

**KNOWLEDGE AND MASCULINITY CONSTRUCTION OF THE JAPANESE
SŌSHOKU DANSHI (HERBIVORE BOY) THROUGH DISCOURSE IN INTERNATIONAL
MEDIA COVERAGE**

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Résumé

Cet article s'intéresse au traitement de la masculinité dans les médias. La mise en système théorique de connaissances préétablies et de la masculinité hégémonique permettrait d'expliquer la genèse de la notion de masculinité au Japon, définie comme subordonnée ainsi que sa fonction de vecteur de savoirs. Cette étude tend à démontrer que la masculinité est vulnérable aux changements sociaux et que dans un contexte japonais son utilisation peut se révéler lourde de conséquences.

Mots-clés

Analyse discursive, connaissance, la masculinité hégémonique, articles en ligne, masculinité japonaise

Abstract

This article examines the utilisation of masculinity in the media. A theoretical combination of constructed knowledge and the hegemonic masculinity are applied to offer an explanation for the construction of Japanese masculinity as subordinated and its function to communicate knowledge. The findings show masculinity vulnerable to social change and Japanese masculinity is used to convey possible dire consequences.

Keywords

Discourse analysis, knowledge, hegemonic masculinity, online articles, Japanese masculinity

Introduction

There is a fast growing body of work analysing and theorising masculinity in media products concentrating on a variety of print media depicting models to admire or follow (e.g. Benwell, 2003; Ehrenreich, 1983; Hank, 1998; Moss, 2011) or even resent (Consalvo, 2002) while others reflect on the commercialisation of masculinity (Beynon, 2002). For Japanese masculinity similar works exist concentrating on different kinds of masculinity representations and how these images reflect or influence the culture they are produced in (e.g. Freedman, 2009; Louis, 2012; Matanle et al. 2008; Tanaka, 2003). This article goes one step further by focusing on a discourse about masculinity from a different culture within a culture. I argue that by examining the discourse on Japanese masculinity it is possible to

identify how it is used by the media to construct specific knowledge about masculinity. By identifying the pool of knowledge (Berger and Luckmann, 1966/1967) about masculinity and its connection to social factors, I will demonstrate how certain models are related to specific social realities, what kind of effects alternative models of masculinity can have on society and how these masculinities are located in a power matrix or hierarchy of masculinities.

I am going to approach this by analysing the international media coverage of the *sōshoku danshi* (herbivore boy or man)ⁱ which was a buzzword in Japan to discuss men and masculinity that caught the attention of the international media precisely because of its buzzword status (Fukasawa, 2009: 268), leading to increased reports and articles discussing Japanese masculinity. The term *sōshoku danshi* has been coined by the columnist Fukasawa Maki, who received the Japanese “Word-vogue award” in 2009 for that term, defined as young men below the age of forty, who have a strong sense of harmony and family, are gentle, but do not actively pursue love or sex. Furthermore these young men have no interest in status-conscious consumption and therefore do not buy cars, whereby this attitude is an attributed effect of the on-going recession since the burst of the *bubble economy* (Jiyūkokuminsha, 2014). I am not interested to work with or give a clear-cut definition of *sōshoku danshi*, as there are several definitions in use by the media (Japanese and international), which are briefly discussed in Fukasawa (2009), Toussaint (2011) and Chen (2012). Rather the descriptions given within this article regarding this particular Japanese form of masculinity will be analysed to extract knowledge through topics, themes and the argumentative structure. The latter are aspects of the Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse (SKAD) by Keller, which will be introduced in the next section. This is followed by a theoretical discussion of the concept of hegemonic masculinity and its application for this article. After that the material is discussed, which is comprised of online articles.

The findings of the discourse analysis will be presented within three main themes “the decline of the salaryman”, “consumption as feminised and bizarre”, and “(un)-lust of the Japanese men”. The “salaryman” refers to the post-war Japanese white collar, full-time employed masculinity of Japan (Dasgupta, 2003) also present in the discourse and important for the discussion of the findings in perspective to the theoretical background.

