social networks to enhance one's job prospects and for personal pleasure. Long working hours and expectations of after work drinking with co-workers leave many office workers with little time for relaxation and pleasure so that the spatial and temporal zone between the office and the home becomes a valuable personal time and space for some individuals to unwind, think and reflect, and others to play and reinvigorate themselves. Given that drinking is among the few activities that are widely available late at night, it therefore constitutes the main, if not only, form of 'retail therapy' – as several informants describe it – for those with ample disposable income to spend on themselves, particularly those with few or no familial commitments. Married women and those who are mothers like Asano and Fujita, whose jobs have enabled them to contribute to the household budget and to negotiate egalitarian arrangements on domestic chores and child-rearing duties, view it as their entitlement to having 'time-off' from domestic duties to drink and play with friends and social contacts. As Ueno Chizuko (1998: 236) notes, working women need this 'third space' (*daisan kukan*) that is connected to neither work nor the family which they can call their own.

The significance of drinking, however, is more than a functional one for women. Emboldened by the transformed symbolic association of alcohol with masculinity into 'gender-neutral' products by consumer marketing, many women are strategically reconfiguring the meaning of different alcoholic beverages and actively utilize drinking as a site for negotiating new self-identities. Despite brewers' intentions, most of my informants still find it difficult to not perceive beer as a 'masculine' and 'group drink', which they would consume to 'blend in' with male co-workers, and

as the first beverage to drink in a group for toasting. Beer is not regarded as ‘an individual’s drink’ that these women would consume on their own or with female friends throughout an entire evening. As 31-year-old marketing manager Nishihara Narumi in Fukuoka explains, stronger beverages such as wine, whisky and alcoholic cocktails are drinks for ‘the individual’ and for the ‘serious working adult’ that she – as well as several other women I know – would feel proud to be labeled as a ‘heavy drinker’ (*shugo*) so that they would be highly regarded and even respected in certain lines of work, especially in sales and marketing where women managers are required to manage subordinates who are mostly male. Fifty-two-year-old sales director Tobayashi Masako, for example, was playfully renamed as Osako Tsuyoshi by her peers and subordinates as a pun on being a *osake tsuyoi* (strong drinker) – that is, of ‘traditionally male drinks’ like beer, whisky and *nihonshu* – which Tobayashi describes as a critical image for commanding respect from her team of sales staff who are mostly male.

While some women train themselves to develop a strong tolerance for alcohol consumption, some others devote a substantial amount of their time to learning as much as they can about alcoholic drinks – particularly wine, champagne, *nihonshu* and *shochu* – to groom themselves as ‘connoisseurs’ and ‘experts’. I know a number of corporate executives who would make an annual ‘pilgrimage’ to a vineyard in Australia, Europe, South America or the US to expand on their knowledge about wine and international cuisines, information which they believe to be ‘useful’ for enhancing their image as corporate executives in business dealings, in addition to projecting themselves as cosmopolitan individuals. Several other women take to *shochu* in a similar way, utilizing its newly constructed image as a ‘healthy’ drink to construct themselves as individuals with discriminating taste. For Asano, *shochu* is a ‘feminine’ drink in contrast to beer and *nihonshu*, not because it is a drink for women but because the new image of *shochu* better reflects women’s ‘concern about the quality and health benefits of food and drinks than men’.

Perhaps the most innovative practice that I observed during my fieldwork is how one-third of my informants are contemporizing and individualizing the manner in which they consume *nihonshu*: by pouring their own drinks in the same way that they drink wine and champagne instead of pouring for others, which is still widely practiced in Japan (Befu, 1986: 115). Forty-six-year-old lawyer Hamashita Norie from Osaka offers an interesting explanation for the individualized manner of drinking *nihonshu*, which she describes as signifying the egalitarian nature of relations, unlike the ‘traditional’ way of pouring for others – which men usually do – which acknowledges and promotes hierarchy in relations. Obviously, these women still pour *nihonshu* for others when they drink with co-workers and business associates. They would, however, switch to pouring for themselves in the company of female friends and close acquaintances, a custom which I have not witnessed among men during the course of my fieldwork in Japan.

