

# Herbivore Masculinity in Media Discourse: The Japanese TV Drama *Ohitorisama*

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## Introduction

1. The Japanese TV drama *Ohitorisama* (The Single Lady), broadcast on TBS in 2009, was a TV production that had an audience rating of 9.45 per cent.<sup>[1]</sup> Even though its audience rating is merely average, it is worthwhile to take a closer look at this TV drama, since the male lead actor Teppei Koike, who plays the male protagonist Shin'ichi, received the 'U-can<sup>[2]</sup> Shingo Ryūkōgo Taishō' (the U-can award for neologisms and buzzwords) for his role as a *sōshokukei danshi*<sup>[3]</sup> (herbivore man).<sup>[4]</sup> He won the award together with columnist Maki Fukasawa, who coined the term in 2006 and was distinguished for its creation.
2. Hardly any other term that emerged in recent years in Japan has influenced public discourse on so many different levels than the expression 'herbivore man'. Fukazawa's aim was to express an allegedly new quality of young men whose most striking characteristic is that they have lost interest in sex and/or in engaging in love relationships with women. Herbivore men are not asexual, but they are not as proactive towards women as men of previous generations were and in the way that is perceived to be normative masculine behaviour in Japan. Sex has become a commonplace act which is initiated by women as well, and which thus makes the idea of the conquering man and conquered woman obsolete. Therefore, sex has lost its position as the ultimate goal a man has to achieve. Herbivore men can have emotionally deep but platonic relationships with women and, for example, spend the night in the same room with them to support them emotionally, without having sexual contact. Fukasawa refers to herbivore men in this regard as *sōine danshi*<sup>[5]</sup> (sleep-sharing men) and writes:

*Sōine danshi* (sleep-sharing men) are men who ask a girl if they should come over and sleep next to her when she feels ill or is sad and distressed because of a broken heart. However, when a man would say something like this to a girl in the past, and then visit her at her house, it was obvious that he had 'more' in mind. Yet, sleep-sharing men really just mean sleep-sharing. And when the morning comes, they just say 'So, just give me a call if you are not feeling well again' and leave nonchalantly.<sup>[6]</sup>

3. Many men of the older generations saw this as a clear opportunity to initiate a sexual encounter. Yet, for herbivore men, the chance to have sex with a woman is not particularly important anymore. Philosopher Masahiro Morioka interpreted herbivore men differently, stating that these men are interested in relationships with women, but they are so inexperienced in interacting with them that they simply do not know what to do.<sup>[7]</sup> Along with this new attitude towards sex and relationships, the discourse on herbivore men quickly expanded and incorporated ideas of individualism and self-fulfilment, which is also manifested in catering to one's personal interests, such as hobbies or clothes, for example. Covering a discourse ranging from fashion and consumption to relationships, the term 'herbivore men' has become a buzzword that describes a much talked-about phenomenon which is positioned at the intersection of social, political and public discourse. However, even though Fukasawa intended to describe a positive development of young men, the term quickly received a negative connotation and herbivore men are now seen as not being 'proper' men, because they are said to lack assertiveness and ambition. Therefore,

they are viewed as a problem for Japanese society and, among other things, connected to shrinking birth and marriage rates as well as Japan's economic downturn.[\[8\]](#)

4. *Ohitorisama* is the story of the herbivore man Shin'ichi and his older colleague Satomi, who both work at the same school and eventually become a couple. Over the course of the drama, both evolve and grow in terms of their personality, which makes the drama a coming-of-age story, among other things. It is therefore worthwhile to take a closer look at how the drama negotiates gender in general, focusing on the male protagonist's development in particular. Before going into detail, however, I will provide a short synopsis of the show.

### Synopsis of the drama

5. The romantic comedy *Ohitorisama* tells the story of Satomi, a 33-year-old history teacher at a private girl's high school, and Shin'ichi, a substitute teacher who starts working at the same school. Since Satomi is single by choice, she is the 'single lady' to which the title of the drama refers. Coincidentally, however, she ends up sharing her apartment with Shin'ichi. What starts as a gesture of support for Shin'ichi, a living arrangement meant to only last until he can afford a place of his own, develops into a romantic relationship between two quite unequal characters. The older, more experienced Satomi is very serious when it comes to her job, but neglects her household, cannot cook and has a lack of social relationships, which hardly go any further than the occasional contact with her colleagues and sporadic dates with two men. Shin'ichi, on the other hand, is inexperienced in the professional world since he has never held a proper job before. He is also inexperienced when it comes to dating and love relationships. However, he shows a great amount of empathy and is very skilled at cooking and doing household chores.
6. The drama relates the experiences of these two protagonists in everyday life situations, which are mainly situated at and around the school, and which unfold in the realm of interpersonal relationships and encounters. In the end, Satomi and Shin'ichi become a couple. Satomi comes to terms with her situation and acknowledges that she only tried to convince herself that she was happy being alone. Meeting Shin'ichi made her realise that there was a deep gap inside her that was eventually filled by him. Shin'ichi comes to terms with his attitude towards both his professional and personal life. In the end, he leaves to take a job in Iriomote-jima in Okinawa Prefecture to become a 'proper' man and teacher and thus a proper partner for Satomi.

