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## MASCULINITY STUDIES IN JAPAN

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*Sarariiman* (salaryman), *otaku* (geek), *sōshokukei danshi* (herbivorous man), *himote* (undesirable[s]): these are all words that resonate throughout men's studies in Japan today. What is it to be a man in Japan? What constitutes "masculinity," and how does it affect men's lives? How do labour and masculinities continue to intersect? How is masculinity implicated in sex, sexualities, and intimacy? These are some of the driving questions in contemporary Japanese masculinities studies. Masculinity continues to be a topic of significant interest across a variety of disciplines, including sociology, history, and psychology. Indeed, if you Google "masculinities Japan" in Google Scholar in English, you'll get 20,600 results (as of 12 August 2018). In Japanese, 2,640 results come back. If we refine this to the last five years, then the results are 10,700 in English and 756 in Japanese. Given space limitations, this chapter introduces some of the dominant trends in the discipline of masculinities studies (*danseigaku*) in Japan today, primarily covering the 2000s and 2010s, with a particular focus on the trend to explore "alternative" masculinities via labour, caring, intimacy, and sexuality. For readers interested in trends in masculinities studies from the 1980s until the early 2000s, see Taga (2005).

### **The salaried hegemon: labour, productivity, and masculinities**

By far the most dominant discourse with which masculinities studies in Japan continues to grapple, turn to, lean on, or attempt to escape from, is that of the ubiquitous "salaryman." As such, most authors turn to R. W. Connell's (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity. As Dasgupta (2010, note 4) eloquently put it, hegemonic masculinity is:

[T]he discourse of masculinity which at a given time in a given society has the greatest ideological power, both in relation to women and femininity/ies, and in relation to other coexisting and intersecting masculinities. Thus, hegemonic masculinity may be regarded as the cultural "ideal" or "blueprint" that has a powerful (and often unarticulated) presence in the lives of men and women. However, at the same time, as Connell stresses, it need not be the most common form, nor the "most comfortable."

In the Japanese context, the white-collar male salaried employee at a large company (the "salaryman") is said to embody this hegemonic type of masculinity. One of the reasons for such

continued reference, even for authors writing about alternative masculinities, is that many people in Japan refer to ideals that are embodied in this figure. In particular, there is a continued focus on male productivity, labour, breadwinning, and specific types of familial responsibility. It thus becomes hard to ignore a figure that is ubiquitous even if not, strictly speaking, particularly common. Frühstück and Walthall (2011a) concisely argue that “distinct modes of masculinity become visible only if pitched against an actual or imagined Other” (2011a, 7). The image of the salaried male worker continues, in scholarship on masculinities in Japan, not just as an ideal that is held to be hegemonic, but also as an other against which alternative “types” are measured (Roberson and Suzuki 2003).

### **“Alternative” masculinities, but still productive. . .**

A significant trend since the early 2000s is a focus on masculinities that are non-hegemonic, “subordinated,” or alternative. For example, in their classic edited volume, Roberson and Suzuki (2003) discuss the importance of “dislocating the salaryman doxa.” The contributors focus on masculinities and masculine bodies in a variety of topics and contexts, including through beauty work, transgender experiences, fantasy spaces, illness, masculinity within families, and through “what makes life worth living” (*ikigai*), marriage markets, fatherhood, and violence, as well as via explorations of masculinity in relation to class and the nation. Meanwhile, contributors to Frühstück and Walthall’s (2011b) edited volume provide an important addition to scholarship on manhood by looking at changing gender ideologies and discourses ranging from early modern Japan of the seventeenth century through to the contemporary period. Topics range from warrior legacies to men at the margins to an exploration of “bodies and boundaries.” A focus that runs throughout is on how changes in social roles have prompted various crises of masculinity that are socio-historically, and economically, contingent (see also works by Inoue et al. 1995; Itō 1993, 1996, 2002, 2003; Itō et al. 2011; Taga 2001, 2005, 2006, 2011, 2016; Tanaka 2009, 2015, 2016).