KNOWLEDGE AND THE MASS MEDIA

“What we know about our society, yet about the world we live in, we know through mass media” (Luhmann, 1996: 9), yet media does not simply mirror reality. Even as a “window to the world” it is more than just a framework deciding what part of the picture is seen. Media constructs the picture, but only partially witnesses it first-hand and even as an observer already fixed selections and meanings are at work influencing the construction of reality (Rucht et al. 2008: 20–21).

Media products are therefore contributions to a construction of reality, but workers inside the media do not need to establish special modes to interpret reality, instead they use what already exists in the social knowledge pool (Keller, 2003: 211) and contribute as actors to the discourse by writing and conceptualising articles building a discourse (Keller, 2013: 62).

Keller describes his research program of a Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse (SKAD) grounded in the works of Berger and Luckmann as well as Foucault. Knowledge is never inherent but always constructed and based on symbolic systems and orders, which have been “constructed through and in discourses” (Keller, 2013: 61). For Keller discourses are “analytically definable ensembles of practices and meaning attributions” (2013: 63) that do

not mirror the world but establish reality in a specific way. Discourses produce and process patterns of knowledge and the SKAD has the means to filter out “what knowledge, what objects, relationships, properties, subject positions and so on are claimed by discourses to be ‘real’” (Keller, 2013: 78).

The reconstruction of what is perceived as real about masculinity within the discourse will be accomplished through extracting what Keller calls the “phenomenal structure”. The term refers to “the fact that discourses, in the constitution of their referential relationship (or their ‘theme’) designate a variety of elements and combine them into a specific form of constitution of phenomena, a structure or constellation of a problem” (Keller, 2013: 114). Therefore it is important to reveal causal relationships (cause and effect), value implications and consequences (Keller, 2013: 115).

The analytical section of this article is my reconstruction of the phenomenal structure as the actual components of a phenomenal structure are not known prior to the analysis of the material, but rather have to be “ascertained from the empirical data” (Keller, 2013: 115).

“Mass media is an important observer of modern society that constructs a world out of distinctions, a world that is both real and not” (Fuchs, 2001 : 332), therefore a distinct vantage point embedded in the discourse of masculinities is needed that stipulates it as real from the “hegemonic viewpoint” (Donaldson, Howson, Nilan, 2006) and not real if observed from another position. The notion of a “hegemonic viewpoint” is deduced from the research on the concept of hegemonic masculinity the second theoretical framework on which I build a combination to examine constructed masculinity and knowledge.

MASCULINITIES AND THE HEGEMONIC VIEWPOINT

Hegemonic masculinity has been conceptualised by Connell (1987, 1995/2005) and since then it has been applied to the studies of men and masculinities worldwide (Messerschmidt, 2012). It has also been criticised (Donaldson, 1993; Demetriou, 2001; Beasley, 2008) and revised (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Its main feature to analyse and understand plurality and power relations among masculinities is useful for my analysis. Following the idea of a global hegemonic masculinity to the “hegemonic viewpoint” via external and internal hegemony, will build the groundwork to get insights concerning a self-understanding of culture needed to theoretically frame the findings.

As early as 1998 Connell spoke of a “transnational business masculinity” that seems to be holding the dominant position on a global level made possible by “the extent that particular institutions become dominant in world society [and] the patterns of masculinity embedded in them may become global standards” (Connell, 1998: 11) with transnational business corporations being such institutions reaching global domination. Furthermore this domination was based on a modernisation process creating local or regional variations of regional modernised masculinity (Connell, 1998: 17), but “the result generally was masculinities defined around economic action, with both workers and entrepreneurs increasingly adapted to emerging market economies” (Connell, 1998: 14). In other words, even regional or local variations of this dominant masculinity show core patterns or at least “a certain common ground that is created by processes of globalization” (Connell, 2005: 78), which are needed to maintain the global gender order. Connell theorised the gender order on a regional and global level constructed as clearly patriarchal and men gaining a patriarchal dividend from “unequal wages, unequal labour force participation, and a highly unequal structure of ownership, as

well as cultural and sexual privileging” (Connell, 1998: 11-12). Hence those conditions are required to construct a hegemonic masculinity globally, that simultaneously “embodies, organizes, and legitimates men’s domination in the gender order as a whole” (Connell, 1998: 12).

