

Consuming leisure, consuming lifestyle: Women's access to the Bubble through the lifestyle magazine, Hanako, in the Japanese Bubble Economy (1986-1991)

Through analysis of the lifestyle magazine, Hanako, this paper will explore the use of work and consumption among young working women as a key motivator of culture in the Bubble Economy of Japan in the late 1980s.

In brief, the Bubble Economy was a period starting from 1986 in which the Japanese economy experienced a fully-blown exaggerated asset bubble. During this time assets such as stocks, shares, and property escalated rapidly, and linked to the agreement of the 1985 Plaza Accord which upwardly revalued the yen against the dollar and deutschmark, the liberalisation of the banks, and the historically low interest rate, combined to create conditions for market frenzy and the biggest credit-fuelled asset bubble in Japanese history. When interest rates were finally raised at the end of 1989, this signalled the beginning of the end of the Bubble, but due to the bullish nature of the asset market and belief of the Japanese public in the economy, the end was not fully realised until the beginning to mid-1990s.

However the Bubble Economy was not just a simple matter of a rapidly accelerating financial and asset market, but also had a knock-on effect on the lifestyles, expectations and culture of the people experiencing it, permeating through local, national and international levels, and arguably with the resulting decades of recession once it had burst, continuing the resounding effects of the Bubble. One of these effects can be seen in the culture and attitude towards work, leisure, and lifestyle. During this time, young working men and women were at the forefront of this economic and cultural shift, experiencing through their work and leisure major effects of the Bubble Economy on working life and the increased opportunities for consumption. Alongside these changes new magazine titles increased rapidly and lifestyle magazines echoed this sentiment of rampant consumption.

However these magazines were not only straightforward sources or gateways to consumptive behaviour, but could also be seen as indicators of relative levels engagement with Bubble culture linked to participation in working life in the Bubble Economy.

Women

Although women in Japan have traditionally been represented as highly subjugated subjects through historical and cultural influences ranging from political to religious, women in the Bubble, and young working women in particular, initially appear to be more emancipated than ever before. Building on the feminist movements of the early 20th Century, post-war liberalisation, and the second wave feminism of the 1970s, more young women were entering work after education, helped along by the passing of the EEOL (Equal Employment Opportunities Law) in 1985.

This is not to say that Japanese women at this time were fully emancipated, and there were many areas in which women's employment was highly problematic, from marginalisation to administrative roles to lack of career longevity. Seen as primarily supportive to the smooth running of the departments, these women were often referred to as 'office flowers' for their decorative and non-essential quality.

However despite this marginalisation, women were feeling many benefits of the Bubble, from increased access to work to the increased leisure options that conditions of the Bubble created. In particular leisure and the consumption of leisure could be said to be one of the booming industries of the Bubble period. Encouraged by the government who in turn was responding to international pressure to reduce the trade surplus, magazines such as Hanako were featuring numerous articles on leisure and lifestyle choices for which young working women, with their disposable incomes and lack of responsibility at work were a prime target audience for this kind of lifestyle.

In the Bubble period young working women thus became a new and significant consumer market that had the time and disposable income for the significant and conspicuous spending that characterised the Japanese Economic Bubble, influencing many of the stylistic and consumption trends of the period, from the increasing trend for internationalisation to the rise in popularity for luxury and international brands.

Some of these trends can be seen in the type of features and articles within the magazine itself, and if we examine the 1989 series, it appears that although predominantly concerned with leisure activities the regular articles consist of four main types: travel; entertainment; new products/design; and current events and issues. Surprisingly enough for a woman's magazine, fashion does not feature as much as expected, and instead the focus appears to be on going out, shopping as a general activity, and eating and drinking.

Breaking these down even more, it appears that advertisements, at 64.5 pages per issue, and travel, at 29.5 pages per issue do make up the majority of the magazine, and surprisingly a relatively even split between the areas of food, fashion, going-out, and entertainment news (around 15 pages per issue). Articles on current events and products are relatively similar and smaller (around 8 per issue), and the smallest or less frequent articles are of interiors, cars and fitness activities (making up just under 3 pages per issue altogether, or 1.38, 0.9 and 0.66 respectively). What this means is that besides being advertised to, the main concern of the average Hanako reader is to travel, keep up-to-date on entertainment, go out to shops, bars, restaurants, and to look good or fashionable. Products, interiors and design are less of an interest, which is unsurprising given that many of the readers at this point in their lives either live at home with their parents or in work dormitories.

Aside from advertising, the next largest section is of travel, with it taking up nearly double that of food, fashion, going-out and entertainment, and more than three times that of the smaller articles. Why travel appears to be so significant to women can be partly attributed to official policies such as the Ministry of Tourism's Ten Million Program that aimed to double the number of outgoing Japanese tourists from around 5 million in 1986 to 10 million in 1991, and policies focusing on Japanese lifestyle, such as the 1986 Maekawa Report, and Prime Minister Miyazawa's 1991 promise of making Japan a 'lifestyle superpower'. According to the 'White Paper on Tourism, FY 1991', the number of tourists increased from 5,516 in 1985 to 10,997 in 1990, with women in their 20s making up a significant proportion of Japanese travelling abroad.

