

# **Construction of Nurses' professional identities in France and Japan**

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## **ABSTRACT**

We present a comparative study of the identity dynamics of nurses in France and Japan. This study relies upon the paradigm of four identity forms : categorical occupation identity, professional network identity, company identity and not-work related identity.

With this theoretical framework, we examine the results of three surveys conducted in French and Japanese hospitals. The first deals with the consciousness of professional alignment and the structured relation of gender. The second investigates the integration in hospital organization. The third explores the three elements of professional identity, namely trajectory, work relations and professional education.

We observe that the gendered division of labor comes into question in the identity dynamics of French nurses. They construct a categorical occupation identity, dissociating qualified tasks from nonqualified tasks (attached with female stereotypes), and a professional network identity, depending on their capacity to distance themselves from a gendered division of labor.

On the other hand, the identity dynamics of Japanese nurses is characterized by the conservation of a gendered division of labor. Japanese nurses do not have any enduring commitment to professional life and are inclined to construct an identity outside of work. However, some succeed to construct an identity through their workplace, based on traditional male stereotypes.

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## *Problem and Method*

The works of the LEST revealed the importance of putting into relation **the individuals' integration in company and the professional autonomy** to realize the international comparison of companies. Besides, it seems to us that in Japan, the integration in company's organization is accentuated, and that it results from its segmentation between staffs integrated and not - integrated into the institution. This logic tends to entrench the sexual division of labor. One of the central questions is to know **whether the appearance of a new professional logic would lead to questioning the gender relations.**

We present here a comparative study of the identity dynamics of nurses in France and Japan. This study is based on the **paradigm of four identical forms:** identity of network, identity of company and identity outside work and category-identity of occupation (C. Dubar, 1991).

Between 1987 and 1989, we conducted rather an extended series of semi-directive interviews with 46 French nurses (including six men) of two hospitals of the Assistance Publique de Paris (in four services), and with 46 Japanese nurses (including one man) from four hospitals situated within Tokyo Metropolitan Area. Our two samples, French and Japanese, were divided into various groups according to the position (executive or not executive), the duration of professional activity and the sex.

We investigated the following problem: how can the professional world of nurses be developed beyond the segmentation between staffs integrated and not integrated into the institution? We then centered the interviews on three themes:

- **Career**
- **Work Relations**
- **Professional Education**

Then, to analyze these interviews, we proceeded in two steps:

- Pick out keywords in the most representative interviews and discover **the binary oppositions** of categorization for each of these three themes;
- Analyze, for all the interviews which we conducted, **the links between these three levels of binary oppositions by the multiple correspondence analyses.**

## *I Binary Oppositions of Categorization*

For the first analysis of the interviews, we adopted a **double approach**: we coupled Claude Levis-Strauss's structural analysis with Anselm Strauss's inductive method. We so tried to find, identify by using keywords, **the binary oppositions of categorization** for the three themes.

For the French nurses, we observe a major alternative concerning their **career**: either to continue as they were in their career (often to reconcile their work with their family life), or to seek an advancement in their career.

As for the **work relations**, on one side, they emphasize their "relational" role with patient, distinct from two other roles, namely the "prescription" and the "nursing", and, on the other hand, they are interested in finding ways to articulate these three roles.

Finally, in professional education, we observe an opposition between what they learn on the job and what they learnt in schools also contrasts with the collective learning, which is realized through "nursing research" leading to a construction of network.

## **Career in France**

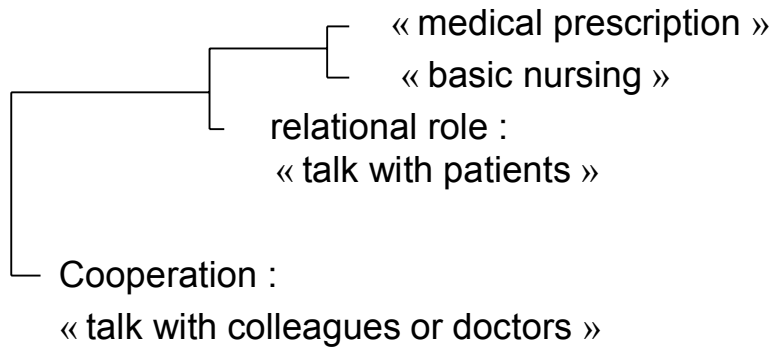
### **Continuity of career**

- pass to and stay at a post of « day »  
to « have children »
- become executive to « do another thing»