Shifts in commercial marketing may have de-masculinized the symbolic meaning of various alcoholic beverages, but many women have taken this opportunity to turn their consumption practices into strategic, productive and innovative activities

to re-invent new, meaningful identities that few could have imagined before. By re-interpreting the meanings of various alcoholic beverages and modifying the manner in which they consume certain drinks, these office workers are further altering the symbolic significance of alcoholic beverages and of drinking for women in ways that can help them re-align some of the asymmetries in their lives in order to match their perceived and desired self-identities as white-collar workers. Women's consumption of alcohol is thus strategic, infused with purpose and meaning, and a symbolic act that has – to borrow Pierre Bourdieu's (1977: 177) words – the 'effect of transforming' social status, as well as establishing difference. Instead of being a source of 'disturbed identities' as Sennett depicts, the 'ever-shifting market reality out there' has been a source of self-affirmation for many white-collar female workers in Japan.

De-masculinizing late-night drinking venues through spatial shifts

Similar 'liberating' dimensions are also evident in women's response to the changes to drinking venues. The most prominent of these changes was the 'gentrification' of *izakayas* from being a predominantly 'male' space to becoming a 'women-friendly' environment. Led by large chain operations, *izakayas* furnished their interiors with trendy decors and expanded their menus to include food and drink items popular among women. These helped several *izakaya* groups expand their operations despite the prolonged recession. Sanko Foods,¹³ for example, grew from owning several *izakayas* in 1995 to a total of 270 today. The Watami Group¹⁴ too expanded swiftly after segmenting its business into three categories of *izakaya* chains: the low-end *Watami* chain for young adults and low-income customers; the mid-priced, trendier *Za-Watami* chain for working adults, with women in mind; and the high-end *Waminchi* chain for customers willing to pay for an exquisite menu of food and alcoholic beverages. The Group grew from owning a handful of *izakayas* in the early 1990s to operating more than 600 outlets in total across the country today. According to regional manager Mikura Masahiro who has worked for the Watami Group for 11 years, working women account for a growing majority of the customers at its high-end and mid-priced chains.

As *izakayas* were revamping their premises to draw a bigger female clientele, many foreign bars and restaurants, whose number had increased from the mid-1980s, were becoming popular among women. In Tokyo, a wide variety of posh restaurants and bars can be found in many business districts, especially in Roppongi Hills, Azabu-Juban, Akasaka and Marunouchi, where prestigious hotels and the offices of many of the world's largest multinational companies are located. Though many are owned by Japanese entrepreneurs and companies, these establishments offer cuisines and alcoholic beverages from all over the world to fan the cosmopolitan desires of customers with the means to actualize them. The rising demand for foreign food and beverages has been said to be due to a 'gourmet boom' (*gurume bumu*) in Japan that has persisted since the 1980s among segments

of the population who are able to afford 'luxury' foods despite the prolonged economic recession (Bestor, 2004: 153). It has been noted also that this trend towards the 'gentrification of taste' in terms of the consumption of 'global' food and beverages is particularly strong among women who, as Karen Kelsky (2001: 2) observes, are more inclined than men to view the space of the foreign as a 'site of professional opportunity, personal liberation, and romantic or erotic self-expression'.

These findings are apparently true for the several hundred people I have interviewed for this article and other research projects. However, I also learned that while many Japanese women's interest in the foreign stems from the desire to project themselves as 'modern' and 'cosmopolitan' individuals, it is not based merely on some romanticized ideas or fantasies about the foreign. More than half of the women in this study who have worked for a foreign employer for a considerably long time consider the working conditions and promotion prospects to be more favorable to women than those in Japanese firms, and have over the years developed their aspirations and associated their identities with the foreign and cosmopolitan, images that have become appealing in Japan's globalized business environment today. Another reason for why so many of my informants prefer drinking in foreign bars to 'typical Japanese' establishments is that they can – and often do – consume copious amounts of alcohol. As Ebata explains, women want to 'blend in comfortably' and 'not be too conspicuous' because many still feel that women do not have the same liberty to behave like men, despite the improved image of drinking for women, and despite also feeling justified to drink as white-collar workers. This is perhaps why the discourse on 'atmosphere' (*fu inki*) recurs throughout the narratives of my informants, by which they mean being able to avoid the scrutiny of others when they drink till very late into the night or the early hours of dawn. Since hordes of *sarariman* are more often seen in *izakayas* than foreign establishments, the atmosphere in the latter is perceived by many women as less discriminating and hence more relaxing.