### Japanese TV dramas and social development

7. Japanese TV dramas (*terebi dorama*), which usually air weekly over a period of 10 to 12 weeks, tend to address topics that are currently being discussed in Japanese society[\[9\]](#) and enable their audience to get in touch with and negotiate current discourses.[\[10\]](#) Even though the production of these TV shows aims to create an audience which in turn will generate revenue for the broadcasting station[\[11\]](#) and, therefore, cannot be too critical,[\[12\]](#) *terebi dorama* are prone to discussing issues that are perceived as social problems.[\[13\]](#) TV dramas can neither be understood as a mirror of society nor as an institution that provides advice that is appropriate to the viewer's personal situation. Consequently, they are unlikely to cause direct social change.[\[14\]](#) However, referring to Anthony Giddens' concept of self-reflexivity, Kelly Hu explains how TV dramas can aid viewers in making life choices: 'Individuals will ask themselves questions about everything from lifestyles and relationships to body image and self-therapy. Japanese TV dramas present a multitude of similar questions with choices acted out for the viewers.'[\[15\]](#)
8. Since the 1990s and 2000s, the diversification of gender constructions and the discussions about them have become common topics in Japanese TV series.[\[16\]](#) In this sense, *Ohitorisama* can be understood

as presenting a very different kind of masculinity and negotiating it with reference to current societal developments in Japan. Yet, Shin'ichi was also evaluated by society on the basis of the commonly accepted idea of masculinity—what Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell has called 'hegemonic masculinity'.<sup>[17]</sup> This is the ideal construction of a man that the majority of a society accepts as valid, supports and reconstructs. In post-war Japan, the so-called 'salaryman'—a white-collar employee who lives with his wife and kids—became the manifestation of hegemonic masculinity. His wife does the housework and childrearing while he works long hours, earns promotions and gets salary raises in line with a system of seniority. This ideal is closely connected to the concept of the *daikokubashira*, that is the central pillar of a traditional Japanese house and, as such, the main support of its structure: a metaphor for the idealised position of men in Japanese society. As breadwinners, these men are considered to be the central person in the household and crucial to the economic wellbeing of the family and the whole nation.<sup>[18]</sup> Hence, the rationale of Japan's hegemonic masculinity means that being a proper man in Japan is closely connected to being a reliable and mature partner who earns his dignity to a great extent from his social status and professional occupation.<sup>[19]</sup> However, with the burst of the economic bubble in the 1990s, the ideal of the salaryman lost appeal, opening gaps which are now filled by alternative concepts. The herbivore man can be viewed as such an alternative. In the following, I will elaborate on two major aspects of the TV drama *Ohitorisama* that are especially prominent and revealing with regard to gender: professional life and relationships.

## Professional Life

9. Masculinity and work are heavily intertwined and the term 'salaryman' already indicates that the very manifestation of hegemonic masculinity in Japan is a direct reference to the man's occupation. In the following section, I will discuss Shin'ichi's attitude towards work and how it can be interpreted in terms of masculinity.

### *Ambition*

10. When Shin'ichi is introduced to the viewer in episode one, he works at a part-time job in a supermarket (*arubaito*) and is obviously neither very motivated nor focused on his work. He also does not earn enough money to rent a flat of his own, which is why he is staying at his friend Hiroyuki's place. When Shin'ichi is talking to Hiroyuki about a job opportunity to work as a substitute teacher, he shows a distinctive lack of ambition with respect to both changing his situation and his professional life in general, as he is not very eager to take the offered position.<sup>[20]</sup>
11. These circumstances show that Shin'ichi is, by definition, not in the position that Japan's hegemonic masculinity expects from a man. He is working as a *freeter*<sup>[21]</sup> and is thus in a precarious financial situation. Hegemonic masculinity demands that a man has a good, stable income in order to be able to support not only himself but a family as well. Shin'ichi is not in the position to do that, as he can barely make enough money to provide for himself.<sup>[22]</sup> Furthermore, it is not only the amount of the income that is important, but also whether the job is secure and therefore enables a man to have future prospects. Being a *freeter* means lacking any type of job security.
12. For Shin'ichi, however, this does not seem to be a big problem. He is happy with his life and does not feel the urge to change anything. He also does not seem to be bothered by the fact that he does not have much money. In episode two, for example, when Satomi criticises his eating habits as coming from a life of poverty, he almost happily replies: 'Yes, because I am poor.'<sup>[23]</sup> Consequently, Shin'ichi is not at all concerned about living up to the common ideal of a man and having the financial means to support himself and a potential family. Since several studies have already shown that hegemonic masculinity is an ideal which is already supported by youth, Shin'ichi's attitude towards money cannot just be explained with reference to his young age.<sup>[24]</sup> It is obvious that his values differ from those that are commonly

accepted.

13. As Shin'ichi is not really bothered about working part-time and staying at his friend's place, he is also not very eager to find a new job. He is not actively searching for a job—the chance to work at the new school was arranged by his university—and he even doubts that his profession, namely being a teacher, is a good fit for him. [25] Only hesitatingly does he accept the new job. Therefore, Shin'ichi neither has the ambition to be successful in his current job, [26] nor is he motivated to be properly employed. This is an attitude which is associated with herbivore men, as well. Chris Deacon elaborates on the results of his interview study, stating that '[t]hose who identified as *sōshokukei danshi* were generally against entering the corporate world ... [because they] found corporate culture and the life of a salaryman abhorrent.' [27] In addition, Morioka quotes one of his interviewees who said: 'I really do not have any career ambitions.' [28] Shin'ichi's lack of desire to strive for a conventional career is, thus, a commonality with herbivore men.

