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Women as a driver for social change: rethinking women's advancement in the accounting profession by reference to their experience in Japan

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ABSTRACT

While accounting is being increasingly influenced by globalisation, the experience of individual accounting professionals is still largely shaped by local socio-cultural traditions. The experience of women accounting professionals in particular differs depending on the national context. Following my previous study of the gender-related barriers faced by Japanese women accounting professionals in the workplace (2008), this study explores how they are also affected by their experiences at home. It does so by a longitudinal study of the lived reality of Japanese women accounting professionals, as revealed through in-depth interviews conducted between 1998 and 2012. The study finds that the women's experiences are shaped by a contradiction brought by the independent work of the accounting profession with their interdependent role in the household. They have responded to this dilemma in a number of ways. While some have found ways to reconcile the two roles, others have responded more strategically. Some have chosen to pursue their independent professional work by terminating the interdependent relationship with their husband. In broader terms, their pursuit of independence has also been reflected in their lobbying for the introduction of a dual-surname system. The study highlights that the efforts of these women are helping to undermine some of Japan's social underpinnings, and the homogeneity of its cultural values, to allow greater social diversity. The study argues that the advancement of women accounting professionals should be measured not just in terms of hierarchical success but also in terms of the impact their advancement has had within their indigenous socio-cultural context.

Keywords: Japan; Household; Indigenous culture; Oral history; Gender; Globalisation; Diversity