I think that regional and local forms of (hegemonic) masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005: 849) participate in the ranks of a global hegemonic masculinity by exhibiting those core patterns and upholding the patriarchal gender order. This is “external hegemony” as suggested by Demetriou and means that the gender order with its patriarchal outlay and the subordination of women is maintained (2001: 341). “Internal hegemony” on the other hand accounts for the differentiating of other masculinities and creating a hierarchical or power related order of masculinities (Demetriou, 2001: 341). This makes it possible to understand why different forms of masculinity are included, excluded or simply put into positions such as subordinated or marginalised rather than being eliminated by the hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987: 184).

With regard to the local, regional and global level to analyse masculinities, I assume an “internal hegemony” on all those levels and between them as well. In other words, if a hegemonic form of masculinity can be empirically analysed on each of those levels, so are other forms of masculinity such as the complicit, subordinated, and marginalised or “protest” forms. Those variations of different models of masculinities and their power hierarchy on the local and regional level have been demonstrated by research (Kimmel et al. 2005; Flood, 2007; Frühstück and Walthall, 2011), yet the global level being somewhat problematic to grasp. What Beasley regards problematic in the conduct of one form of hegemonic masculinity on a global scale is the lack of integration of an “account of the role of state and of the impact of differentially powerful cultures and states in the global context” (Beasley, 2008: 13). But Connell and Messerschmidt suggested the local, regional and global level to analyse and study masculinity because it “allows us to recognize the importance of place without falling into a monadic world of totally independent cultures or discourses” (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005: 850). The hierarchy or power relation of masculinities on a global level and the internal moment of the hegemonic masculinity become therefore a matter of perspective.

Connell also assumed, that “the culture and institutions of the North Atlantic countries are hegemonic within the emergent world system” (1998: 8). Building on this the defining power of masculinity lies in this hemisphere of the world and from its “hegemonic viewpoint” it puts other masculinities in its place as subordinated or marginalised while also including or rejecting certain moments of these masculinities (Demetriou, 2001; Hirose and Phi, 2010). In this respect the “hegemonic viewpoint” not only echoes the “internal hegemony” but creation of an oppositional “other”. The latter has been described for example by Said (1978) with the phrase “Orientalism”. The orient came into existence as a creation of the “West”, which simultaneously assumed its hegemonic position in the world, and the West also created an understanding and perception of itself. The same process has been ascribed to culture by Fuchs (2001: 156) as it “produce(s) an inside and outside, separating that which belongs to a culture from that which does not belong, does not yet belong, or belongs to a different culture”. Hence I argue that from a “hegemonic viewpoint” a culture arranges other forms of masculinities even from other cultures in a hierarchy. The hierarchy extends to the local, regional, and global level, so that every level consists of a hegemonic, subordinated, and marginalised masculinity and so forth.

Hegemonic masculinity differentiates itself from other masculinities, especially the subordinated masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005: 832). Particularly homosexual men are subordinated as they are “assimilated to femininity” (Connell, 1995/2005 : 78) but also other heterosexual men and boys can have no legitimacy according to the hegemonic viewpoint which is marked by abusive vocabulary blurring with femininity (Connell, 1995/2005 : 79). In general everything associated with the practice or behaviour of women is excluded from men. Interestingly the association with femininity and therefore suppression of certain masculinities is also close to Said’s orientalism. From a hegemonic position of the West, the orient was created and perceived as irrational and feminine (Castro Varela, 2005: 36). Subordination is established through a close association with femininity and thus will be a major point of interest for the later analysis of the discourse.

THE MATERIAL

The data corpus consists of free-of charge accessible online articles in English. I focus on online articles, as the method of searching and finding information has more and more shifted to the Internet in recent years (Horrihan, 2006). For younger broadband users under age 36 it is normal to get daily news from different sources on the Internet and getting news is the third most popular activity using the Internet on an average day (Horrihan, 2006: 1). The development of the online news market was mainly fostered by the increased adoption of broadband Internet at home and higher experience with the Internet in general. It developed further due to the growth of quality with news organisations making their news sites more attractive and rich with content (Horrihan, 2006: 2). There are several options to access news and information on the Internet ranging from national TV news sites such as CNN or MSNBC or portals such as Google and Yahoo to local TV news sites, national daily papers, international news sites, and news blogs (Horrihan, 2006, p. 10). But overall traditional media organisations dominate the online news sources as “established offline media players tend to have a strong foothold in cyberspace as well” (Horrihan, 2006: 11) and thus the material for the analysis has been selected accordingly. The material is more associated to print or “traditional media” than “online media” (Cacciatore et al. 2012) as it consists of articles by established news organisations and not blogs.

