

【ハワイ大学研究会発表論文】

OL (also BG, Shokugyoo Fujin) Office Ladies

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"OL", a Japanese appropriation of English words, stands for office lady. Its dictionary entry in the Shin Meikai Kokogo Jiten (4th edition) defines the term as meaning "female clerical workers", while the Katakana Tsukaiwake Jiten offers "women working in clerical positions". The common elements in both definitions are women and clerical. But women's work has diversified, and as the number of OL who aren't necessarily in clerical jobs increases the boundaries of their job description become harder to define.

OL has become established within the Japanese lexicon, yet its history is quite short. It was first used in 1963, the year before the Tokyo Olympics, when the women's magazine Josei Jishin (Kobunsha Publications) publicly called for suggestions for an appropriate term.

Before and after WWII, there was no particular name for women who worked in clerical jobs, only shokugyoo fujin (professional women) to indicate working women in general. Shokugyoo fujin was coined in the Taisho era (1912-1925) with the increase of women occupying positions as primary school teachers, nurses, switchboard operators, department store clerks, typists, and in tertiary industries. In Japanese, words which combine two kanji, or Chinese characters, tend to be the formal vocabulary; as shokugyoo fujin is a pairing of two of these words, (shokugyoo ['profession'] + fujin ['madam']), the term is very stiff and formal sounding.

At the end of the 1950's as Japan approached its period of rapid industrial growth, the number of women working in offices increased and the term BG, or business girl, was in widespread use. The increase of female office workers during this period can be attributed to the following:

1. The demand for labour could not be met using men only.
2. As production expanded, clerical positions increased.
3. As clerical work became automated and simplified, positions were created for young women to fill these simple jobs at low cost.

However the term BG was short-lived, as NHK [Nihon Broadcasting] discovered that in America BG signified a bar girl, or prostitute, and officially decided to stop using the term. When Josei Jishin asked readers for a new term, OL received 4,200

votes out of a total 25,000, and is still the commonly used term today. However, with the end of industrial expansion, the bursting of the economic boom and the subsequent economic downturn, female clerical staff have been the first to face staffing cutbacks.

"Results of the contest to find a replacement term for 'BG':"

1. Office Lady; 2. Office Girl; 3. Salary Girl; 4. Career Girl; 5. Business Lady; 6. Office Woman; 7. Business Woman; 8. opposed to replacing Business Girl; 9. Career Woman; 10. Work Lady (Nippon no OL tachi, Japanese OL Research Group, Diamond Publications, 1995)

_ "Who are you calling an OL?" The profile of a "typical" OL: Hanako Suzuki, age 25, works in the Accounts Department in the Tokyo Headquarters of Firm X, wears a uniform at work. Lives at home with her parents, and enjoys aerobics and trips overseas. (Nippon no OLtachi,, Japanese OL Research Group, Diamond Publications, 1995)

This is the stereotypical image of a Japanese OL. Because she wears a uniform at work and lives with her parents, in other words, is not financially independent and her parents are watching her to make sure she behaves herself until she gets married, her viewpoint is different to that of the unmarried male employees in the company. "Uniform" is an important keyword. Why are office ladies made to wear uniforms? Although male employees may be required to wear suits, which is like a uniform, the relative freedom they have to choose colour and design makes it something different.

_ "Moving on from being an OL: planning your career development after 27, and the right way to leave your current job." (Datsu OL Koza OL Sotsugyo, Fureeberukan Publications, 1995)

Graduating from being an OL is the theme of this article, which assumes that the upper age limit for office ladies is in the late 20's and further offers suggestions on the correct manners involved in quitting a job, and hints for finding a new job, or moving on to the next chapter in life. The age limit or expected retirement age of an OL are tacitly implied.

"Symptoms of Stress in OL's?"

As female advancement in society becomes common, are OL's feeling stress in the same way as their male counterparts? The cosmetics manufacturer Kanebo surveyed 300 women in their 20's and 30's living in the greater Tokyo metropolitan area. Stress is mostly caused by the commute to work (64%), interpersonal relations (46%), and office technology (27%), and the most stressful relationships are with male superiors, female coworkers, and company clients. When stressed, the OL' s react by becoming angry with those around them (42%), unhappy facial expressions (38%), feeling upset (36%) and impulse buying (15%). Multiple answers were possible. (Mainichi, 21 October, 1990)

"Are OL's saving money?"

A major insurance company surveyed the savings patterns of OL's in their 20's, and found that 25% have savings of less than ~ 1,000,000, and most (25%) were aiming to save ~ 10,000,000. (Mainichi, 22 November, 1997)

As the Japanese economic boom collapsed, it was the unskilled OL's in clerical positions who were let go from the companies.

_ "OL extinction depends on whether or not they have any skills" "My supervisor used to tease me, 'aren't you going to get married?', but these days it's clear that the unspoken message is, 'hurry up and get married and get out of here, for the company's sake'". (25 year old OL in a large firm)

_ "Office Flowers' then and now" • OL=clerical= support functions anyone can fulfil = the front line when the firings begin. (Da Capo, 16 April, 1997) According to a Labour Ministry survey of 716 companies listed on the Tokyo Stock Exchange, in 1996, 47% of them had decreased their numbers of clerical staff. For most of these, who would have been OL's, what kind of retrenchment counselling was provided? The Women's Union in Tokyo reports that most of their cases are women who had been coerced into resigning.

_ "Who needs 'Office Flowers' anymore?"

Will OL's be the next to lose their jobs after the middle-aged men? The existence of office ladies, once known as 'Office Flowers', is being called into question. With the advancement of office automation technology and the downsizing of office work, the issue of clerical roles is coming to the forefront. Is the age of women as 'Flowers' coming to an end? (Forbes, February 1997)

_ "In the storm of mass retrenchments, the end of the OL's has begun" General office work has become the target of downsizing in all industries. Along with the reduction in white collar and middle management positions, the number of support positions needed for them is also decreasing. It's clear that if this continues the structure of women's general office positions, the so-called office ladies, will be reduced. Industries are changing their attitudes towards OL's: the trends reveal clear evidence that the end of the "OL" system is near. (Economist, May :1995)

Companies that increased their numbers of staff at the height of the economic boom times are now putting all their energy into cutting personnel costs. "Risutora" (from the English "restructuring") has become synonymous with firings, with OL's and high salaried male workers as the targets. However, the "Office Flower" mentality and the pattern of women using an office job as a temporary step before marriage has changed since the era of industrial development, and women are both more aware and

interested in lifelong careers. A temp employment agency surveyed 684 women on the top ten reasons why they quit their previous jobs, and the number one reason was "I wanted to do another kind of job." As if to repudiate the very existence of the term "Kekkon Taisha" (leaving the company to get married), quitting a job to get married ranked 11th in the survey. The retrenchments of OL's continue without consideration of the aspirations of working women.

On the other hand, the number of OL's with long careers, with husbands and even children, is challenging the traditional image of the OL. These women are continuing to contribute their abilities to the workforce in this age of economic downturn with its surplus of labour. The position of OL, which is neither a career nor even a type of job, will cease to be the tag of "clerical position for young, unmarried women of no particular training" born of Japan's rapid industrial expansion.

参考文献

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