### **Professionalism**

14. Towards the beginning of the drama, Shin'ichi obviously lacks confidence and experience in being a teacher, which is not very surprising since this is his first teaching job. Just having started working at the school, the students play pranks on him, writing on the blackboard with indelible ink, asking if he has a girlfriend. His inability to erase the question amuses the girls and is commented on as being 'cute' (*kawaii*). Shin'ichi himself seems to like being called cute and even though he blushes, he smilingly acknowledges it. The flurry in the classroom is brought to an end with Satomi rushing in and restoring discipline with authority in a matter of seconds. [29] Shin'ichi then continues his class, discussing a story where a human is reborn as a tiger. He himself is wondering what animal he would like to be reborn as, triggering suggestions from his students that include squirrel, rabbit, hamster and koala, [30] with a koala appealing to him as well. This is just another way in which the drama alludes to the fact that he is clearly meant to be perceived as a herbivore man who appears to be rather antithetical to the common image of a grown-up and successful working man.
15. These two comical scenes clearly show that Shin'ichi has a different attitude towards carrying out his profession than other teachers. First of all, he is contrasted with Satomi who personifies the perfect school teacher. She has authority and the means to discipline the class, she is knowledgeable about her subject, she is capable of taking over several additional tasks for the school, and she is respected by both students and fellow teachers for those reasons. Shin'ichi seems to be the opposite of all that. He obviously is not being treated as a proper teacher by the students. They rather see him as one of their peers, both because of his young age and also because of his demeanour at school and in the classroom. He neither appears as a person of authority nor is he experienced in teaching. However, the drama reveals very quickly that Shin'ichi has a different attitude towards teaching and thus towards the way he approaches his job.
16. This aspect first emerges during a conversation between Satomi and Shin'ichi in episode two. He asks her what he can do to be respected by the students and seen as an admirable teacher. She replies: 'Become an admirable man.' When being asked what that means, she says: 'To always keep one's countenance, to be dignified, and to be reliable.' After briefly thinking about her words, Shin'ichi comes to the conclusion: 'Ah, I think that is impossible to achieve!' [31] What Satomi does here is create a direct link between gender and profession in the sense that in order to be successful, a person has to live up to the expectations of society and only then will they be recognised as an admirable person. The traits Satomi describes are those of an ideal mature person. In Japan, being a mature man is greatly connected to having a family and a job. Hence, she describes the characteristics of a mature man who is a strong support for his loved ones, re-imagining the *daikokubashira*. As such, Satomi's words serve to convey the common idea of Japan's hegemonic gender order. [32]

17. In order to become recognised as a professional, Shin'ichi needs to be recognised as a man. This scene also shows, however, that Shin'ichi does not even bother trying to live up to social expectations. To him, trying to conform to the concept of hegemonic masculinity does not make sense, as it is impossible to achieve in the first place. He does not care about what society expects him to do or be.
18. Shin'ichi is very empathetic, and able to understand and connect with others on an emotional level. This not only comes into play in his personal relationships, but also in his interactions with students and in his teaching style. Shin'ichi is always willing to get involved in solving his student's problems, whether they be suspected of theft,<sup>[33]</sup> unwillingness to attend a certain class,<sup>[34]</sup> or another issue. In all of these cases, Shin'ichi feels there is more to the student's deviant behaviour and is willing to delve deeper in order to understand the real problem behind it. To have an empathetic and understanding teacher in a school drama series is nothing unusual; it is more or less a genre convention.<sup>[35]</sup> However, in *Ohitorisama*, this is used as a stylistic tool to express Shin'ichi's different approach to his profession as a teacher. Indeed, Satomi, who has a completely different teaching style and way of interacting with students, also cares about her students. However, Shin'ichi gets much more personally involved with the students' problems than Satomi. That is because he is able to understand the students and connect with them on a much deeper emotional level than the other teachers.
19. Shin'ichi's empathy and ability to understand others on an emotional level are traits conventionally associated with herbivore men. But in *Ohitorisama*, it is not only a quality of a different masculinity, but also of a different type of professionalism. The very students who mocked Shin'ichi in the beginning and did not even acknowledge him as a professional teacher, ultimately end up respecting him as a professional. They coin the term 'Kamisaka magic'<sup>[36]</sup> as a way of appreciating the unique way he supports his students emotionally, alleviating their fears and leading them to success. Hence, he meets his professional duty as a teacher in a very different way.
20. Shin'ichi also deviates quite obviously from hegemonic ideas of a man who is the breadwinner outside of the house and, therefore, not involved with duties at home, as he is very capable of doing housework and cooking.<sup>[37]</sup> Not only does he enjoy it, he also has no problem balancing it with his job. As doing the household chores in Japan is considered to be the woman's task,<sup>[38]</sup> Shin'ichi clearly has a very different idea of the gendered division of labour.<sup>[39]</sup> He is at ease doing tasks which are generally perceived as women's work and also is not bothered if he is not the breadwinner, as becomes clear, for example, when he thinks of moving to a remote town where Satomi, of course, would continue to be a teacher and he would just find any job.<sup>[40]</sup>

### **Relationships and interpersonal relations**

21. Much of the drama's content revolves around Shin'ichi's interpersonal relationships. The way he treats other people shows that he has fundamentally different ways of interacting than the other male characters of the show or hegemonic ideas of masculinity in Japan would suggest.