However if we examine this concept of travel as leisure (as opposed to on company business), we can see that it in fact is based on the premise that not only did young working women have money to spend abroad, but more importantly that they had the disposable time to spend on extensive travel. As Hanako magazine shows, the travel articles feature not just foreign destinations in predominantly further afield Western countries, but also practical features such as shops and restaurants, indicating that these articles are guides for women with significant time and disposable income for travel. Yet for working women, mostly in their 20s, this benefit of extensive time for leisure stems from their very lack of stake in working life, in which they

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were not expected to participate seriously nor for very long. For despite the 1985 EEOL encouraging women to work, women were still by and large discouraged from managerial track jobs, instead automatically placed in clerical roles that were to be vacated on marriage or having children. This lack of access to meaningful work thus becomes the reason why women were able to have significantly more leisure time than their male counterparts, as by not being taken seriously at work they were given more allowance in terms of personal time. Indeed their very lack of personal investment in their careers meant that they were unafraid of consequences when it came to taking personal time away from the office, something that has been parodied by the manga, *OL Shinkaron*, and mentioned by interview subjects.

In addition, the ability to travel and participate in leisure indicates not just an abundance of non-working time, but also non-investable disposable income. Just as women had no official stake in their careers, so they were by extension prohibited from participating in the investment opportunities of the Bubble. Real estate and stocks and shares were areas in which the men were invested in, but women, with their inability to invest money and shortlived careers, had the additional pressure of needing to enjoy themselves before their independent income would be cut on marriage and leaving work.

In effect, having the time in which to participate in the leisure options that the Bubble has to offer thus becomes not just indicative of women's lack of meaningful participation in work, but also can be read as being taken as active compensation for not being allowed to participate in said work. Research by Ogasawara and Lo show that the tasks given to women, such as tea serving, client greeting, and helping the men with administrative tasks, was not by and large felt to be fulfilling, and through my own interview with former Panasonic worker, Mika Matuso, it becomes clear that company perks enjoyed by women like taking extensive personal time and being wined and dined by men (and by proxy, the company expense account), were seen in this wider light of compensation for having their access to fulfilling work restricted, and thus to the more concrete benefits of Japan's wider economy (such as higher wages, lifetime employment, seniority progression, and so on).

This logic of time as being taken as compensation for economic and industry exclusion is applied to not just travel, but of course can be extended to other leisure pursuits and activities, many of which are included in the magazine, from shopping (which accounts for a significant proportion that crosses over into other areas, such as travel), to eating and going out, and entertainment. Indeed the leisure areas which are in the minority (current events, products, interiors, cars, and even sporting /fitness activities) are all areas which women would have been more excluded from in daily life. In a sense it could be said that some of the most well-known areas of Bubble activity, such as real estate (and by proxy interiors and the products to fill them), and the various sporting booms (for example, golf), were in fact areas in which women were excluded by the very financial requirements needed to participate in them.

However this does mean that women were able to participate in and actively enjoy many aspects of Bubble culture to much greater extent than the men, and one area in which this can be seen is that of the international trend, or 'kokusaika', of the 1980s. Alongside real estate, stocks and shares, and rampant consumption, this trend for internationalism was also something that can be seen as epitomising the Bubble. Against the backdrop of Japanese industry appearing to surpass that of other developed countries, Japan's trade surplus, Vogel's book, 'Japan as Number One' that appeared to ratify ideas of Japan surpassing other developed countries, its meteoric economy, as well as Japan's apparent desire to join other countries in comparative lifestyle and leisure – it is unsurprising how internationalism as a way of joining the international community became a trend in the Bubble.

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What this does is achieve several things in painting a picture of the professional Japanese woman. Firstly the main copy not only supports and gives context to the picture, but also emphasises Japan's place as well as the woman in modernity and the international community. By describing the process of internationalisation as a wave, it focuses on Japan's positioning on the global stage where it joins the rest of the world in becoming global, and by saying that this globalisation wave has also come to 'me' it is positioning the (female) subject as not just a subject of Japan, but also included in the international community. The use of katakana script in ワタシ ('I') and the casual language (た form) is also significant as it portrays the woman as modern, personable, and international (katakana being the script used for predominantly foreign introduced words), and not in her traditional role of domestic, subservient, and holder/keeper of tradition and family life.

This is something that appears at first glance to be further supported by the smaller copy below, which seems to encourage women to proactively declare their desire to join the international community and the internationalisation process, and to portray them as working professionals knowledgeable and working within the 'foreign company business'. However this effect is rather undone by the tagged on reference to the beauty salon feature within the magazine, which, with its very informal casual language and reference to the relevance of beauty salons as an equal concerning interest on par with foreign company businesses, repositions the female subject back to, not being an equal game player on the international stage, but one to whom beauty and appearance is just as important. This may be seen as part of the sophistication of international femininity, however seen in the context of the average working OL's office environment, it really is a re-establishing of the office patriarchy that posits the Japanese woman as more decorative and disposable rather than useful and essential.

In conclusion, working women in the Bubble appear initially to be at their most emancipated, supported by the passing of the EEOL, and being the most visible consumer market in enjoying the lifestyle and leisure benefits of the Bubble, especially overseas travel. However on closer inspection many of these benefits are predicated on a lack of access to other more concrete benefits, such as career progression and investment opportunities, and in this light access to leisure and disposable income become more associated with compensation for a lack of meaningful work rather than emancipation. Nevertheless working women through their very visible participation in the consumer culture of the Bubble come to shape many aspects of its portrayal, something that can be seen in the linking of women to the kokusaika trend of internationalisation. However the apparent modernising of women's role in Bubble culture belies the fact that women still did not have access to more concrete benefits of the Bubble, acting instead as compensatory until the burst in the mid-1990s.