The corpus was created using the Google search engine google.com. The decision to use Google was reached due to two major factors. First, the search engine Google is the most used search provider for example in the US, with more than 65 per cent of all Internet searches (Nilson Wire, 2010) and second, using Google makes it possible to tap into “the full depth of public discourse” (Cacciatore et al. 2012: 1052) and has therefore greater advantages than using other databases, such as LexisNexis. Google does link “to actual stories in context” and thus may be regarded as advantageous by researchers (Weaver and Bimber, 2008: 524). The search was repeated using different words because search engines give a vertical hierarchical selection, as they list relevant websites hierarchically in accordance to the used search term and provide only a specific part of “online reality” based on the defined criteria (Rucht et al. 2008 :28–29). One selection criteria was the term *sōshoku danshi* in either possible translation appearing in headlines or as a significant keyword within the article, whereby most suitable results were found using the English translation of the term *sōshoku danshi* as “herbivore men”. Also “spam blogs”, which tend to copy content that appears on other sites (Cacciatore et al. 2012: 1052) had to be filtered out. This was achieved by using a chronology of the

articles online publishing date and it was assured that only original articles were included in the corpus. After that twelve articles remained for the in-depth-analysis. While reading each of the twelve articles I used (a modified) “open-coding” methodology to identify recurrent themes (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

THE DECLINE OF THE SALARYMAN

The first main theme constructing knowledge about masculinity and showing its relation to social conditions I named “the decline of the salaryman”. Due to the decline Japanese masculinity is discursively established as a subordinated masculinity. To prove a decline of the salaryman and legitimise concern about Japanese masculinity, estimates are given of the proportion of herbivorous boys inside the Japanese population. Interestingly the estimates differ significantly: while some authors estimate a rate of only 20 per cent (Neill, 2009) others take a proportion of 60 per cent or even 70 per cent as given (Otake, 2009; Harney, 2009). These estimates establish the issue of masculinity in transition, making it hard to dismiss the phenomenon as something marginal. Furthermore the scale of the phenomenon makes it large enough to have a substantial impact on social conditions in Japan. Otherwise it would not have been possible to headline “The Herbivore’s Dilemma: Japan panics about the rise of the ‘grass-eating men’ [...]” (Harney, 2009).

Social and economic changes accompanying the decline of the salaryman

In this minor theme the *sōshoku danshi* is constructed as subordinated to the salaryman, a commonly known model of Japanese masculinity, by relating him to the conditions the salaryman stands for. In other words: If the “hegemonic salaryman masculinity” is related to certain social and economic conditions, so is the subordinated masculinity. These social and economic conditions are unfolded through various topics. One of them is the disillusionment of young Japanese males with the current Japanese economy, making them uncompetitive and uncommitted to work (McNeill, 2009). A waning interest in career options as disillusionment is the symbol of Japan’s bad economic conditions. Moreover, behind the disillusionment a “silent revolution” against the traditional Japanese work ethic is suspected, an ethic that is being regarded as having kept the Japanese economy thriving and growing after the war and during the *bubble economy* since the 1960s to the late 1980s. This ethic is being discarded by *sōshoku danshi* who are not regarding work as the centre of their lives anymore (Japantoday, 2009), an attitude that is frowned upon by older managers (Broughton, 2009).

In addition to this, witnessing first-hand how the model of their fathers has faltered during the 1990s, which was the era of severe stress in male working lives, has made the young male generation less confident and goal-oriented (Neill, 2009). In order to prove Japan’s unstable economic status, the rising unemployment rate is cited and identified as a cause shaking the very foundations of the fathers’ generation masculinity model (Neill, 2009). The masculinity model of the fathers’ generation - the salaryman - is directly connected to work and therefore rising unemployment rates indicate that more and more men are not able to live up to this model. Simultaneously the stability of that masculinity model is questioned and herbivorous boys are presented as an effect of these changes.