#### ***Shin'ichi's relationships with women***

22. When Fukasawa coined the term 'herbivore men', she wanted to give a name to a new idea of masculinity, which, according to her, more and more (especially younger) Japanese men could be associated with. One of the main traits of these 'new' men is their reluctance and/or disinterest in love and sexual relationships. This aspect is also one of the most important ones in public discourses about herbivore men.
23. The drama addresses this topic, for example, when Shin'ichi needs to accompany Satomi home because she got too drunk during a welcome party at school. Since it is already very late, he stays at her apartment and sleeps on the living room floor.<sup>[41]</sup> What happens here is similar to what Fukasawa

describes about herbivore men when referring to them as sleep-sharing men. Shin'ichi takes Satomi home since she is clearly too drunk to go home alone, and then, instead of taking advantage of the situation, sleeps on the floor of the living room. He has no ulterior motive and does not even think about exploiting this situation.

24. There is not any sexual tension between him and Satomi over the course of the whole drama, not even when they become a couple in the final episode.<sup>[42]</sup> Satomi fully understands that their relationship could potentially become a sexual one when Shin'ichi tells her that it is time to go to bed, while she is brushing her teeth in the bathroom. However, when she steps out, mentally prepared to explain why they should not have sex now, Shin'ichi is already asleep on the floor of the living room—where he always sleeps while she sleeps in her bed. Shin'ichi never shows any intention of becoming sexually involved with Satomi, their relationship is completely void of any sexual tension. Therefore, it is by definition a relationship where Shin'ichi behaves like a herbivore man in the way Fukasawa understands it: sexual intercourse is not on Shin'ichi's mind.<sup>[43]</sup>
25. However, Shin'ichi is emotionally involved with Satomi and falls in love with her over the course of the drama. Yet, especially as far as confessing his love to Satomi is concerned, Shin'ichi differs from what is understood as typically masculine in Japan. This becomes obvious in the drama, as Shin'ichi is contrasted with other male characters that do conform to ideas of hegemonic masculinity, which stress that it is the man's role to approach a woman and confidently capture her heart. He has to be proactive and assertive in approaching her in order to win her over. Shin'ichi, however, is not confident in approaching Satomi. It takes him a very long time to realise his feelings and to finally find the courage to tell her how he feels. He cannot explain his emotions in a mature and reflected way, but instead describes that he sometimes feels a heartache when he sees her. He more resembles a child who experiences love for the first time than a confident man confessing his love. When he eventually does tell Satomi how he feels, he mumbles and stumbles: 'I might ... have ... fallen in love with you.'<sup>[44]</sup>
26. There are other male characters in *Ohitorisama* that contrast Shin'ichi's behaviour with regard to interacting with women in terms of love. Shin'ichi's friend Hiroyuki, for example, is the perfect personification of a man who conforms to Japan's hegemonic masculinity when it comes to approaching women. Hiroyuki is proactive, in no way reluctant, and knows exactly with whom he wants to engage. He is interested in Shin'ichi's fellow colleague Kimika and approaches her on several occasions by directly talking to her and making his interest in her very obvious. One time he even refers to the very stereotypical approach of impressing her with a convertible car.<sup>[45]</sup> By contrasting these two male characters, the drama stresses the very different approach Shin'ichi has when interacting with the woman he loves, especially in comparison to what is considered to be normative male behaviour.
27. The arguably most important secondary male character that plays a vital role in contrasting Shin'ichi is Hitoshi. Hitoshi is more or less the positive epitome of a man who apparently lacks many of the negative sides that Japanese salarymen have. He is handsome, tall, has a good educational background, and is successful in his job. Therefore, he represents all the ideals a man was meant to live up to in order to be a perfect partner for a woman, as they were expressed in the 1990s as the so-called *san kō* (three highs).<sup>[46]</sup> In the drama, he appears to be the optimal partner for Satomi or any other woman, and all the other female staff members at the high school envy her for being invited to go on an *omiai* with him.<sup>[47]</sup> However, Hitoshi combines not only all the good sides of a stereotypical Japanese man, but also those traits that Shin'ichi usually shows and which count as being antitypical of hegemonic masculinity in the drama. Hitoshi is very empathetic towards Satomi and proves to be a gentle and patient partner. Yet, he clearly states his interest in her and asks her very directly to go out with him, adding that he will not be pressuring her to marry right away.<sup>[48]</sup> Therefore, he also takes the lead and straightforwardly approaches his love interest. He does not give up, even after Satomi declines his offer and asks for more time to think. Yet, he is a typical salaryman and his ideas about marriage are quite conservative. Satomi explains to him that the relationship with her former partner Shōgō did not work out because she could

not see herself doing the housework and pursuing a career at the same time. Therefore, her partner retracted his proposal. Hitoshi replies that since her profession is about educating people, she should see marriage as a bond between two people who educate each other. By saying this, he tries to convince her that even though she would not be working anymore after their marriage, she still could practise her profession—just not in the classroom, but at home with her partner. In other words, he is sugar-coating the fact that he expects her to become a housewife and fulfil the stereotypical role of a married woman in post-war Japan.