### **Progress of career**

## Work Relations in France

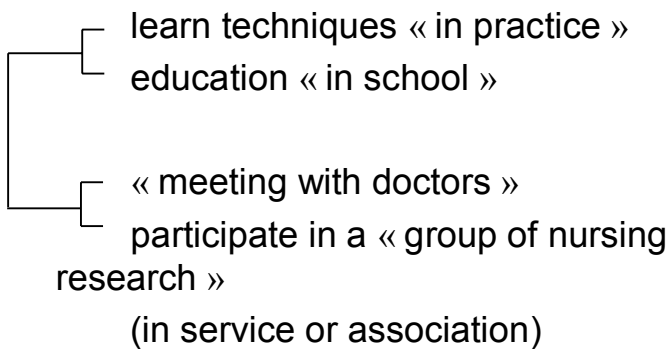
### Distinction of roles



### Articulation of roles

## Education in France

### Experience v.s. Diploma



### Collectif learning

For the interviews with 46 French nurses, we can code the answers in the following way:

- In their Career: Continuity of Career (cc) / Progress in the Career (pc);
- In their Work Relations: Distinction of the Roles (dr) / Articulation of the Roles (ar);
- In their Professional Education: Experience (exp) / Diploma obtained in school (dip) / Collective Learning (cl).

Let us see now these same themes for the Japanese nurses.

In their **career**, the major difference is between those whose professional activity is interrupted for family reasons, and those whose career advances within the same hospital (often by internal promotion).

In **work relations**, unlike the Frenchwomen, the Japanese do not distinguish their various roles: they consider themselves to be flexible. However, they form both positive and negative judgments about their adaptation to the organization.

In **professional education**, we observe the following contrast: on one side, the experience accumulated in the course of the first three years – an accumulation which breaks off when some marry and stop working - and on the other hand, the collective learning is built up for those who choose the internal promotion.

## Career in Japan

### Uncertain career outside hospital

difficult to continue to work  
because of « family life »

be promoted « executive »  
= « continue to work » in the same  
hospital

### Progress of career in the same hospital

## Work Relations in Japan

### Absence of contact with patients

#### Difficulties in cooperation

- └ difficult to « talk with patients »
- └ difficult de cooperate with « patients »  
and « doctors »
- └ being responsible for « nurses' » cooperation  
with « patients » and « doctors »

#### Practicable cooperation

## Education in Japan

### Accumulation of experience

- └ acquire a « competence » « 1st year »  
+ another « 2nd year »  
+ another « 3rd year »
- └ participate in a « meeting with colleagues »  
or a « research group »  
= be motivated to « continue to work »  
in the same hospital

### Collectif learning

The coding of the answers of 46 Japanese nurses was as follows:

- In their Career: Progress in the Career (pc) / Uncertain Career outside the Hospital (uc);
- In their Work Relations: Absence of Contact with the Patients (acp) / Difficulties in Cooperation (dc) / Practicable Cooperation (pc);
- In their Professional Education: Experience (ex) / Collective Learning (ac).

## *II Links between three Levels of Binary Oppositions*

The second stage of the analysis of the interviews consisted in analyzing **the links between three levels of binary oppositions** through the procedure of multiple correspondence analysis (cf. T. Foucart, 1997).

Firstly we will examine the French results. The graph concerning the classes of answers shows **the crossing of two oppositions**. On one hand, the class of answers at the top, « distinction of the roles » (dr) opposes to both classes of answers below, « articulation of the roles » (ar) and « collective learning » (ac). On the other hand, both classes of answers on the left, the « continuity of career » (cc) and « experience » (ex), oppose to both classes of answers on the right-hand side, « progress of career » (pc) and « diploma » (dip).

Also, the four graphs concerning the French interviewees present **four groups** (young non-executives, senior non-executives, executives and men) in the space of these two crossed oppositions.

The young non-executives seem to fall into all the directions. Those who are at the top value their proper role, seeing it as different from the role delegated by the doctor. Those who are below are interested in the articulation of their various roles, although this articulation is difficult to realize. Moreover, these young non-executives represent two distinct attitudes. They are the cynics or idealists concerning their future trajectory, those situated on the right-hand side are idealistic (professional promotion by obtaining of a diploma), while those on the left are cynical (stable and continuous career by simple accumulation of experience).

On the other hand, the senior non-executives and the executives tend to be on the downward side. More precisely speaking, the senior non-executives are placed on the lower right-hand side. They appreciate their past continuous career and the articulation of the roles made possible by collective learning.

The executives are situated on the lower left. They estimate positively their past professional promotion and as the seniors, they want to articulate their roles through collective learning.

In the case of men, they tend to be placed below and appreciate collective learning. As the seniors and the executives, they wish a new negotiated order.

Next we will examine the Japanese results. **The main opposition** appears in the graph concerning the classes of answers. Three classes of answers on the left, « progress of career within the same hospital » (pc), « practicable cooperation » (pc) and « collective learning » (cl), oppose to three classes of answers on the right-hand side, « uncertain career outside the hospital » (uc), « absence of contact with the patient » (acp) and « experience » (ex). Let us note however that the class of answers « difficulties in cooperation » (dc) is at the top.