As another topic the issue of the working poor is discursively explained as being the result of disillusionment and a lack of drive for work or career and thereby connecting both topics. In the working poor topic increased irregular employment patterns due to the deregulation of the labour market (Otagaki, 2009) are discussed. Young male adults in particular are employed as a “precarious” workforce (Otake, 2009) having less social security and being paid lower wages (Pesek, 2009). This development is deemed alarming because it also resulted in the widening income gap between males (Otake, 2009). These “wealth disparities” are a clear sign for “corroding Japan’s meritocracy” and a rise in poverty (McNeill, 2009).

In this argument structure masculinity is strongly connected to economy by the discourse. The hegemonic masculinity is obviously linked to the era of economic growth and stability, whereas non-hegemonic masculinity is simply tied to the more problematic economic conditions. The economic recession is being described as making it impossible for the young generation to pursue the hegemonic masculinity of the salarymen and thus leading to their decline.

The decline of the salaryman results in a loss of purchasing power in branches associated with male consumption. Lifetime employment and regular income are said to have made them consumers of exclusive and expensive goods (Harney, 2009). But the well-established branches of male consumption are being threatened (Broughton, 2009) as sales are going down, especially products such as cars and alcohol (Lim, 2009). The declining consumption has a problematic effect on the economic turmoil that Japan was already facing (Harney, 2009; Pesek, 2009; Otagaki, 2009; Lim, 2009). The “anemic consumption” (Harney, 2009) itself was not the sole reason putting strain on the economy; but also the changed consumption habits of the herbivorous boys aggravated this strain.

CONSUMPTION AS FEMINISED AND BIZARRE

The following second main theme revolves around feminising male consumption and behavioural patterns. To some extent they present a logical conclusion of the foregoing, as the economic changes with the effect of precarious employment and lower income generally are leading to a decline in male purchasing power, but the herbivorous boys are making more shifts in the consumption patterns of men. Beyond the low income other reasons for the decline of status high “male” consumption are discussed. Discursively the situation of being brought up in the economically challenging times is regarded as a reason for the untypical spending habits of the *sōshoku danshi*. During the bubble era consumption was regarded as good and people measured their value by money, whereas herbivorous men are not buying things to show off (Otagaki, 2009). In general it is assumed that it is no longer important to those young men to boost their status through consumption (Arima, 2009).

In this sub-theme a general lack of interest in money is attested to those young men (Neill, 2009), but simultaneously consumption of fashion is said to be the only sphere left for men to increase their self-esteem (Otake, 2009). *Sōshoku danshi* redirected their energy towards the “once feminized sphere of consumption” (McNeill, 2009).

Feminised consumption patterns of the herbivorous boys

In the connection to feminised consumption an argument is developed that attests a more positive effect of the *sōshoku danshi* on the economy. The headline “Herbivorous men’ are new consumer kings” from the Japan Times (Arima, 2009) is a good example, but

“feminised” stays the significant marker inside the minor theme consumption, because *sōshoku danshi* exhibit consumption patterns that have a female connotation. Instead of cars and houses, it is fashion – especially tight outfits – accessories, hair and beauty products in general but also manicures, facials and eyebrow plucking that have become popular among young men (Arima, 2009; McNeill, 2009; Lim, 2009). Furthermore alcohol and tobacco have become substituted by sweets and goods that were considered as inappropriate for males less than twenty years ago (Lim, 2009). For some branches the *sōshoku danshi* could have positive effects, with transition of consumption patterns they have become a significant consumer group in the cosmetic and fashion industries (Arima, 2009).

There are a few topics mentioned in several articles that exaggerate the subordination by referring to unmanly consumption or behaviour. The unmanly fashion choices Japanese men could make were skirts and lacy tops, which happened to be designed for men (Broughton, 2009) and were being topped by the male bra (Otake, 2009; McNeill, 2009; McCurry, 2009). The latter has been selling “briskly” (Otake, 2009). The shift of men towards formerly feminine connoted consumption patterns is also common in the West and therefore common knowledge of masculinities, yet by referring to i.e. a male bra, Japanese masculinity is constructed as subordinated. Here a first indication of utilising Japanese masculinity as a worst-case scenario illustrating ramifications of changing masculinity is perceivable.