28. Satomi's former partner Shōgō also has a different attitude than Shin'ichi. He, too, is aware of his feelings and, unlike Shin'ichi, communicates them to Satomi without hesitation or confusion.<sup>[49]</sup> Hiroyuki, Shōgō, and Hitoshi are thus in line with the hegemonic gender order when it comes to being proactive, assertive and confident in their interactions with women.
29. Shin'ichi is therefore distinctly different from the other male characters of the drama. His age and (lack of) life experience do not seem to be important factors in this regard, since he is different from both men who are older<sup>[50]</sup> and men of his own age.<sup>[51]</sup> His problems with being able to communicate his emotions when he is in love can in fact be interpreted as the drama's take on herbivore men being partially influenced by Morioka's definition.<sup>[52]</sup> During regular everyday life situations, Shin'ichi has no problems talking to women, and can carry on a conversation.<sup>[53]</sup> Yet, when it comes to more than just friendship, he suddenly appears unconfident and lost, and does not know what to do. Shin'ichi's overall inexperience with dating women becomes even more obvious in his interactions with his colleague Kimika.
30. Shin'ichi is a young teacher who immediately catches the eye of both female teachers and the school's students. Fellow teacher Kimika is around his age and tries everything to win his heart. Shin'ichi, however, seems to be unaware of what affect she has on her colleagues and students. In episode five, for example, she asks Shin'ichi to accompany her to buy a new camera after she overheard that Shin'ichi is an amateur photographer. While having lunch in a nearby hotel, she suggests that, when in private, they could address each other by their first names. It is at that moment that Shin'ichi realises that this is in fact a date.<sup>[54]</sup> Before that, he had no idea that Kimika's intention was actually to get closer to him. Even though Shin'ichi is a sensitive and emotionally intelligent man, he completely fails to correctly interpret Sawai's romantic approaches.

### ***Shin'ichi as a new kind of partner?***

31. Ultimately, Satomi neither decides for Hitoshi nor Shōgō, but rather engages in a relationship with Shin'ichi. In episode nine, she explains that despite Shin'ichi's flaws and his seemingly constant need for help, it is she who is actually helped by him. She does not clearly state what she means by that. But it is likely that Shin'ichi on the one hand filled the gap within her, which she tried to stuff with all the goods she had purchased in order to convince herself that she is happy.<sup>[55]</sup> On the other hand, Shin'ichi expresses quite a different idea of marriage than Satomi's suitors. When he and Satomi face trouble because their relationship is not accepted by the school authorities, he clearly states his willingness to move to a different place where both of them can find new jobs. He does not see himself as the sole breadwinner of the family while his wife has to do the household chores. On the contrary, he wants Satomi to keep working full time as a teacher, while he will find just some other job and continue to do the housework.<sup>[56]</sup>
32. Hence, the drama makes a clear statement: When it comes to partnerships, the hegemonically gendered division of labour seems to be unappealing to women, regardless of how 'perfect' the man may be. The herbivore man is what women are looking for. That is why Shin'ichi is the most appealing man to Satomi.
33. Shin'ichi is a character who incorporates aspects of two different definitions of herbivore men. On the

one hand, he is very sociable with women, yet does not realise when he is in a situation that could develop into a romantic or sexual relationship. This lack of comprehension seems to occur because the possibility of entering into a relationship apparently does not cross his mind, which ultimately means that he is not at all even interested in having such a relationship. [57] In this sense, Shin'ichi resembles Fukasawa's definition of a herbivore man. The trouble he has expressing himself and interacting with the woman he is in love with, on the other hand, is aligned with Morioka's definition. The drama thus functions as an active agent in negotiating different versions of herbivore men and in doing so creates a more comprehensive idea of what the configuration of an herbivore man in contemporary Japan might look like.

### ***Shin'ichi's development***

34. With regard to his attitude towards work, the drama depicts a profound change in Shin'ichi. In the beginning he is portrayed as an inexperienced and disinterested professional who had quite particular ideas about his job that differentiated him from his colleagues. By the end of the drama, he has evolved into a much more professional teacher. This development resembles a coming-of-age story. At the beginning, Shin'ichi is, for example, reluctant to doubt his students when a significant amount of money appears to have been stolen at the school, even though he has a reason to suspect one of his students. Having to suspect one of them bothers him so much that Satomi at one point asks him why he is acting so oddly. During the ensuing discussion, he expresses that if being a teacher means not trusting his own students he does not want to be a teacher anymore. [58] Shin'ichi's idea of what the relationship between students and teachers should be like is as idealised as it is unrealistic. He does not want to accept that reality is different from his utopian vision of the teaching job. In the end, he matures, becomes more professional in his job, and is accepted by his students as a teacher. However, despite shifting his attitude towards that of a 'mainstream' teacher, he still stays true to himself. When he is troubled about the way he has changed, Shin'ichi asks his best friend Hiroyuki if he has also noticed a difference. Hiroyuki replies: 'No matter what happens, you will always stay yourself.' [59] Therefore, even though he has changed, Shin'ichi will still stay true to himself and thus will always be a different kind of teacher.
35. The drama depicts an evolution in Shin'ichi's relationships as well. At the beginning, he is very insecure and inexperienced in love encounters. He does not recognise when a woman is interested in him and also needs a long time to understand what he feels about Satomi and to develop the courage to confess his love. However, he becomes more experienced in being with women and learns how to interpret and come to terms with his own feelings. He makes concrete plans for the future and is not afraid of facing any obstacle in order to be with the woman he loves. Never, however, is there a sexual encounter between Shin'ichi and Satomi, and never is there sexual tension to be felt. [60] In this respect, Shin'ichi remains a stereotypical herbivore man—at least during the course of the drama.
36. When he leaves at the end of the drama to take a job in Iriomote-jima (Okinawa prefecture), he wants to achieve two things: First, he wants to become a man worthy of being Satomi's partner, which means to become a man who is close to what she described as an admirable man—that is, a mature and reliable partner and, as such, also what Japan's hegemonic masculinity defines as an admirable man. Second, he wants to become a professional teacher. Setting these goals shows that he is striving to become a suitable partner for Satomi. [61]

### **Conclusion**

37. In *Ohitorisama*, the herbivore man Shin'ichi aspires to make changes with regard to two main aspects: his profession and his relationships. Thus, the drama describes his coming-of-age story. Shin'ichi is constructed as the 'perfect' herbivore man at the beginning, and consequently appears immature. Therefore, the question arises as to whether Shin'ichi still continues to be a herbivore man even after he

changes over the course of the drama.

