

## First female captain no quitter

By WANG YEXING  
Kyodo News

OSAKA — Ari Fuji was not deterred when she was deemed too small for admission to the government-affiliated pilot training school. Instead, she went to the United States to get a pilot's license and became Japan's first female captain for commercial passenger flights this month.

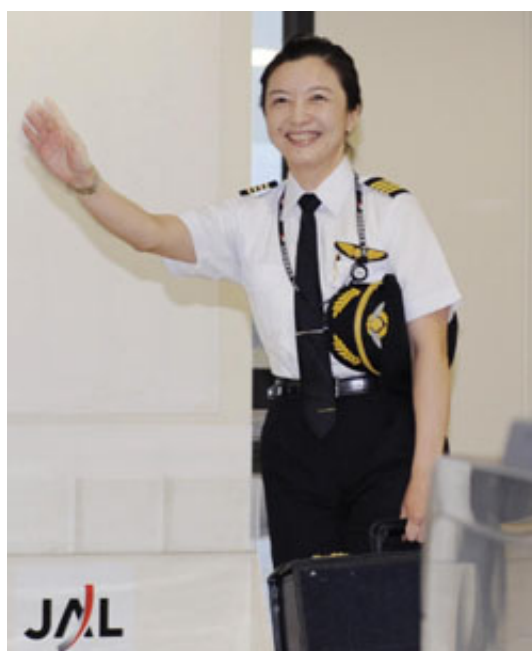
Fuji, 42, now dons a short-sleeve uniform of JAL Express Co. with four gold stripes, one more than during her first-officer years. "I feel the weight of one stripe added," a nervous-looking Fuji said after her appointment ceremony at the company's Osaka headquarters on July 9.

She is the only woman among about 3,800 aircraft captains in Japan and one of the three among around 300 pilots working for JAL Express, which operates regional flights chiefly to and from Osaka.

Speaking to reporters, Fuji said she liked airplanes when she was a child and decided to pursue a career as a pilot while at university.

But at only 155 cm tall, she was barred from even taking the Civil Aviation College admission test. The college required candidates' height to be at least 163 cm until this spring, when it lowered the minimum to 158 cm.

While some people around her at that time said it would be



**'Stubborn': Ari Fuji, Japan's only female airline captain, poses at Osaka airport Monday before her first left-seat flight.**  
KYODO PHOTO

impossible for her to realize her dream, she refused to give up and decided to go to the United States to get her wings.

She said she was optimistic of achieving her goal if she went there, and, after attending a U.S. flight school, she got her license.

In 1999, she joined JAL Express as a trainee. From the start, her goal was to be pilot in command.

Fuji said training was arduous for the captain's examination administered by the Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism Ministry. Having logged roughly 6,200 hours, she is now certified to fly a Boeing 737-400, which can seat up to 145 people, in the JAL Express fleet.

She said that at times over the years she became disheartened because she was not able to achieve what she wanted and started questioning whether she was really fit for the job. But she said she was always able to overcome the lows because she is "unrelenting." People around her describe her as "stubborn."

Her husband is also a captain and is currently working for an airline in China. She described him as a "senior associate I admire." He has been very supportive of her progress and is a good listener to her problems, she said.

Even though she is in the minority in the pilot community, Fuji says she does not feel she is handicapped on account of her gender. "I happened to be born a woman," she said. "If people have faith and the strength of mind not to give up, anyone can do (like me)."

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