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IKEMEN: EFFEMINACY OR THE NEW MASCULINITY OF THE MODERN-DAY
JAPANESE MALE?

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ABSTRACT

Over recent years, the Japanese entertainment industry has seen a burgeoning of actors who are known for their slightly androgynous physical attributes such as their flawless skin, their tall, slender bodies, or their soft-shaped faces. The projection of this trend onto the public can be seen through the increasing presence of effeminate young Japanese men walking through the streets of Japan. Rather than being a phenomenon that is resulting in weaker, more pathetic men, the feminization being observed is actually the redefining of masculinity that has been brought about by the bursting of the mid-1980 economic bubble and the subsequent empowerment of women. The changing times and the ascension of females in the workplace promoted the new man of 21st century Japan – the *ikemen*. Although just a fantasy of women for now, the assumption of ideal traits embodied in the *ikemen* by the average Japanese man has begun, stimulating the irreversible shift in the Japanese identity and how male-female interactions are conducted in the future.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The room is dark save for the warm glow of the candles on the floor being lit one by one. A girl watches from her seat amongst the candles as her boyfriend moves, coaxing each candle to blossom. He pauses near her and they kiss before he continues on, unaware of the soft smile on her lips. The candles are all lit and they sit together in the center, her head on his shoulder, basking in the calm. The scene shifts and the couple are now undressing each other. We see him slip the strap of her blue-gray chiffon dress from her shoulder, a short camera shot compared to the attention devoted to the slow reveal of the actor Mukai Osamu's smooth, hairless, unmarred chest. His skin is almost milky white and baby soft. His slender arms wrap around the girl's naked form. His long, downy bangs brush against her forehead as they begin to lose themselves in their passion. His body covers hers, blocking the feminine body from sight while rewarding the audience with the utter perfection of his bare torso.

This scene from the highly sexualized four-episode cell phone drama *Sweet Room* is just one of an increasing number that feature hot male actors – like Mukai Osamu, Narimiya Hiroki, and Kimura Takuya of SMAP – showing off their bodies in dramas made over recent years. From American eyes, these men look weak and feminine; but to many Japanese women ranging from junior high and high schoolers to women in their 40s, they are extremely good-looking and sexy. In one word, they are *ikemen*. There has also been a curious growth in the presence of non-celebrity effeminate men in Japan, particularly in the young adult generation. In light of the stereotypical image of a Japanese male being the styleless, stodgy salaryman, why has there been an increase in men who are chic and completely reject that image? Why do Japanese women

seem to lose their sanity in fangirling over celebrities that many Americans consider girly men and “probably gay”. What is so appealing about them?

At an unusual height for Japanese men, Mukai Osamu stands at 6 feet tall. His stature, along with his trademark smile, has helped to propel him into the spotlight since his career started in 2006. According to the Japanese culture blog TokyoHive, he currently stands as the male celebrity with the most ideal face and the person people most want to have a forbidden relationship with based on two polls conducted by NTT Docomo early this year. It can be argued that Osamu’s predecessor – and the predecessor of many other *ikemen* celebrities – is Kimura Takuya of the idol group SMAP. Many of Osamu’s roles are men who are good with the ladies – sometimes to the point of being a player – but especially sweet to one special girl. Likewise, many of Kimura Takuya’s drama roles were men not in the conventional salaryman occupation and sensitive to women’s (or in some cases, just one woman’s) feelings. Since his breakout role in 1994, his work has helped make these kinds of male characters become mainstream.

The timing of Kimura Takuya’s appearance in the history of the entertainment industry played a key role in his success; it was immediately after the bursting of the economic bubble and women’s power was well on its way to taking a more prominent place. The collapse of the Golden Age of the mid- to late-1980s caused a re-evaluation of the Japanese way of life. The resulting introspection gave way to a repudiation of the previous generations’ lifestyles and thus the seeming feminization of Japanese men began. This paper will examine how the products of the economic bubble burst paved the way for this feminization – starting from the impact on career stability to the abasement of the salaryman– and for the empowerment of women, which has further fueled the effeminacy trend.