38. The herbivore man discourse in Japan is embedded in an environment of cultural panic—especially due to the demographic development of Japanese society, with questions arising about marriage and childbirth rates (which are both declining). Herbivore men are often seen as one of the major factors that cause these demographic problems. One of the main reasons for declining marriage rates is that men feel insecure about being able to live up to the expectations of female partners and society. In *Ohitorisama*, Shin'ichi obviously does not live up to these expectations at first. The drama shows how he evolves towards the idea of hegemonic masculinity and thus adjusts to these expectations. Yet, at the same time, he stills stays true to himself, which is also why Satomi chooses him as a partner. He will not become a typical salaryman who expects his wife to do all the work at home. He is a man who will do his share (or even more) of the housework and, therefore, enables Satomi to live in a relationship with him that she could never have with her other suitors.
39. On the one hand, Shin'ichi embodies a new kind of man who enables women to have a professional career and who can serve as a blueprint for what needs to change in order to resolve the socioeconomic and demographic problems of Japanese society. [62] On the other hand, however, *Ohitorisama* is also an attempt to bring the unconventional herbivore man closer to Japanese conventions. It provides an idea of what a new form of masculinity might look like—one which is clearly different from hegemonic masculinity in terms of emotional capacity and in the ability to approach professional life and relationships. Herbivore men are thus depicted as a positive alternative to hegemonic masculinity. However, they cannot stay 'purely' herbivore, but rather need to shift towards hegemonic masculinity. Hence, they are not depicted as a new ideal. The drama constructs them as a new kind of man that, even though he develops in a positive way, must not completely lose touch with Japan's hegemonic masculinity. *Ohitorisama* thus provides a more comprehensive idea of what herbivore men could actually be like and interprets them as a positive example of how masculinity in contemporary Japan could evolve.

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## Notes

[1] See [Audience Rating TV](#): Dorama shichō ritsu (Audience rating of dramas), *Ohitorisama*. Most of the TV dramas which were aired in 2009 had about the same audience rating. Online: <http://artv.info/ar0910.html#ohitorisama> (accessed 23 August 2016).

[2] U-can is a company that is active in various fields of entertainment and culture.

[3] He is referred to as being an herbivore man in the first episode of *Ohitorisama*.

[4] [Yō Ōtsuka](#), *Sōshoku danshi, shingo-ryūkōgo taishō de toppu ten ni* (Sōshoku danshi enters the top ten of the award for neologisms and buzzwords), (02 December 2009). Online: <http://www.nikkeibp.co.jp/article/column/20091201/198327/> (accessed 23 August 2016).

[5] Fukasawa created this term in analogy to the Japanese expression *sōine*, which describes the very common practise of Japanese mothers to sleep on one *futon* together with their children. It therefore refers to providing emotional support by physically being close to someone.

[6] Maki Fukasawa, *Sōshoku danshi sedai: Heisei danshi zukan* (Generation of Herbivore Men: Illustrated Encyclopedia of Heisei men), Tokyo: Kōbunsha, 2009, 130.

[7] Masahiro Morioka, *Sōshokukei danshi no ren'aigaku* (Love Education for Herbivore Men), Tokyo: Media Faktorī, 2008.

[8] It is noteworthy that the discourse on herbivore men is not an academic one. It is not a social theory, but rather expresses a sentiment and an observation about Japanese society. It is furthermore shaped mainly by the media and thus by a variety of authors and media products that contribute to this discourse. For a thorough discussion of the term 'herbivore man', see e.g. [Masahiro Morioka](#), "'Sōshoku danshi" no genshōgakuteki kōsatsu (A phenomenological study of herbivore men)', in *The Review of Life Studies* 1 (2011): 13–28. Online: <http://www.lifestudies.org/press/rls0103.pdf> (accessed 23 August 2016); Annette Schad-Seifert, 'Der Grasfressermann als mediales Trendwort im Diskurs um Japans Lost Generation' (The grass eater as a media buzzword within the discourse of Japan's lost generation), in *Prekarisierungsgesellschaften in Ostasien*, ed. Stephan Köhn and Monika Unkel, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2016, 261–81; Ronald Saladin, 'Between gyaru-o and sōshokukei danshi. Body discourses in lifestyle magazines for young Japanese men,' in *Body Concepts: Changing Discourses of the Body in Contemporary Japanese Society*, special issue of *Contemporary Japan* 27(1): (2015): pp. 53–70; Constanze Noack, 'Wissenskonstruktionen von Männlichkeit am Beispiel sōshoku danshi im Diskurs englischer und deutschsprachiger Onlineartikel' (Knowledge constructions of masculinity. The example of the herbivore man discourse in German and English online articles), in *Familie – Jugend – Generation. Japanwissenschaftliche und medienkulturwissenschaftliche Perspektiven*, ed. Nora Kottmann et.al., Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2014, 205–222, [doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-01568-8\\_12](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-01568-8_12).

[9] See Hilaria Gössmann, 'Kontinuität und Wandel weiblicher und männlicher Lebensentwürfe in japanischen Fernsehserien (*terebi dorama*) seit der Jahrtausendwende', in *Japanische Populärkultur und Gender* (Japanese Popular Culture and Gender), ed. Michiko Mae, Elisabeth Scherer and Katharina Hülsmann, Wiesbaden, Springer VS, 127–48, 127.