(UN)-LUST OF JAPANESE MEN

The third main theme revolves around the relationships to women, male lust and sexuality. However only in the context of this topic homosexuality of the *sōshoku danshi* is negated and heterosexual orientation stressed (Otake, 2009; Harney, 2009; Lim, 2009). Drawing on the definition of herbivorous boys as shying away from women, the discourse is searching for reasons for this. Women themselves are found to be one reason, as they are described as “lively, interesting and inspiring to be around” (Chavez, 2011). This however makes men shy away from women as voiced by a self-appointed *sōshoku danshi*, Mr. Fujita, who explained: “Nowadays, women have more education and enjoy working. Women are scary now” (Lim, 2009).

On the other hand the change of women’s behaviour and their display of more self-esteem, ambition, aggression and activity with respect to men are seen as a female reaction to men’s turning into *sōshoku danshi* (Harney, 2009; Pesek, 2009). An argumentation is presented in the discourse that indicates a reciprocal connection of masculinity and femininity. Change of men and women is therefore as much a cause as it is a consequence. Therefore the discourse can claim that new types of femininity trigger a change of masculinity and vice versa. It is only problematic that in Japan’s case the altered masculinity turned out to be “unmanly” (Kelts, 2011; Chavez, 2011). This was further emphasised within the discourse, as mainly female voices were used to demonstrate that women want “manly men” (Neill, 2009) and even gave advise what to do and change to “reclaim their manhood” (Chavez, 2011). Herbivorous men were generally regarded as “flaky and weak” by women, who would have absolutely no interest in them (Neill, 2009).

Viewed from a different angle, *sōshoku danshi* exhibit a complete opposite kind of relationship towards women with their desexualised attitude that stands in contrast to those of the men of an older generation who chased women and were assertive or initiating the first step. In several articles friendship without sexual interest is emphasised (Lim 2009; Neill

2009; McNeill, 2009; Harney, 2009). This is deemed to be a huge step towards a more equal relationship between men and women in general (McNeill, 2009).

Male sexuality: why would a man not want to have sex?

Discursively the minor theme of male sexuality is used to establish knowledge subordinating Japanese masculinity by referring to the strong connection masculinity has to sexuality. There are two different argumentative connections regarding the *sōshoku danshi*'s lack of interest in sex. In the first argument a lower male libido is regarded as impossible while the second one is trying to understand the decline in male sexual drive.

As the first argument regards a lower sexual drive by the herbivorous boys as impossible other reasons for having less sex are sought after and found in fear of rejection and commitment. As an example Mr Sakurai was quoted: "I have lots of female friends I'm attracted to. But you weigh up the risks and benefits and come to the conclusion that things are best left as they are" (McCurry, 2009). Sex drive and masculinity are strongly entwined in this argument making it impossible to declare a decline in male lust, at least for a healthy male. "Sex is free" (Chavez, 2011) was the slogan and not pursuing sex was regarded as an anomaly (Harney, 2009) or as sick: "Someone needs to check their hormones" (Chavez, 2011). Rather than admitting a declined sex drive a sublimation of sexuality towards other means of satisfaction was noted, like pornography, sex toys or cybersex instead of real women (Harney, 2009; Pesek, 2009). This shift towards "virtual worlds" preferred to reality had its cause in women: "'I don't like real women,' a bloke superciliously sniffed on Japans 2channel, the world's largest and most active Internet bulletin board site. 'They're too picky nowadays. I'd much rather have a virtual girlfriend.'" After explaining what kinds of games have been invented to simulate "romantic bliss" and having been "absurdly successful" the author concluded: "Nevertheless, these were clearly young Japanese men of a generation that found the imperfect or just unexpected demands of real-world relationships with women less enticing than the lure of the virtual libido. You can't have sex with a digital graphic, but you can get sexually excited, and maybe satisfied, by one" (Kelts, 2011).