What is clear in much of this work is a strong interlinkage between ideas and ideals of productivity and manhood. Condry (2011), for example, argues that “otaku” (nerds/geeks) are often understood as being an antithesis of the “salaryman,” as “failed men” (Galbraith 2015b) (never mind the fact that a man may be simultaneously a salaried full-time employee at a large company and a self-proclaimed otaku). There remains a fundamental assumption in Japan that a man’s masculinity is embedded in his productivity (see also Cook 2013, 2016, 2017; Fujimura 2006; Gill 2001, 2003, 2012; Slater and Galbraith 2011).

In recent years, there has also, however, been greater public debate about the costs of working expectations on men’s lives and health (Kawanishi 2008; Morioka 2013a; North and Morioka 2016), with some calling for a disentanglement between work and ideals of masculinity. In 2016, a leading masculinities studies scholar in Japan, Tanaka Toshiyuki, published a book aimed at general readership provocatively titled *Otoko ga hatarakanai, ii janai ka!* (A man who doesn’t work, it’s good, right?!). Tanaka (2016) argues that we need to rethink why and how men work, as well as questioning the idea that “it’s natural for men to work.” He suggests that men working as full-time salaried employees is seen as common sense in Japan and that this prevents an interrogation of why that is the case, despite significant changes in the economic and employment structure and more diversity in the workforce since the 1990s. Tanaka advocates a slowing down for both men and women through reducing working hours and workdays, as well as providing more flexibility in, and at, work for men and women. Doing so, he argues, would make it easier for both men and women to look after children and to work at the same time. As such, his main argument is that there needs to be greater social recognition and acceptance of diversity in the

workforce and in how individuals themselves work. He thus advocates for a lessening in strong social norms that link labour and masculinities.

### Changing ideals: caring, “ikumen” and elder care

Hegemonic ideals do, of course, change. In recent years, it is clear that expectations of what men should “do” extend beyond paid work and into domains of intimacy, sex, marriage, and family. For example, expectations of changing male roles in families have been discussed by a number of authors (Ishii-Kuntz 2003, 2013, 2015; Mizukoshi et al. 2016; Nakatani 2006; Tatsumi 2015, 2018), with many focusing in recent years on the figure of the *ikumen*: a neologism that combines the word for childcare (*ikuji*) with the word “men.” It is, however, also a play on the word *ikemen*, which refers to a man who is good looking/hot, with the implication that men who are involved in childcare are cool (Mizukoshi et al. 2016).

Whilst Charlebois (2017b) argues that *ikumen*—which he glosses as “stay-at-home dads,” though it is more accurately understood as an active and involved father who is typically *not* a stay-at-home dad—can be conceived of as an alternative masculinity, others, such as Ishii-Kuntz (2013, 2015), understand it to be a shifting of hegemonic ideals. Tatsumi (2015, 2018), for example, argues that being an active father continues to presuppose that men will also continue to be first and foremost active and productive workers (see also Vassallo 2017). Moreover, Ishii-Kuntz (2013, 2015) clearly demonstrates the ways in which the *ikumen* discourse, as part of a governmental push spearheaded by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, is linked to worries about demographic issues (see, for example, <https://ikumen-project.mhlw.go.jp/>). Indeed, this isn’t the first time that the government has advocated men as active fathers: in the 1990s, the “Sam Campaign” suggested, “A man who doesn’t raise his children can’t be called a father” (2015, 163). It was also linked to the government’s “Angel Plan,” which sought to increase the birth rate through various projects such as providing more childcare subsidies and places for children in day care (Roberts 2002). Ishii-Kuntz (2015) illustrates how changing ideas indicate a shifting and diversification of hegemonic ideals. It is not necessarily the case that *ikumen* exhibit alternative masculinities, as Charlebois (2017b) claims, but that there are changes to what constitute normative ideals of masculinity which now include involved fathers, even if this can be difficult to enact because of conflicting expectations on men as productive breadwinners who work long hours. As Ishii-Kuntz (2015, 164) notes, “the conduct of fatherhood has not caught up with the culture.”

Whilst most research on caring and masculinities focuses on childcare, Umegaki-Costantini (2017) provides an invaluable glimpse of the lives of older men caring for parents-in-law, something traditionally considered a woman’s role. In her careful analysis, we can see the various contradictions that the men she worked with expressed about later life caring and the ways they sought to mitigate and come to terms with these contradictions to their sense of masculinity. One such way was the foregrounding of tasks that they felt were linked to masculinities, for example, anything that necessitated physical strength, moving their masculinities away from cerebral work to physical labour and, one could argue, a less elite or more working-class conception of manhood (see, for example, Roberson 2003).