[10] See Elisabeth Scherer, 'Alternative Lebenskonzepte von der Stange? Konstruktion und Rezeption von Geschlechteridentität in japanischen Fernsehserien (*terebi dorama*)', in *Japanische Populärkultur und Gender* (Japanese Popular Culture and Gender), ed. Michiko Mae, Elisabeth Scherer and Katharina Hülsmann, Wiesbaden, Springer VS, 149–75, 171.

[11] See Scherer, 'Alternative Lebenskonzepte von der Stange? Konstruktion und Rezeption von Geschlechteridentität in japanischen Fernsehserien (*terebi dorama*)', 152.

[12] See Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt, 'Terebi dorama ni miru raifu kōsu no datsu hyōjūka to mikonka no hyōshō – *Araundo 40 to Konkastu!* O rei ni' (The de-standardization of the life course and representation of non-wedlock tendencies as seen in TV series – The examples of *Araundo 40* and *Konkatsu!*), in *Raifu kōsu sentaku no yukue – nihon to doitsu no shigoto/kazoku/sumai* (Beyond a Standardized Life Course – Biographical Choices About Work, Family and Housing in Japan and Germany), eds. Hiromi Tanaka, Maren Godzik and Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt, Tokyo: Shin'yōsha, 2013, 184–208, 187.

[13] Painter suggests that this is a characteristic of Japanese popular culture in general. It enables the public to attend to topics 'many Japanese would have real trouble discussing ... because they would have to relate them to actual socially connected others.' (See Andrew A. Painter, 'Japanese daytime television, popular culture, and ideology', in *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 19(2) (1993): 295–325, 311, [doi.org/10.2307/132642](https://doi.org/10.2307/132642)

[14] See Kelly Hu, 'Can't live without happiness: Reflexivity and Japanese TV drama', in *Television, Japan and Globalization*, ed. Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto, Eva Tsai and JungBong Choi, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010, 195–216, 196.

[15] See Hu, 'Can't live without happiness: Reflexivity and Japanese TV drama,' 212.

[16] See Gössmann, 'Kontinuität und Wandel weiblicher und männlicher Lebensentwürfe in japanischen Fernsehserien (*terebi dorama*) seit der Jahrtausendwende,' 129.

[17] For more information on the concept of hegemonic masculinity, see Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005.

[18] See e.g. Tom Gill, 'When pillars evaporate: Structuring masculinity on the Japanese margins,' in *Men and Masculinities in Contemporary Japan: Dislocating the Salaryman Doxa*, ed. James E. Roberson and Nobue Suzuki, London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003, 144–61, 145.

[19] For more information on the manifestation of hegemonic masculinity in Japan, see the introduction to this special issue and e.g. Romit Dasgupta, *Re-reading the Salaryman in Japan: Crafting Masculinities*, London: Routledge, 2013.

[20] *Ohitorisama* episode 1: *Bishi bishi iku wa yo, kakugo shinasai! Josei kyōshi VS sōshoku danshi* (I won't be easy on you,

be prepared! Female teacher VS herbivore man), TBS, Tokyo, 2009, min: 10:13–10:37.

[21] The term *freeter* derives from the English term 'free' and the German word 'Arbeiter' and describes a person who is working a part time job and does not have a stable employment situation or social security. See also Emma Cook's contribution to this volume.

[22] The tension of his financial situation is stressed again later in the drama, when he moves into Satomi's place because he does not have enough money to afford a flat until he gets his first paycheck. See *Ohitorisama* episode 2: *Watashi datte mamoraretai!* (Because I want to be protected!), TBS, Tokyo, 2009, min: 43:34–46:00.

[23] *Ohitorisama* episode 2: min: 12:00–12:04.

[24] See e.g. Genaro Castro-Vázquez and Izumi Kishi, 'Masculinities and sexuality: The case of a Japanese top ranking senior high school,' in *Journal of Gender Studies* 12(1) (2003): 21–33 [doi.org/10.1080/0958923032000067790](https://doi.org/10.1080/0958923032000067790); Futoshi Taga, *Otokorashisa no shakaigaku: Yuragu otoko no raifukōsu* (Sociology of Masculinity: The Unsteady Life Courses of Men), Kyoto: Sekai Shisōsha, 2006.

[25] *Ohitorisama* episode 1, min: 10:20–10:25.

[26] If Shin'ichi is not convinced that being a teacher is the right thing for him, he could look for a career in different profession. But he does not.

[27] Chris Deacon, 'All the world's a stage. Herbivore boys and the performance of masculinity in contemporary Japan', in *Manga Girl Seeks Herbivore Boy: Studying Japanese Gender at Cambridge*, ed. Brigitte Steger and Angelika Koch, Zurich: Lit Verlag, 2013, 129–76, 137. Even though a school is not a company, the way the drama depicts how work is organised at the school, e.g. in terms of hierarchies, personal freedom or workflows, is similar to a company structure.

[28] Masahiro Morioka, *Sōshokukei danshi no ren'aigaku* (Love Education for Herbivore Men), 95.

[29] *Ohitorisama* episode 1, min: 14:20–15:36.

[30] *Ohitorisama* episode 1, min: 15:40–16:00. Most of these animals are herbivores and all of them are generally perceived as cute and harmless.

[31] *Ohitorisama* episode 2: min: 04:28–05:08.

[32] Hegemonic gender order is the social system that hegemonic masculinity brings about and which organises gender in a society. As gender impacts all aspects of society, the gender order is a fundamental aspect that structures not only gender relations, but society as a whole.