The sexual reluctance generating subordination is amplified through feminisation in the respect that *sōshoku danshi* have become similar to Japanese females by refraining from reproduction and being noncommittal (Otake, 2009). Yet the discourse rates this as unfavourably with regard to the shrinking birth rate (Harney, 2009). Implicated here is a connection between sexual activity as a marker of masculinity and birth rates. If men - whatever the underlying motive - cease to father children, the consequence for a society is a declining birth rate, which in Japan's case has further social and economic implications.

Overall withdrawal from women and sex is regarded as problematic in Japan's case, due to the fact that reproduction and marriage is tightly connected, and the latter being also connected to the economic and financial situation of men: "I (interviewee Roshinante; CN) think there are many part-time workers who cannot get a full-time job and cannot plan their life and marriage" (Otagaki, 2009). It is implicated through this statement that men may only think of marriage and starting a family if they possess the financial means to do so, which simultaneously indicates that the maxim of the male breadwinner still remains strong. Men have been expected to work full-time after leaving the education system, marry and support wife and children (Otagaki, 2009).

Masculinity has direct consequences for demographics, if reproduction is tied to marriage, and marriage being strongly coupled with economic factors such as employment patterns and

its effects. The argumentative structure in this topic is very complex and linked to other topics of the discourse. However the entanglement of masculinity with economic status, marriage and reproduction becomes obvious. Inside this complex chain of argumentative sub-themes the lack of interest in women and sex of the *sōshoku danshi* is rationalised, as it is basically rooted in economic factors according to the discourse.

The declining birth rate is rated in the discourse as problematic to Japans economy because the population has been shrinking since 2005 (Broughton, 2009), which already led towards a shrinking workforce. If the birth rate stays low or declines even more, the shrinking of the workforce could be accelerated (Pesek, 2009). Although the population is rapidly aging Japan does not welcome large-scale immigration of foreign workers (ibid.). The implications of these effects are not stated clearly in the discourse itself, the conclusions have to be drawn by the reader who is supposed to “know” what the effects would be: not enough replacement workers for the retiring generation; more strain on the few young tax-paying workers who are paying for the elderly; this leading towards undermining economic growth due to lack of capital either of the state – an even higher debt-to-gross-domestic-product ratio – or the population with even less consumption.

Viewed from the hegemonic perspective in the discourse, the change Japan has gone through economically, socially and demographically does not only put Japanese masculinity in a subordinated position but the whole country itself. Hence yet again it is utilised as an example to convey possible consequences and links between masculinity and social conditions.

DISCUSSION

By inductively reconstructing the knowledge in the above chapters it has become evident that it illustrates connections between masculinity and social reality as well as ramifications of change in areas of social reality. These findings are discussed in perspective to the common knowledge stock of the media workers and its connections to the concept of hegemonic masculinity, a global hegemonic masculinity, the hegemonic viewpoint as well as internal and external hegemony.

Through Japan’s example a pluralisation of masculinities has been integrated in the common knowledge stock, which is one key aspect of Connell’s concept. Additionally the recurring motive of reciprocal change of men and women is part of the common knowledge stock. The impact of femininity on masculinity should not be underestimated (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 848) as women have distinct demands regarding men and masculinities and also modify their behaviour towards men. As women change, so do men and vice versa. It is noteworthy that despite the dislike of the herbivores was stated several times in the discourse, it was not laden with accusations towards women as for example in the media discourse in Germany about changed masculinity (Pauer, 2012; Scheuerman, 2012). The question who changes and why was not presented as a gendered problem between sexes in the discourse, but a self interest in change of men (Pease, 2002) was also absent from the discourse as cause for change of men and masculinities. Rather the discourse naturalises diversification of men and masculinities by concluding that it coincides with and due to economic and social changes, yet political changes were not mentioned in detail and only one article referred to that topic specifically (Harney, 2009).

Hence the analysis demonstrates a nexus between masculinity and economy, sexuality and social change as basic fragments in the social knowledge stock to construct masculinity that

are constantly used and reproduced by the media. Moreover it is used to construct a subordination of Japanese masculinity. As stated in the beginning I presume the working of external and internal hegemony on the global and regional level of masculinity construction. To my understanding the global hegemonic masculinity is an ideal that can be “embodied” by regional hegemonic masculinities usually maintaining a specific gender order and sharing a common ground due to specific social and economic factors. Furthermore I hypothetically assumed the media to take a hegemonic viewpoint and constructing a matrix of hierarchical masculinities.