### Intimacy, (hetero)sex, and marriage

The discourse of men as failing at intimacy, marriage, or sex is a significant trend in contemporary research. For example, Miles (2017, 2018) explores “economies of intimacy,” focusing on men who are considered to be “of no value.” She argues that contemporary masculinity in Japan revolves around the idea of “men who can do” (*dekiru otoko*), and she defines masculinity

“as ability” (2017, 63). This focus on action (see also Cook 2016) sits at the heart of contemporary masculinities, with many of the discourses of manhood revolving around what men are doing or *not* doing. For example, herbivorous men are said not to be “doing” dating or sex right (Charlebois 2017a; Kumagai 2012; Morioka 2008, 2013b; Saladin 2017). Male irregular workers—or at least those from middle-class families—are thought not to be doing work “properly” and by extension often struggle to marry and sustain families (Cook 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2018), and *otaku* are considered to be failing at appropriate expressions of desire and sexuality (Galbraith 2015a, 2015b).

Arguing that male identities in Japan have become “unmoored from traditional lifeways of work and marriage, and have increasingly been focused around the body and modes of public display and self-representation” (Miles 2017, 66), Miles critiques the buzzwords that have come to represent “new” masculinities but in practice obscure the complex lived realities and diverse experiences of manhood in “postmainstream Japan” (2017, 66). Such buzzwords, as Miles rightly points out, are often highly problematic. Moreover, the trends that these buzzwords represent are not so new. For example, in 1996, Itō Kimio argued that there had been a shift in expectations of masculinities, with a move from men who should swagger and exhibit an overt physical masculinity to expressions of “tender-hearted” masculinities. He used *messhii-kun*: men that pay for dinner; *mitsugu-kun*: men that buy gifts for women who may—or may not be—their girlfriends; and *asshii-kun*: men that drive women around, as ostensible chauffeurs, as examples (Itō 1996; non-Japanese readers can read some of Itō’s arguments via McLelland and Dasgupta’s translated excerpts in Itō 2005). Of course, all three of these still consist of men who are “succeeding” enough with women to take them out for dinner, buy them gifts, or drive them around, but nevertheless these terms indicated a change in what was previously expected. We can also see “softer” masculinities in discussions of popular culture and media icons, as embodied in Johnny’s Jimusho (Johnny’s Office) idols such as SMAP and Arashi who are supposed to downplay any overt heteronormative masculinity and are not allowed to discuss any romantic relationships in order to appear available to maintain the fiction of these figures as vehicles of female fantasy. They are typically portrayed as approachable, gentle, sensitive, all-round good guys that can slot into what Glasspool (2012, 117) suggests is a “somewhat domestic manhood” (see also Darling-Wolf 2004a).

Buzzwords that index ideas of masculinity continue to be common, and we see this from the increased interest in “*ikumen*” and “herbivorous men” (*sōshokukei danshi*). Although *ikumen*, as already discussed, are more family oriented and caring than the stereotype of the emotionally distant fiscal provider of postwar Japan, most new buzzwords that index masculinities in some way commonly focus on men who are unassertive, uninterested, or uninteresting to women and thus socially problematic (Chen 2012; Miles 2017, 2018; Morioka 2013b; Saladin 2015, 2017; Ushikubo 2008).

### Male bodies, masculinities, and sexualities

Men’s bodies—and what men do or don’t do with them—are also in the spotlight. As Connell argues, “True masculinity is almost always thought to proceed from men’s bodies—to be inherent in a male body or to express something about a male body” (2005, 45). There are multiple discourses of male bodies in the scholarship of Japan—of sporting bodies (Barber 2014; Chapman 2004; Light 2003; Manzenreiter 2011, 2013), military bodies (Frühstück 2007; Low 2003; Mason 2011; Satō 2010), commodified bodies (Takeyama 2010; 2016), fantasize-able bodies (Darling-Wolf 2004a, 2004b; Glasspool 2012), and passive/asexual bodies (Charlebois 2017a; Saladin 2015), to name just five.