[33] *Ohitorisama* episode 4: *Watashi ni wa wakaru anata wa nigeru yō na ningen ja nai* (But I know that you are not a person who runs away), TBS, Tokyo, 2009.

[34] *Ohitorisama* episode 3: *Hitori ja nain data ... Watashi no heya ni otoko ga iru* (I wasn't alone ... there is a man in my room), TBS, Tokyo, 2009.

[35] The famous Kinpachi-sensei from the drama series *3 nen B gumi Kinpachi-sensei* (Kinpachi, the Teacher of Class 3b) (broadcast on TBS from 1979–2011 in irregular intervals) is a very well-known example of such an empathetic teacher.

[36] *Ohitorisama* episode 10: *Kandō no saishūkai no hazu ga ... kyūkyoku no kakusa renai no yukue wa?* (It was meant to be the emotional last time ... what is the future of this extremely unequal love?), TBS, Tokyo, 2009, min: 17:32–17:52.

[37] See e.g. *Ohitorisama* episode 3, min: 02:55–03:33; or *Ohitorisama* episode 1, min: 02:00–03:40.

[38] As far as the idealised gender order is concerned, anyway.

[39] This is even stated in the drama itself when Satomi comments on Shin'ichi's impressive cooking skills and his ability to use the leftovers for the next day's lunch: 'And something like this comes from a man!?' *Ohitorisama* episode 3, min: 09:08–09:11).

[40] See *Ohitorisama* episode 10, min: 09:10–09:42.

[41] See *Ohitorisama* episode 1, min: 15:40–16:50.

[42] See *Ohitorisama* episode 10, min: 02:26–03:10.

[43] This interpretation is furthermore substantiated when Hiroyuki, Shin'ichi's best friend, comments that he finds it absolutely unbelievable that Shin'ichi lives together with Satomi without any sexual contact. See *Ohitorisama* episode 5: *Kinkyū omiai! W dēto! Puropōzu!* (Emergency omiai! Double date! Proposing!), TBS, Tokyo, 2009, min: 01:00 – 01:20.

[44] *Ohitorisama* episode 7: *Naite! Dakishimete! Totsuzen no kokuhaku!!* (Cry! Hug me! Unexpected confession!!), TBS, Tokyo, 2009, min: 45:25–45:49

[45] *Ohitorisama* episode 3, min: 21:06–22:06.

[46] The 'three highs' are high stature, high educational background and high income. See Muriel Jolivet, *Japan. The Childless Society?* London and New York: Routledge, 1997, 142.

[47] *Omiai* is an arranged date. For more information on *omiaiai* and new forms of arranged dating in recent Japan, see e.g. Masahiro Yamada, 'Konkatsu genshō no hirogari no naka de' (Amidst the expansion of the marriage hunting phenomenon), in *'Konkatsu genshō' no shakaigaku: Nihon no haigūsha sentaku no ima* (Sociology of Marriage Hunting: Choosing a Partner in Contemporary Japan), ed. Masahiro Yamada, Tokyo: Tōyō Keizai Shinpōsha, 2010, 9–16.

[48] *Ohitorisama* episode 5, min: 23:11–23:47.

[49] *Ohitorisama* episode 9: *Toshi no sa ren'ai saishūshō! Sōshoku danshi VS moto kare & moto miai aite* (The last chapter of the age-gap love! Herbivore man VS former boyfriend & former dating partner), TBS, Tokyo, 2009, min: 15:31–15:35.

[50] And thus men who are in a different life stage, since both Hitoshi and Shōgō are well-established salarymen.

[51] Like his friend Hiroyuki.

[52] See Morioka, *Sōshokukei danshi no ren'aigaku* (Love Education for Herbivore Men); Morioka, "'Sōshoku danshi" no genshōgakuteki kōsatsu,' 17.

[53] As is proven in the first episode, for example, when Shin'ichi is talking with his fellow women teachers during a party while the only other two male staff members, namely the vice headmaster and another teacher, are depicted as the epitome of the Japanese *oyaji*. This is a derogatory term used to refer to middle-aged or older men who are unpleasant and unattractive. The two above-mentioned teachers get drunk, loud and obnoxious—as is not uncommon for an *oyaji*—while Shin'ichi not only stays sober, but even expresses his disapproval of their behavior by referring to them as 'bad drunks'. See *Ohitorisama* episode 1, min: 28:10–28:35.

[54] *Ohitorisama* episode 5, min: 13:05–13:15.

[55] *Ohitorisama* episode 9, min: 40:33–40:53.

[56] *Ohitorisama* episode 9, min: 09:11–09:42.

[57] If he was interested in entering into a relationship in principle, he would at least be aware of the chance of it happening, even if he does not want to have a relationship with that particular person.

[58] *Ohitorisama* episode 4, min: 31:14–31:42.

[59] *Ohitorisama* episode 4, min: 33:50–34:20.

[60] Except for the above-mentioned occasion, when Shin'ichi calls Satomi to bed after they just officially became a couple and when only Satomi, but not Shin'ichi, understands that their relationship might develop into a sexual one.

[61] *Ohitorisama* episode 10, min: 40:00–41:00.

[62] For more on the connection of demography, socioeconomic development and gender perceptions in Japan, see e.g. [Annette Schad-Seifert](#), *Japans kinderarme Gesellschaft: Die niedrige Geburtenrate und das Gender-Problem* (Japan's low-

birth society: Low fertility rate and the gender problem),, German Institute for Japanese Studies, 2006, 13–19. Online: <https://www.dijtokyo.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/WP0601SchadSeifert.pdf> (accessed 1 September 2016).

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