The choices available for women to drink comfortably are no longer limited to *izakaya* and foreign bars. As liquor licenses have become easily obtainable, many small bars have begun sprouting in random locations in various cities across Japan, including residential neighborhoods. I noticed during my visit in June 2013 to the northwestern Tokyo residential town of Kichijoji that more than 20 new, tiny bars have opened since I moved out of the area in 2008. Like similar establishments elsewhere in Japan, these bars in Kichijoji have tracked the shifting marketing trends of alcohol producers to target working women, but by selling an exclusive selection of alcoholic beverages supplied to them at favorable rates and promoting themselves as 'concepts' rather than mere watering holes, with some serving only a female clientele. Many of these bars, for example, market themselves as offering a 'real adult's space' (*honto na otona no kukan*), while others describe themselves as offering 'solitary customers' (*ohitori sama*) some 'alone time and space' (*hitori no jikan to kukan*) to drink by themselves at a small table with only one seat. Some 'ladies' bars' serve only 'working women' (*hataraku josei*), while several 'ladies

only' cigar bars have also emerged to serve the highly paid female executives fine cigars and a limited selection of vintage drinks. Most of these bars are located a short distance away from the madding crowd, in small streets within or at the peripheries of busy business districts. They tend to accommodate no more than 10 customers at a time, are dimly lit with blues or jazz music playing softly in the background, and remain open till dawn or until the last customer leaves. To be sure, there are many small, exclusive bars in Japan that are frequented more by men than women. Many of these new concept establishments are also open to both male and female customers, though the privacy, exclusivity, personalized services and intimate spaces that they offer have made them more popular among women than men, especially during late hours.

Fewer still in number than the small, concept bars are entertainment establishments such as host clubs, strip bars, SM clubs, erotic massage parlors and butler's cafés,¹⁵ just to name a few, that have also slowly and steadily entered Japan's nighttime service economy to provide women with a drinking venue that comes with some intimate, playful services provided by men. Of these, host clubs are the most visible and significant in endorsing women's ability to engage in entertainment activities that were once limited and frowned upon, as previously discussed. Evidently scarce and inconspicuous in 2004, host clubs suddenly flourished in 2007, particularly in the Tokyo districts of Shinjuku (see Figures 4 and 5), Ueno, Ikebukuro and Ginza, and also Osaka's Dotonburi district. The popular media in



Figure 4. Hosts before work. Photo by author.



Figure 5. Host clubs in Tokyo. Photo by author.

Japan seemed to have played a significant role in the proliferation of host clubs, which coincided with the popularity among Japanese women of South Korean actors and male singers who are mostly young and have rather feminine looks and features (Ho, 2012a), and a growing interest among Japanese men in beautifying their bodies and using cosmetics (Miller, 2006). Several of my informants knew about host clubs after Japan's biggest broadcaster TBS (Tokyo Broadcasting System) had in 2006 broadcast an 11-episode television drama entitled *Yaoh*¹⁶ ('King of the Night') about women helping two hosts to compete for the title of 'Number One' host in Shinjuku's Kabukicho. The popularity of *Yaoh* later led rival station Fuji TV (Fuji Television Network) to respond in 2009 by broadcasting a one-time special, two-hour drama entitled *Hosuto no Nyobo*¹⁷ ('The Host's Wife'), which was supposedly based on a true story about the daughter of a wealthy architect and wife of an elite member of society who falls in love with a host and gives up everything to become his wife. Contrary to media portrayals of host clubs as spaces for women to obtain relief from their repressed sexual desire or loneliness,¹⁸ my informants' narratives and the observations I made from visiting 12 host clubs with them led me to believe that many women treat host clubs as places for 'working adults to play' (*shakaijin no asobi*) that have broadened their choices of late-night entertainment activities and further legitimized their right to occupy the urban night space.

