Introduction

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1. The burst of Japan's economic bubble in the early 1990s caused not only economic but also socio-political upheaval, which put a definite end to Japan's economic prosperity of the post-war years. It furthermore raised questions about commonly accepted gender role allocations. In particular, the position of men within Japan's society, which used to be strongly linked to the breadwinner role of the family, began to waver.

2. The protagonist of Japan's economic recovery after World War II was the so-called 'salaryman'—a suit-wearing company employee who commutes in overcrowded trains to his job, works long hours and may also be seen having drinks with his colleagues at the end of the day.[1] This salaryman, who is also sometimes referred to as a 'corporate warrior,' is understood to be a loyal employee to his company who is willing to fully sacrifice his time and energy to serve his employer at the expense of his private life, his family and sometimes even his health. Long working hours, long commutes, a lot of overtime and very few days off meant that the Japanese salaryman would hardly have time to spend together with his family or pursue his personal hobbies and, in some cases, did not even have enough time for recreation and exercise. The salaryman is furthermore seen as a *daikokubashira*, the central pillar of a traditional Japanese house. This metaphor acknowledges the salaryman's position in Japan, regarding him as the most important supporter of both Japan's society and its economy. He is the sole breadwinner of his family, while his wife takes care of the household and the children. While he is a full-time employee at a company, his wife is a full-time housewife and works in the paid sector only part time if she works outside the house at all. These gendered role allocations had already started to be formed as ideals back in the Meiji Period, but they did not become social reality until the post-war years of economic growth (especially in the 1950s and 1960s). It was only then that a salaryman would be able to earn enough to be the sole provider for his family. The salaryman himself would not be involved with housework and only very occasionally with childrearing. Therefore, he can also be seen as a manifestation of a clearly gendered division of labour. Since he benefits from a seniority system within the company he works for—which will grant him promotions and salary raises nearly automatically over time and which also comes with a de-facto lifetime job where he is neither meant to change his employer nor be fired at any time—the Japanese salaryman will earn enough money to provide a comfortable life for his family and himself. Even though this image of the salaryman is idealised, he became the manifestation of Japan's hegemonic masculinity and thus the widely regarded ideal to strive for, which would as such also rule the way the life histories of men in Japan unfold.

3. After the burst of the bubble economy, Japan's hegemonic gender order started to show cracks. These cracks revealed that the entire system was problematic and in turn, the salaryman as the idealised manifestation of hegemonic masculinity began to be questioned more loudly. More and more positions began to be filled with irregular workers, such as part-timers, contract workers, dispatched workers, etc. The ideal of the man being the sole breadwinner has become even more unrealistic as more and more women want to have a professional career, too, since jobs are not as secure as they used to be, and since it is increasingly the case that the income of just one single

household member is not enough to support the whole family. As the real-life situation of the salaryman apparently deteriorates, so does its idealisation … or does it really? Even though the socio-economic changes in Japan provoked a downfall of the salaryman as an ideal to strive for, it appears that core values of Japan's hegemonic masculinity did not lose their validity, and thus are still parameters men apply when construing and constructing their own masculinity.

4. The development of Japan's socio-economic situation is, among other things, linked to new social issues such as declining marriage and birth rates, changes in the employment sector and an ageing society. All these topics are connected to gender questions, as changes in gender perceptions lead to different life choices on the part of individuals. This, in turn, also impacts on the development of the whole society. As a result of Japan's socio-economic changes, new ideas of masculinities emerge.[2]

5. This volume of *Intersections* aims at addressing some of these new configurations of masculinity in contemporary Japan, focusing on how certain Japanese men now adhere to different values than those expressed and lived up to before. Bringing together a variety of methods and research subjects, it is the goal of this volume to give an insight into how broadly the issue of masculinity affects contemporary Japan and how current dynamics can be interpreted in terms of Japan's social development. The contributors investigate very different kinds of men who are all in different life situations.