Historical Context

Over the past several decades, Japan has seen a drastic shift in what made men attractive or appealing to women. During the post-war period, the male gender was de-eroticized by a culture that emphasized productivity through “standardization, order, control, rationality and impersonality”. Perhaps because of the increased exposure to Western media after the war, the masculine ideal between the 1950s and the 1970s was akin to the image of the whiskered Euroamerican movie star such as Sean Connery. Going into the 1970s, the most sought-after men were the scholarly or athletic types that eventually became the salarymen that are so often associated with Japan. Then in the 1980s, although a magazine poll in 1987 found that single women placed more importance on inner personal traits than external physical attributes, depilation trends took hold and hair was suddenly taboo. Not just facial hair, although recently beards have made a comeback into fashion, but hair all over the body; chest hair was no longer the symbol of masculinity in Japan and this was further propagated by women’s preference for a completely hairless male body. A poll by Valoir, a brand of hair removal products, found that 72% of women preferred smooth – or *subesube* (スベスベ) – men.¹

Around this time, celebrities with athletic builds, like Japanese actor and former professional boxer Akai Hidekazu, were still popular. Desirable male traits such as strength, tenacity, reliability and loyalty were often associated with Akai’s “large, bloke-ish, somewhat doughy appearance”.¹ Similarly, Japanese actor Oda Yuji, who had a promising future in sports that never came to light due to a knee injury sustained at a young age, was also extremely well-liked. In 1991 and 1992, he was named the number-one favorite male star by readers of the

¹ Laura Miller, *Beauty Up: Exploring Contemporary Japanese Body Aesthetics* (Berkeley: University of California, 2006) 125, 134-135.

women's fashion and beauty magazine, *An-an*.² Then everything started to change after, and arguably because of, the appearance of Kimura Takuya, a member of the idol music group SMAP (Sports and Music Assemble People)³ that was created and managed by the male talent agency Johnny & Associates, Inc. (often referred to as *Johnny's Jimusho* or Johnny's Entertainment, the name of its record label). Starting in 1994, Kimura Takuya – or KimuTaku, as some of his fans call him – held the number one spot on *An-an*'s annual poll for its readers favorite male celebrity for fifteen consecutive years.^{2,4}



Figure 1-1. From left to right: Akai Hidekazu, Oda Yuki, and Kimura Takuya [Source: Google Images, 7 Apr. 2011]

As a child, Kimura embodied the perfect balance of artistic and athletic talents: he was gifted in drawing and painting to the point of having some of his works selected for exhibitions, and he won several championships in prefectural tournaments in both kendo and fishing. In 1987, he joined *Johnny's Jimusho*, as a part of a group of trainees known as Johnny's Juniors. A year

² "Anan の好きな男 TOP10 (1991-2007)," *My happy life*, 17 Sept. 2008, 20 Feb. 2011 <<http://m.exteen.com/blog/happytikky/read/1479207>>.

³ Fabienne Darling-Wolf, "SMAP, Sex, and Masculinity: Constructing the Perfect Female Fantasy in Japanese Popular Music," *Popular Music & Society* 27.3 (2004): 357.

⁴ Martika, "Anan's Rankings-Japan's Most Popular Male Idols of 2008," *Martypedia*, 25 Sept. 2008, 26 Feb. 2011 <<http://martypedia.wordpress.com/2008/09/25/anans-rankings-japans-most-popular-male-idols-of-2008/>>.

later, he became a member of SMAP which started his life in the entertainment industry. It was not until his role in the TV series *Asunaro Hakusho*, however, that his popularity began to skyrocket. That same year, he won the “Ishihara Yujiro Newcomer Award” for his performance in his debut film, *Shoot*. According to his biography on the fan site T.K. Online, the summer of that year he grew out his hair and incidentally started a trend that was copied by many young men in Japan. Kimura has been called “sexy” and “manly” by both men and women alike. His increased popularity shows the shift in how women judge the young heterosexual male; from being based more on character, social standing, earning, capacity, and lineage, it now relies more heavily on aesthetic and sexual appearances.⁵

The result of this shift is still apparent today in the characteristics of Japan’s current hot male stars which include actors and idols like Mukai Osamu, Ikuta Toma, Matsumoto Jun, and KimuTaku. With their thin faces and their typically-long hair colored various shades of brown, blonde, or – for the particularly adventurous ones – virtually any color of the rainbow instead of natural black, these men pervade the entertainment scene with an image that is the antithesis of the bland, homogenous salarymen of old. They flaunt bodies that are skinny enough to make any woman jealous instead of the athletic body that was so popular just a couple decades before. From an American perspective, the lack of muscle build or tone removes any sense of sex appeal and masculinity from these men. They are often mistaken as women, as a result of the styling of their hair, their face, and their thin frame, by the unfamiliar eye of the foreigner. However, one look at their respective sexually-charged photoshoots for *An-An* (of which a few issue covers are shown in Figure 1-2) will erase any questions about their gender and, in some cases, their sexuality.