Moreover, none of my informants seems to visit an entertainment place such as a strip bar or host club more than once a month, and would do so usually for a

second or third round of drinking that occurs very late at night. A visit to a host club can be costly, financially and emotionally, partly because customers are constantly persuaded to order expensive champagnes to help their favorite host or hosts ascend in the popularity rankings, but more because some hosts try to charm women into ‘falling in love’ with them in order to induce repeated visits or be given expensive gifts. Many women I know, including Asano and her friends, would therefore exercise a considerable degree of caution and restraint to keep these new entertainment spaces for women strictly as – in Asano’s own words – ‘playgrounds’ (*asobiba*) or ‘amusement centers’ (*yuenchi*) for the ‘true white-collar female workers’ (*honto na josei sarariman*) to relieve work-related stress and be sufficiently revitalized to perform productive work in the office the next day. They view their ability to afford the services offered by host clubs as ‘therapeutic’ and ‘liberating’, since it allows them to reverse, albeit temporarily, the existing gender order in Japanese society by asserting themselves as subjects of their own desire, with men being the commodified objects. Their views resonate with those of many other women in this study who, while recognizing that women still occupy a subordinate position relative to men in Japanese society even today, find comfort in the transformation of Japan’s urban night space over the past few decades into an arena that is – in Asano’s words – ‘no longer an exclusively man’s world’ as a validation of the importance of white-collar work for women. As Asano reflects:

So much has changed since the bubble days when a professional career was not considered to be suitable for women, and staying out late at night to drink and play after work was regarded as inappropriate for women. I am really glad that women can do all these more freely today. Of course, women are still not equal to men in many ways.

But we have certainly gained a lot more recognition: in our ability to do office work and help the night economy (*laughs*).

Re-thinking the implications of flexible work and consumption practices

In tracing the increasing availability of drinking and entertainment venues for women in Japan’s urban night space, this article is not suggesting that white-collar female workers engage in the various drinking and playful activities discussed above as much as their male counterparts do. The degree of discretion and self-policing that many women exercise when drinking late at night suggests that social acceptance still lags behind commercial endorsements – even with the state’s support – of women drinking and playing as many men do. What this article has demonstrated, however, are some of the radical shifts in certain commercial practices and also spatial re-orderings in post-bubble Japan when flexible labor gradually becomes the dominant work norm and offers new employment and consumption possibilities for a particular category of the country’s working population that were limited or non-existent only decades ago.

These possibilities are literally and symbolically important to many women. As explained earlier, drinking is very much a part of the lives of working adults in Japan, and is seen as necessary for coping with the challenges posed by an increasingly flexible work environment. The ability to drink openly and comfortably without the kind of restrictions imposed on women in the 1980s is therefore 'liberating' in conferring a greater degree of recognition to women's status and identity as *sarariman*. Secondly, many women also find it empowering to be able to reverse the gender order in the night-time economy by mobilizing their economic capabilities to pursue a diversity of activities in the urban night space that only men have historically been able to engage in. All these are symbolically significant in assuring women of their having gained a more equitable right – perceived and real – to the public sphere, not merely as ordinary consumers but as independent and financially capable individuals.

More significantly, many women have strategically utilized the new possibilities to turn their drinking-related activities into productive pursuits that further offer them a discursive space to articulate their aspirations and desires (Simpson, 2008: 201), a symbolic space for crafting new individual identities as urban sophisticates through their consumption of taste and distinction (Bestor, 2004: 127), and also a new cultural sphere to communicate their enhanced economic capability, social mobility and difference (Bourdieu, 1984: 8). By reconfiguring the meaning of drinking and the spaces for drinking activities, many women are doing more than merely appropriating a once-masculine realm to establish themselves as men's equals, they are also symbolically transcending from being marginalized entities in Japanese society to becoming individuals in their own right, and as subjects with knowledge, taste and confidence in the contemporary, globalized economy. In doing so, the women in this study are thus re-arranging the unequal power positions in existing gender relations to re-empower themselves by displaying their progression and gains in a society that historically depicts them in limiting positions, and hence affirming their 'coming of age' as *shakaijin*, a status that was historically reserved for men.