In the discourse knowledge is constructed establishing the salaryman – the form of masculinity that is close to the global hegemonic masculinity– as losing ground due to economic problems and instabilities. The salaryman is a regional hegemonic masculinity that is very close to the ideal of the global hegemonic masculinity or “transnational business masculinity” as it consists of patterns that seem to be needed to maintain not only the regional gender order but the global one as well. This is external hegemony. Granted a dominant status in Japan as early as 1963 (Vogel), the salaryman has been identified and studied accordingly as the Japanese hegemonic masculinity in various approaches and fields (Louie and Low, 2003; Roberson and Suzuki, 2003; McLelland and Dasgupta, 2005) and is still discussed as such (Hidaka, 2010; Dasgupta, 2013). The salaryman has also been the model on which Japan based the makeup of its post-war welfare state and constructed the gender order subordinating other men and women (Osawa, 2011). By demonstrating that the salaryman is a declining form of masculinity its foothold in the ranks of a global hegemonic masculinity is in jeopardy and becoming unstable. The discourse simultaneously utilises the decline of the salaryman to indicate the importance of maintaining a strong and thriving economic power base which is needed to construct a masculinity that can be recognised as close to the ideal of a global hegemonic masculinity.

Besides that feminisation is used in the discourse as a mean to construct Japanese masculinity as subordinated in the power matrix of masculinities from the hegemonic viewpoint by referring to the regional form of masculinity of the *sōshoku danshi* as an example, and thereby using the moment of “internal hegemony” simultaneously on a global and in a regional power matrix of masculinities. In other words, the western hegemonic viewpoint creates a global power matrix of masculinities and internal hegemony is used to demonstrate the lower position of Japanese masculinity in said matrix by utilising the regional power matrix of masculinity simultaneously constructed by referring to a subordinated masculinity the *sōshoku danshi* associated with feminisation and lack of masculine markers such as sexuality and economic power.

The subordination of Japan and Japanese masculinity is not a particularly new undertaking as Japan and Japanese masculinity have been historically prone to subordination under terms such as “the yellow peril” or “Japan bashing” (Morris, 2011) or by association to femininity and submission as exemplarily demonstrated by Hirose and Phi (2010) with Mixed Martial Arts. Hence not surprisingly it is established and reproduced as common knowledge by the media workers with no need to establish a new background to interpret reality.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

It has been the first objective of this article to demonstrate what is constructed as common knowledge of masculinity retrieved inductively from knowledge constructed of Japanese masculinity by and in media discourse, and second to illustrate the utilisation of knowledge constructions of masculinity from a different culture by the media of yet another culture.

From the western perspective Japan and Japanese masculinities serve as the “worst case scenario” for ramifications that can happen, if certain factors change and how these are connected. Yet concurrently the knowledge constructed in the discourse about Japanese masculinity is used to subject Japan and Japanese masculinity from the hegemonic viewpoint. The subordination then not only applies to Japanese masculinities but the country itself. This clearly demonstrates the working of internal hegemony by the western hegemonic viewpoint in the media constructing a power matrix or hierarchy of masculinities.

What I think should be observed with caution other than the need of creating a cultural “other” and arranging these in said hierarchy, is the naturalisation of differentiation by and due to economic factors also present in the discourse about masculinities. It seems that the hegemonic lens to view reality is merely economic, which arises from the strong nexus with masculinity construction. This could be used to strengthen inequalities not only between the sexes but masculinities as well by implicitly presenting a need to preserve the historical unique set of social and economic moments needed to maintain access into the ranks of a global hegemonic masculinity in form of said “transnational business masculinity”. Connell and Wood (2005, p. 362) already found traces of this in Australia as: “By virtue of the cultural, political, and economic dominance of the institutions of multinational business, the masculinity formed in their matrix is in a strong position to claim hegemony in the gender order of the societies they dominate”.

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¹Both Japanese terms *sōshoku danshi* (草食男子) or *sōshokukei danshi* (草食系男子) for „herbivorous boys“ or “herbivore men” or „grass-eating boys“ do not significantly differ in their meaning and can be used synonymous.