⁵ Miller 126.



Figure 1-2. Covers of *An-an* featuring idols from *Johnny's Jimusho*. [Source: *yuukie085 (LiveJournal.com)*, 7 Apr. 2011]

From top to bottom, left to right: Kimura Takuya (SMAP, 1998), Okada Junichi (V6, 2003), Matsumoto Jun (Arashi, 2007), Yamashita Tomohisa (NEWS, 2008), Akanishi Jin (KAT-TUN, 2009), Sakurai Sho (Arashi, 2010), Ikuta Toma (2010).

Although any issue featuring KimuTaku (who is especially known for his androgynous looks) would put to rest that he is most definitely male, the issue from 1998 wherein KimuTaku is shown in various blatantly suggestive positions with a Caucasian woman screams it. As a result, using ploys like these photoshoots allow these men to retain their softer, effeminate images without sacrificing their masculinity in the eyes of the general female population.

Japan has always had a history of “gender-bending” practices, particularly by way of Kabuki, wherein men play both the male and female roles, and Takarazuka, wherein women are the ones playing both men and women, theater.⁶ *Bishounen* (which literally translates to “pretty, young boy”) have been present since the time the famous Japanese novel, *The Tale of Genji*, was created and into a number of media in today’s Japanese popular culture scene such as *manga* (Japanese comic books) and *anime* (Japanese animation). However, it was not until recently that a

⁶ Fabienne Darling-Wolf, “Women and New Men: Negotiating Masculinity in the Japanese Media,” *The Communication Review* 7.3 (2004): 291.

“feminization” (so described although not necessarily considered a process resulting in men that act more like women since a grasp on their masculinity is retained) of a significant portion of the male population has been observed. The phenomena has been headed by many of the young male *talentos* (idols who do not specialize in just one circle of entertainment such as acting, singing or modeling but are active in all aspects of the industry) whom the Japanese media have titled “New Men”. With the appeal of the new man lying not in just his looks but also in his sensitivity to women and willingness to occasionally take roles more often given to the woman⁷, this change hints at not just a shift in fashion and popular culture in Japan but also at a possible reconfiguration of the male mind.

The new man is such an antithesis of the salaryman and the established male identity that an acceptance of, and even demand for, him at the scale observed in Japan is nothing less than shocking. The new man is not a consequence of men wanting to be more like women but rather a response to the events and circumstances in Japan around the time of its birth. The increasing “effeminacy” of today’s young Japanese male was sparked by the economic bubble burst in the 1990s and has been fueled since by the growing power of the modern female. The existence of the *ikemen*, the cool and sexy man character who embodies every aspect of the ideal man in the female fantasy has also further perpetuated the cultivation of the new man in 21st century Japan.

⁷ Darling-Wolf, “Women and New Men...,” 288.

Chapter 2

Post-Bubble Japan

After World War II, Japan saw a period of rapid economic growth. The real per capita gross national product (GNP) grew by 7.4%, the highest compared to other countries such as the United States (2%), Australia (2.9%), France (4.4%), and the United Kingdom (3.2%).⁸ Real estate, stock prices, and land value soared in the late 1980s. The standard of living improved dramatically with the increase in disposable income experienced by many Japanese households.⁹ The prosperity did not last though. When the economic bubble burst in the late 1980s, the country entered what has come to be called The Lost Decade. As shown in Figure 2-1, the real GNP per person began to decline (continuing to do so to this day) and the amount of disposable income decreased immediately after the bubble pop around 1991.

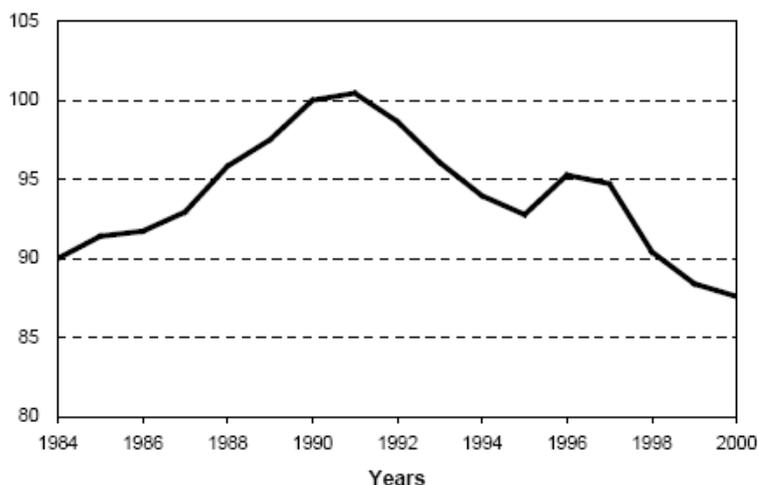


Figure 2-1. Detrended (normalized such that 1990 = 100) real GNP per working-age person. [Source: F. Hayashi and E.C. Prescott, "The 1990s in Japan: A Lost Decade"]