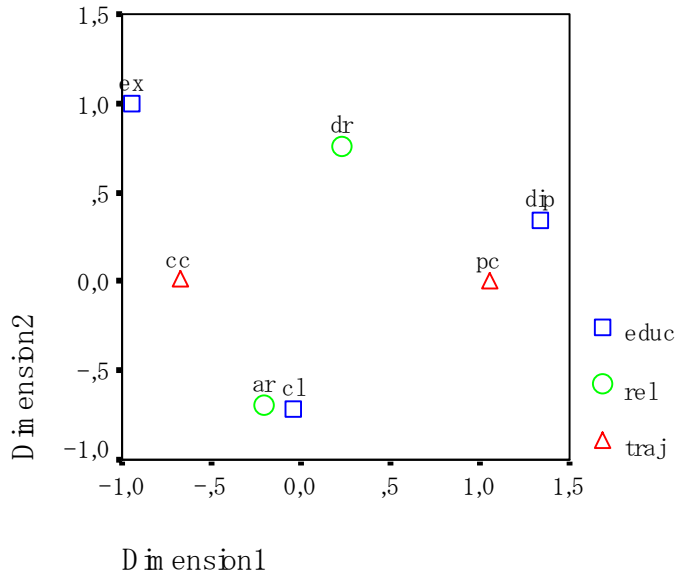
In the graphs concerning the Japanese interviewees, we see **the non-executives to the right and the executives to the left**. However, two groups appear at the top: the non-executives having worked more than 3 years, as well as the executives having worked less than 10 years. They feel difficulties in cooperation. However, we see the following segmentation: the executives are generally integrated into the institution, while the non-executives are only integrated into it with difficulty.

In the case of non-executives, the negative judgments on their situation of the work (absence of contact with the patients) are related to the future construction of a trajectory outside the hospital. Their learning by the experience rarely leads to an internal promotion.

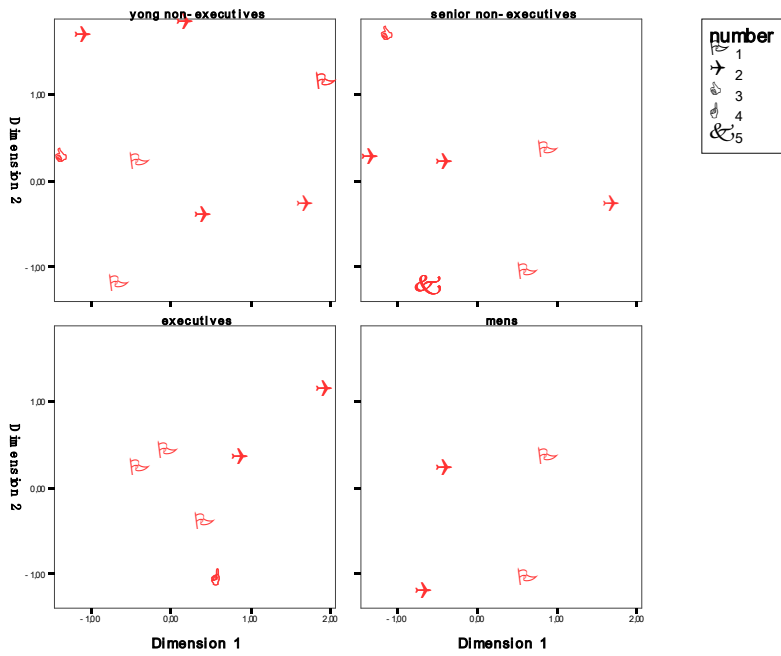
On the other hand, the executives positively appreciate their past internal promotion and they estimate the cooperation as practicable. They consider the collective learning as important in order to integrate the non-executives nurses to the institution.

As for the man, he is situated neither on the left nor on the right but at the top. His situation is ambiguous: he is anxious to become integrated into the institution, but he considers that it is difficult to realize the cooperation.