Lin et al. (2017) argue, however, that in East Asia “the relationship between masculinity and sexuality has been underexplored, with earlier commentators suggesting that masculinity ‘leans’ on sexuality” (2017, 3). Whilst normative ideals of masculinity in the Japanese context are intimately interlinked with heterosexuality, heteronormative marriage, and procreation, a number of prominent scholars have explored sexuality and masculinities, primarily via analyses of homosexuality, though some work on transgender male experiences also exists (e.g. Lunsing 2003; McLelland et al. 2007).

McLelland (2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2011) reminds readers that during the Tokugawa era, male homosexuality was conceptualized “as a masculine and even masculinizing practice” (McLelland 2000, 24) and that it is only since the Meiji era that male same-sex desire became pathologized or considered unusual or problematic due to post-Meiji social changes and imported discourses of sexual deviance. The implication from this work is that sexual practices were more diverse pre-Meiji and that same-sex practice was, for some men, part of constructing masculinities. During the Meiji period, however, “[T]he issue of sex, both hetero- and homosexual, was seen as a potentially damaging distraction from which a young man needed protection” (McLelland 2000, 24): a radically different discourse than in Japan today where male sexuality is predominantly linked to concerns about population decline. Men who are not heterosexual or not interested in sex or marriage are thus often considered problematic. Dasgupta (2005, 2013, 2017), for example, has argued that some gay men he worked with married but pursued their sexual desires outside the home in order to minimize the impact of discrimination against unmarried adult men in the workplace (see also Lunsing 2001).

Although these discourses go beyond male bodies, it is important to remember that masculinities and sexualities *are* bodily. McLelland (2000, 115), for example, argues that gay magazines in Japan, like straight magazines, “define masculinity through a man’s ability to perform sexually.” Meanwhile, 15 years on, Castro-Vázquez argues that circumcision, whilst a niche industry, “anchors the gender identity of young men to their genitals” through its commercialization (2015, 29). Men’s bodies, sexualities, and sexual practices thus continue to be linked to productivity (in this case bodily productivity) and the expectation that men “do,” or can potentially do. If men don’t—or don’t do the “right” things—then they are “failing” (Castro-Vázquez 2015; Galbraith 2015a, 2015b; Gill 2012).

### Future directions

Whilst there is a large body of excellent research in masculinity studies in Japan, there are a number of issues and areas that are ripe for further research. Although the co-creation of masculinity and femininity is often acknowledged, and some recent work explores these aspects in more depth (see, for example, Castro-Vázquez 2015; Miles 2017; and contributions in Steger and Koch 2017), most of the recent work in masculinities studies continues to privilege male experiences and discourses of male bodies and actions without also interrogating the complex ways in which women co-construct and reinforce norms and ideals of masculinities. In addition, the intersectionality of masculinities, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and class, as well as transgender experiences, could be further analyzed.

I have argued elsewhere that current masculinities studies scholars also need to perhaps move away from the “salaryman as hegemon” (Cook 2016, 2017). Of course, these ideologies and discourses are important and often emerge in various guises. However, if we rely on this comfortable established argument, we risk obscuring and oversimplifying the complexities of lived experiences and the ways that masculinities are fluid and changeable—not just over the life

course—but also in interaction with others in different areas of life at the same time. It is well acknowledged that multiple masculinities exist, but there continues to be a sense that a man has *a* masculinity that he is producing, constructing, and maintaining. Yet individuals themselves may have multiple masculinities or senses of masculinity as they live their lives, making the task of masculinities scholars all the more complex.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to dedicate this chapter to the memory of Romit Dasgupta, a leading figure of masculinity studies in Japan until his untimely passing in 2018.

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### Related Chapters

- 4 Gender and Language
- 6 Transgender, Non-Binary Genders, and Intersex in Japan
- 7 Gender and Ethnicity in Urban Japan
- 11 Intimacy in and Beyond the Family
- 25 Myths of Masculinity in the Martial Arts
- 26 The Continuum of Male Beauty in Contemporary Japan
- 33 Gender, Media, and Misogyny in Japan

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