

## **To Female Students Working Hard on Job Hunting – A Message from China Keiko Ohama (China)**

In February, the job hunting season for university students in China reached its climax. In China, as in Japan, almost all companies employ new graduates simultaneously. This is why the female students lined up at job interview venues looked somewhat tense. They entered the university in the academic year of 2007, when the entrance examination race was very fierce. Approximately 70% of the holders of Zhuangyuan (a title conferred on those who have achieved highest marks) at entrance examinations conducted in each province were female students. This indicated the vigorous power of female students in the age of the popularization of higher education. Such female students were regarded as the winners of the academic competition race. Nevertheless, many of them were forced to engage in hard struggles to find employment, rendering them even losers.

According to a survey and report by the All-China Women's Federation, more than 90% of female students job hunting this academic year felt that they suffered unreasonable gender discrimination. To obtain one application form for a company employment test, they needed to contact nine companies on the average; to obtain one tentative employment offer, they needed to make applications to 44 companies on average. Compared to male students, female students needed to dedicate much more effort to job hunting, in terms of the number of resumes sent out as well as the time, money and patience required for job hunting. Despite all of these efforts, many female students could not find employment, forcing them to lower their criteria for selecting their jobs. Brought up attentively as the only child at home, they had believed that studying hard would be rewarded. And they had seldom felt any concern about their future. Right before the time of their departure for the real society, however, they were overwhelmed by a feeling of disappointment and a sense of failure, neither of which they had experienced before. In reaction to this, some female students chose to stop job hunting and began spouse hunting, leading to a sudden increase in *Bihun - zu* (those both graduating and marrying). Actually, some provinces have launched measures for *Bihun* for female university students.

The difficulty that female students face in finding employment has emerged along with the transition from the age when the country assigned university students to companies based on its uniform plan to the age when university students themselves

participate in the labor market and find employment. Such difficulty is derived mainly from the assumption that, female students, who will later get married and have a child, are unprofitable. Consequently due to market rationality, they are driven out of the labor market. Also, some people point out the imbalance between the development of higher education and that of an industry structure. This year, approximately 6.6 million students will graduate from university. The problem of securing employment for university graduates is looming larger and larger over the Chinese government every year. In recent years, the ratio of girls advancing to university has been rising rapidly, with half of students enrolled in university being female. While it is expected that the tertiary industries will provide stable employment opportunities for women with an advanced academic background, these industries have not been fully developed. Meanwhile, some people criticize universities' departments and divisions not being created in order to cope with the drastic change in labor trends concerning labor supply and demand. A good example of this criticism is found in one social problem that China has faced over the past several years. China has been suffering a shortage of kindergartens. It is said this can be attributed to the lack of professional women staff with an academic background in early childhood education.

In this year's ranking of the most popular occupations among university students, "public servant" and "teacher" took the first place among male students and female students, respectively. After the Lehman Shock, Chinese young people are shifting their job hunting focus to the domestic market.

Perhaps with this as a background, women's studies is now gaining favorable attention at Chinese universities. Actually, *Basic Women's Studies* (edited and authored by HU Huang-qing, Chemical Industry Press, 2010), the latest version of a textbook for higher education, is rich in practical information, which is a refreshing surprise to me. This textbook which features how female students get prepared for job hunting; do's and don'ts when writing a resume; do's and don't when having a job interview; as well as many other interesting topics, serves as a how-to manual for female students working on job hunting.

In the chapter referring to the employment of female university students, the author says that a trend toward conservatism is found among today's women. While urging them to reexamine their passive attitude, the author repeatedly offers encouragement to female students who are setting sail into the ocean of society.

“Your job hunting will become more and more difficult. Although failure may be unavoidable, please do not give up. You must take such failure as the best opportunity to strengthen your determination and skills, and make every effort to develop your core competitive strength. That is the ability for exploration. On the basis of a broad range of knowledge and reliable special skills, you must acquire genuine abilities that will not be affected by the changing times. In order to sustain yourself for the rest of your life, you must cultivate such abilities with high ethics and responsibility, as well as with passion to explore a multitude of professions.”

I believe that the above message from the perspective of women’s studies in China is also encouraging to Japanese female students preparing for job hunting.