6. The first paper, by Emma E. Cook, focuses on *freeters*—a social phenomenon that appeared in the 1990s. She shows how these part-time workers are constructing alternative masculinities through future-oriented 'aspirational labour'. These men re-negotiate their concepts of masculinity by focusing on intention, action and individualistic meaning-making rather than on achieved statuses, and Cook illustrates how constructions of masculinities vary across different spheres of life and as men age. In her paper, she sheds light on the ideas of masculinity held by men who are in a socio-economic situation that does not comply with hegemonic masculinity and whose occupation alone can be viewed as an antithesis to hegemonic masculinity. She shows how these men create new connections between their work and masculinities. Cook points out that they draw on individualistic subjectivities when creating aspirational masculinities through aspirational labour. However, this does not mean that they necessarily reject all hegemonic norms of masculinity, especially with regard to the demands on them to be the provider of the family. By creating alternative aspirational masculinities, these men cope with their difficult situations and try to reposition themselves within society in a socially legible way. However, at the same time, such masculinities are fluid and typically foregrounded for a limited period of time in their lives. Emma Cook's research thus contributes to a better understanding of the connection between irregular employment status and masculinities. With the number of *freeters* and other kinds of irregular workers in Japan on the rise, she addresses a crucial aspect of social change that has not yet been thoroughly analysed in terms of its implications for Japan's gender order and ideas of masculinity.

7. In the second paper, Hiroko Umegaki-Costantini considers the identities of men within the family. She examines how men's evolving role within the framework of care for the elderly leads, within the domestic setting, to men's reconstruction of their sense of masculinity, since being involved in elderly care means that they engage in activities that are not part of masculine work as it is defined by Japan's salaryman masculinity. Hiroko Umegaki-Costantini provides an insight into how men in contemporary Japan address consequences of social change in the very private environment of the family. Japan is one of the fastest-ageing societies in the world, and faces major problems when it comes to caring for the elderly, since there is a shortage of both nursing homes and nurses, amongst other issues. Gender in the Japanese family is usually assessed in terms of gendered role allocations with regard to the division of labour. Therefore, the family is seen as the

realm of the housewives who care for the children and the elderly, and who cook and do the household chores. There is, however, a recognisable shift from the daughter-in-law caring for the parents of her husband to elderly couples living with their own daughters, which leads to the greater involvement of sons-in-law in elderly care. Hiroko Umegaki-Costantini sheds light on this new development and examines how sons-in-law renegotiate their own position in the family and with respect to normative concepts of masculinity. Her research shows that no matter how varied the sons-in-laws' individual renegotiations of masculinities in the family may be with regard to their participation in caring for the elderly, they still strive to keep in touch with normative ideas of Japan's hegemonic masculinity—and in doing so, to revalidate their own masculinity.

8. In the third paper, Ronald Saladin looks at the way the media interprets 'herbivore men' and analyses how the Japanese TV drama *Ohitorisama* (The Single Lady) constructs and construes them. TV dramas are very topical products of popular culture that are well-known for dealing with current issues, such as changing gender perceptions, for example, and in doing so, contribute to the discursive negotiation of Japan's social and political developments in the public. The term 'herbivore man' was coined in 2006 by journalist Maki Fukasawa and became one of Japan's dominating buzzwords. As these men allegedly lack ambition in both personal and professional life, they appear to have significantly different ideas of what it means to be a man, how to interact with women, and also with respect to their goals and ideas about work as compared to men of previous generations. The discourse around herbivore men, however, quickly expanded and changed from the expression of a positive turn in men's attitude towards women to a negative development with regard to Japan's society. Even though the herbivore man phenomenon is widely known in Japan, the academic assessment of the topic is still marginal. Focusing on two main aspects (interpersonal relationships and professional work), Ronald Saladin uses his case study of a TV drama to investigate how the media serves as a means to renegotiate the herbivore man phenomenon within public discourse. He shows how the media becomes an agent in creating new conceptions of masculinity by rearranging different constructs of herbivore men and adapting them to Japan's hegemonic masculinity. In doing so, it actively contributes to shaping the concept of herbivore men and to renegotiating it with respect to Japan's hegemonic masculinity.

