

**CORPORATE WARRIORS OR COMPANY ANIMALS?:
AN INVESTIGATION OF JAPANESE SALARYMAN MASCULINITIES
ACROSS THREE GENERATIONS**

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**Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Gender Studies and Asian Studies
School of Social Sciences
University of Adelaide
November 2006**

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ABSTRACT

'Corporate warriors' and 'company animals' are common terms used to describe Japanese *sararīman* (salarymen), the former referring to salarymen as the samurai of Japan's post-war economic miracle and the latter suggesting servile creatures of Japanese corporations.

This thesis explores Japanese salaryman masculinity, that is, the 'hegemonic masculinity' in Japan. The study collects the life-histories of 39 men across three generations of salarymen, so that the oldest men in my sample were in their 70s and the youngest in their 20s. While research on Japanese masculinities has expanded rapidly in recent years, no other study, to the author's knowledge, explores generational changes. This generational approach allows exploration of maintenance of and changes in hegemonic masculinity over time.

This thesis pays attention to the phases of salarymen's lives. In the period of growing up, participants were continually confirmed in their self-worth through a hierarchy grounded on age and gender in the settings of the family, school and neighbourhood. Across the three generations, participants grew up in a homosocial and heterosexual world, barely mixing with the opposite sex and focusing on educational outcomes for successful careers after their schooling. Despite their immersion in comradeship, most participants ensconced themselves comfortably in the institution of marriage. While a few unconventional families emerged in the sons' generation, the traditional gendered division of labour is reproduced across the three generations. Many participants rejected equal opportunities for women in the workforce and participated very little in housework and childcare, claiming that providing the family income was their 'childcare'. Participants understood themselves as corporate warriors, or elite male workers, rather than company animals. Nevertheless, some young respondents evinced a tinge of jealousy for increasing number of 'freeters' (part-time workers). Moreover, several men in the grandfathers' generation regretted their current minimal contact with their children and grandchildren as a result of their absence from home while children were growing up. Thus Japanese salarymen in this study expressed aspects of both the corporate warrior and the company animal in reflecting on their experiences.

DECLARATION

This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text of the thesis.

I give consent to this copy, when deposited in the University library, being made available for photocopying and loan.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost I would like to thank the supervisors of my doctoral dissertation, Professor Chilla Bulbeck and Dr Shoko Yoneyama, for their invaluable and insightful guidance with regard to my thesis and for their unstinted support and encouragement throughout the researching and writing of the manuscript. I was fortunate to have these dedicated supervisors.

My heartfelt thanks should go to my mentor, Dr Jennifer Brown, who was always there for me, for her generous assistance, from reading my draft and offering comments on my work to giving me continuing moral support throughout my higher education in Australia.

I am indebted to the participants, who generously gave their time for my research, for their valuable life stories provided in the interviews, because without them I would not have been able to complete my project. I am grateful to my family, my relatives and my friends for their help in finding the participants.

I had the privilege of meeting Associate Professor Taga Futoshi and Dr Romit Dasgupta whose research interests lie in Japanese men and their masculinities. I am grateful for their generous assistance in giving me useful information and in making their work available to me.

My sincere thanks to my colleagues in the discipline of Gender, Work and Social Inquiry at the University of Adelaide, Dr Ken Bridge, George Lewkowicz, Pam Papadelos, Jessica Shipman Gunson, Alia Imtoul, Ros Averis and Thalia Palmer for their friendship and moral support, Professor Chilla Bulbeck and Dr Susan Oakley for their giving me a wonderful opportunity to teach and Associate Professor Margaret Allen, Associate Professor Margie Ripper and Dr Kathie Muir for their generous scholarly and friendly assistance. I also give my thanks to other colleagues whom I do not specifically name for their consistent encouragement. I would also like to thank other staff members of the University, Professor Purnendra Jain, Dr Peter Burns and Dr Gerry Groot for their assistance and support.

I would also like to thank fellow members of CASPAR (Centre for Asian Studies Postgraduate Academic Review), in particular, Glen Stafford who has been organizing fortnightly meetings, for their intellectual companionship as well as friendship. I benefited greatly from informal seminars and friendly discussions over coffee afterwards, which enriched my postgraduate life.

I thank Naomi Hoff, Diana Clark, Greg Clark, Helen Mitchell, Keith Mitchell, Ivy Wing and her family, Chris Hamilton and his family, Jan Dash, Jan Miller who is no longer with us, Gus Overall, Libby Ivens and other friends for their friendship and caring support throughout my stay in Australia. These friends made my long and sometimes trying journey to the completion of my PhD more meaningful.

Finally and surely not least, I would like to thank my parents for their generosity and support.

NOTE ON THE TEXT

The names of the participants in this study are fictitious (pseudonyms).

Japanese full names mentioned in this thesis are written in the Japanese order, with family names followed by given names. In the case of the participants in this study, their names are indicated by family names together with the Japanese comprehensive courtesy title 'san' (e.g. Amano-san), which is used to indicate status titles such as Mr., Mrs., Miss, and Ms. in Japanese.

The Hepburn style of romanisation is applied in rendering Japanese words, macrons indicating long vowels, for example, 'ō' as in *ryōsai kenbo* (good wife wise mother), in order to convey the pronunciation of Japanese words. Those Japanese words in the Hepburn style are italicized, as exemplified in the above example. They are intentionally used because of their importance in the Japanese discourse on sociology, these terms being followed by English translations in brackets. However, macrons are not used for the Japanese words that are commonly used in English, for example, Tokyo.

Quotations from the narratives of the participants in this study as well as those from publications in Japanese are translated by the author.