Through the shifting business practices and spatial re-orderings, women are able to co-opt these commercial endorsements into their self-making and identity-crafting projects to resist, contest and challenge established norms, and negotiate a stronger sense of self-worth through their transformed relationship to the urban night space. Far from being a source of 'disturbed identities' argued by Sennett, the 'ever-shifting market reality out there' has instead enabled white-collar female workers to transform their after-hours drinking activities in the urban night space into a symbolically meaningful and productive arena that produces important experiences and identities for women, and also helps them affirm a stronger sense of self. 'The street' in Japan late at night has thus become a sphere that is 'personal' and 'private' which many women are today able to occupy and share with their male counterparts in a similarly legitimate way. Women's rightful place in society is no longer confined to the domestic environment that Japanese women used to be restricted to in the past. Far from being a source of 'disturbed identities',

the urban night space has become a site for women to negotiate and re-negotiate their structural positions within Japanese society through their consumption practices.

Notes

1. All the names of people and places are pseudonyms given to protect their identities. The order of Japanese names is written family name first, followed by first name.
2. The strip shows mentioned in this article refer to performances by men to a female audience, while SM clubs are venues for sado-masochistic activities, and an 'erotic massage' is a service provided by male masseurs in varying degrees of nakedness depending on the price one pays, but it does not involve any sexual service.
3. All references made to the noun 'play' (*asobi*) and the verb 'to play' (*asobu*) refer to a limited range of after-work drinking and drinking-related entertainment activities that are commonly engaged in by white-collar workers in Japan in the public arena at night.
4. The 56 female 'white-collar workers' in this article are high-school and university graduates working in various areas such as office administration, human resource management, finance, sales and legal work. In addition, I also interviewed 39 male office workers, 10 owners and employees of alcohol producers, 28 owners and employees of drinking establishments and seven executives of advertising companies.
5. *Shakaijin* literally means 'a person in society', which historically referred to men who have transited from an educational environment to gain full employment, while women were typically expected to mediate their social membership after marriage and through the domestic roles that were expected of them, and not through their participation in the workforce on a long-term basis.
6. Japan's total female workforce increased from 25.36 million in 1990 to 26.42 million in 2010, as opposed to a decline in the total male workforce from 37.13 million to 36.15 million during the same period (JILPT, 2013: 20–21).
7. The average age of first marriage was 28.4 years for men and 25.9 years for women in 1989, but the figures rose significantly to 30.4 years for men and 28.6 years for women in 2009 (MHLW, 2011: 16). The country's divorce rate rose from 1.51 per 1000 of the population in 1983 to 2.01 in 2009 (MHLW, 2011: 16), while the fertility rate fell from 1.75 children per woman of child-bearing age in 1980 to 1.37 in 2009 (MHLW, 2011: 14).
8. In their respective annual reports in 2010, Asahi said it would continue to focus on 'uncovering potential beer demand mainly among younger customers and women', and Sapporo also expressed its commitment to keeping the sales of its beer products 'strong among women'.
9. Kato Koyuki is a model and actress who co-starred with American actor Tom Cruise in the 2003 Hollywood movie *The Last Samurai*.
10. *Shochu* has a wide alcohol content of 25 percent to 42 percent.
11. This beverage, which has an alcohol content of 11 to 14 percent, is commonly known as *sake* by many non-Japanese authors, but I have followed my informants in referring to it as *nihonshu*.
12. Alcohol tax might have decreased from 1.55 trillion yen in 2006 to 1.42 trillion yen in 2009, but its contribution to the government's total tax revenue actually increased from 2.86 percent to 3.52 percent over the three-year period (NTA, 2008: 47; 2011: 51).
13. More information about Sanko Foods is available at: <http://www.sankofoods.com>

14. More information about the Watami Group is available at: <http://www.watamifoodservice.jp>
15. Japan's first butlers café opened in Shibuya in 2006 as a restaurant for costume play where young Caucasian waiters were dressed like English butlers. For more information see: <http://www.butlerscafe.com>
16. The drama, which was based on a 29-volume *manga* series published between 2003 and 2010, received viewers' ratings of 12.4 to 19.2 percent when it was broadcast from January 13 to March 24 in 2006. More information is available at: <http://www.tbs.co.jp/yaoh>
17. This program, which was broadcast on Fuji TV at 10 pm on 4 September 2009, featured one of Japan's most popular actresses, Kuroki Hitomi, as the woman who falls in love with a host.
18. Host clubs in Japan have been reported on extensively by CNN, *The New York Times* and *TIME* magazine, and were the main theme of the documentary *The Great Happiness Space* produced in 2006. More information is available at: <http://www.thegreathappinesspace.com>

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