9. The masculinities examined in all of these case studies appear to differ significantly from the salaryman described above. The research results presented here show how these 'new' men face difficulties when it comes to their self-perception and/or the perception of others regarding the acknowledgment of their manhood. And yet, even though their living standards and circumstances appear to be so different, there are similarities that still persist in their conceptualisations of masculinity. The case studies discussed here help to identify how men who do not count as representatives of Japan's hegemonic masculinity renegotiate their own position in society, and the research results show that by doing so, they reconnect themselves to core values of hegemonic masculinity. It appears that this reconnection is an important part of reassuring and validating their masculinity and status within private and public spheres of society.

10. Social development is an ongoing process and the goal of this issue of *Intersections* is to contribute to the discussion of changing masculinities in Japan by elucidating recent topics which to date have not been thoroughly addressed by academic research. The academic results presented here shed light on current phenomena and, therefore, continue the academic assessment of how Japan's changing society impacts and is impacted on by gender perceptions.

11. Gender permeates the life of every person and thus the shape of any society at any time and any place. All of the case studies included here continue the ongoing analysis of masculinities in flux in contemporary Japan by attending to issues that have scarcely been addressed by western and Japanese academia since leading anthologies such as *Men and Masculinities in Contemporary*

Japan[3] and *Recreating Japanese Men*[4] were published. They focus on new phenomena and also further explore recent developments of topics previously attended to. By shedding light on some issues that reveal changing gender constructions, masculinities or re-negotiations of the hegemonic gender order in contemporary Japan, it is the aim of this issue of *Intersections* to contribute to a better understanding of the current developments of Japanese society.

Acknowledgement

Notes

[1] Romit Dasgupta, 'Creating corporate warriors: The "salaryman" and masculinity in Japan,' in *Asian Masculinities: The Meaning and Practice of Manhood in China and Japan*, ed. Kim Louie and Morris Low, London and New York: Routledge, 2003, 118–34. For an extensive discussion of the Japanese salaryman and Japan's hegemonic masculinity, see also, e.g., Tsunehisa Abe, Sumio Obinata and Masako Amano (eds), *'Otokorashisa' no gendaishi* (Contemporary History of 'Masculinity'] vol. 3, Tokyo: Nihon Keizai Hyōronsha, 2006; Romit Dasgupta, *Re-reading the Salaryman in Japan: Crafting Masculinities*, London: Routledge, 2013; Tomoko Hidaka, *Salaryman Masculinity: The Continuity and Change in Hegemonic Masculinity in Japan*, Leiden: Brill Academic Publishing, 2010; Tomoko Hidaka, 'Masculinity and the family system: The ideology of the "salaryman across three generations",' in *Home and Family in Japan: Continuity and Transformation*, ed. Richard Ronald and Allison Alexy, London and New York: Routledge, 2011, 112–30; Kimio Itō, *Otokorashisa no yukue* (The Future of Masculinity), Tokyo: Shin'yōsha, 1993; Kimio Itō, *Dansei-gaku Nyūmon* (Introduction to Men's Studies), Tokyo: Sakuhinsha, 1996; Kimio Itō, *Otokorashisa to iu shinwa* (The Myth of Masculinity), Tokyo: Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai Shuppankai, 2003; Futoshi Taga, *Otokorashisa no shakaigaku: Yuragu otoko no raifukōsu* (Sociology of Masculinity: Life Courses of Unstable Men), Sekai Shisōsha, 2006; Toshiyuki Tanaka, *Danseigaku no shintenkai* (New Developments in Masculinity Studies), Tokyo: Seikyusha, 2009; Toshiyuki Tanaka, *Otoko ga tsurai yo: zetsubō no jidai no kibō no danseigaku* (It's Hard to be a Man: Masculinity Studies of Hope in a Generation of Despair), Tokyo: Kadokawa, 2015.

[2] All contributors to this issue of *Intersections* investigate such new ideas of masculinity in their case studies. However, the appearance of new buzzwords, such as *ikumen*, for example, illustrate this trend as well. *Ikumen* is a play on words combining *ikemen*, a term that refers to an attractive man, and *ikuji* (childrearing). Therefore, it expresses the notion that men who participate in childrearing are now considered to be attractive.

[3] James E Roberson and Nobue Suzuki (eds), *Men and Masculinities in Contemporary Japan: Dislocating the Salaryman Doxa*, London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003.

[4] Sabine Frühstück and Anne Walthall (eds). *Recreating Japanese Men*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011.

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