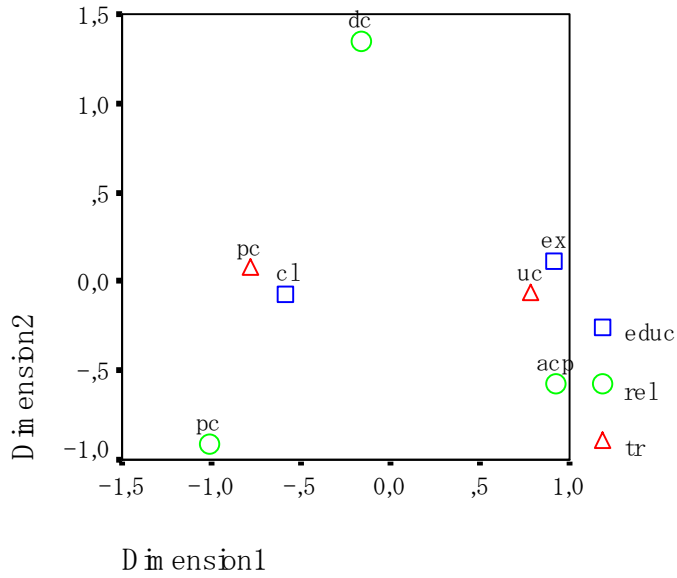
### Classes of answers in France



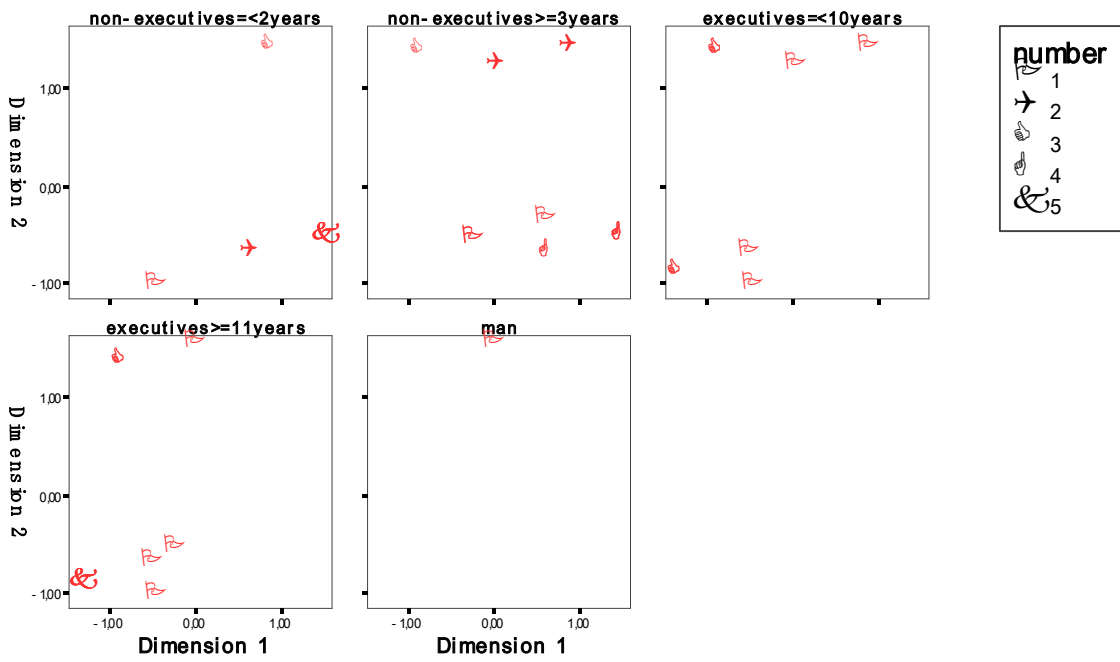
### Interviewees in France



### Classes of answers in Japan



### Interviewees in Japan



## *Conclusion*

What do we think of three levels of oppositions observed in the case of French nurses? We can analyze them as a **sign** of an identity dynamic, which oscillates between the category-specific identity of profession and the identity of network. The young non-executives tend to consider themselves as a **category different from those of the doctors or the aids**, although within this category, we find two different types of professionalism, the cynical and the idealistic. The delegation of the domestic role to the aids favored the entry of men in this feminine profession. The senior non-executives confirm their stable and continuous career, while the executives appreciate their professional promotion. However, the senior non-executives and also the executives are more interested in the collective learning which allows them to construct an **identity of network**. This new negotiated order makes possible the norm of “mixité” between women and men, as the men are also interested in collective learning.

Three oppositions observed for the Japanese reflect an identity dynamic which differentiate **an identity outside work** (especially for the non-executives) from **an identity within company** (especially for the executives). We thus have a strong segmentation between executives and non-executives. The Japanese nurses do not seem to distinguish their various roles, but are obliged to have a certain flexibility of competence to adapt themselves to the organization of work. The collective learning has the function of integrating the nurses within the institution. However, the executives feel integrated into the institution, while the non-executives have difficulties for being integrated into it. Let us note that in the case of the man, although the cooperation in the organization of work seems difficult to him, he is anxious to be integrated into the institution. So we can say that this segmentation does not challenge the sexual division of labor, but tends rather to preserve it.

In conclusion, we can say that we observed that construction of the professional group and the sexual division of labor were related. We are indeed convinced that, in France, the challenging of gender-based division of labor is a preliminary in the construction of a professional group. On the other hand, in Japan, there is no real questioning of the sexual division of labor. On the contrary, this division is maintained by logic of organizational integration in company. This logic of company does not favor the construction of a professional group: it leads

to segmentation between executives and non-executives, and between men and women.

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