⁸ Kwan Choi, "Per Capita GDP Ranking," *Department of Economics*, 26 Feb. 2011 <<http://www2.econ.iastate.edu/classes/econ355/choi/rank.htm>>.

⁹ "Japan - LIVING STANDARDS," *Country Data*, 26 Feb. 2011 <<http://www.country-data.com/cgi-bin/query/r-7209.html>>.

Companies no longer felt as rich as they had been and ended up laying off some of their employees to make up for the loss in profits. The tradition of lifetime servitude to a single company was no longer viable, and Japan's formerly complacent workers were forced to face the possibilities of unemployment and bankruptcy.^{10,11}

At around this time, the number of non-regular jobs, which are part-time jobs that pay less and provide fewer benefits than regular, full-time jobs, and non-regular workers began to increase. Though the response slightly lagged behind the time the economy plummeted, the percent of the labor force that was made up of non-regular staff really began to rise at a more noticeable rate starting in 1995 (Figure 2-2).

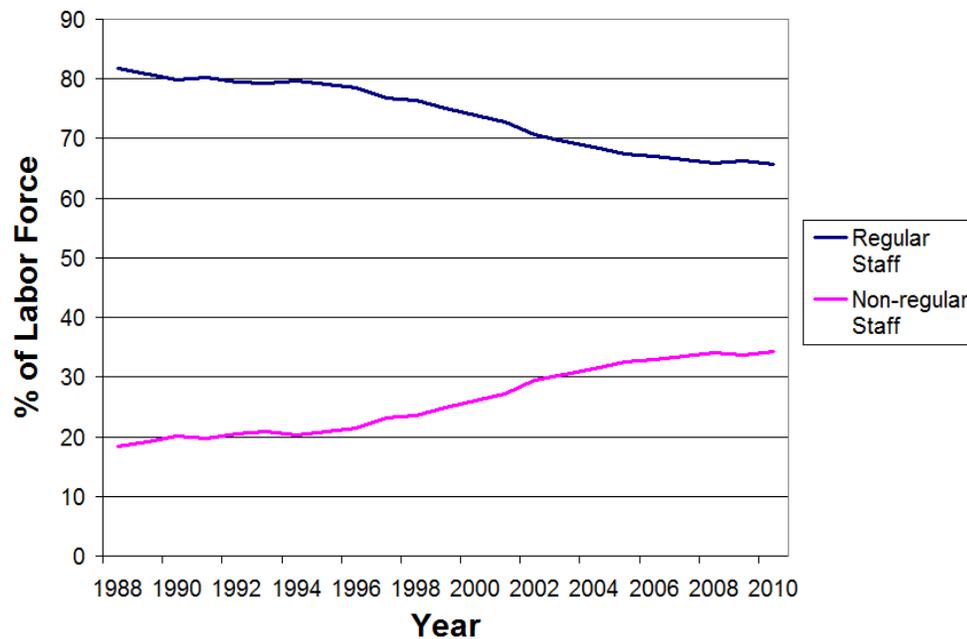


Figure 2-2. Percentage of the Japanese workforce made up of regular and non-regular staff [Source: *Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications*, 26 Feb. 2011]

¹⁰ "The Bubble Economy," *Japan for the Uninvited*, 23 June 2004, 26 Feb. 2011 <<http://www.japanfortheuninvited.com/articles/the-lost-decade.html>>.

¹¹ Alexandra Harney, "Japan Panics about the Rise of "herbivores"—young Men Who Shun Sex, Don't Spend Money, and like Taking Walks. - By Alexandra Harney." *Slate Magazine*, 15 June 2009, 22 Feb. 2011 <<http://www.slate.com/id/2220535/>>.

This was, in part, a result of decreasing availability of jobs, especially regular full-time jobs. It was also caused by the apathetic attitudes of a new crowd of young men emerging out of a childhood that saw both the rise and the fall of the Japanese economy.¹²

Herbivore Men: Sparking the acceptance of effeminacy

Around 2006, author and pop culture columnist Fukasawa Maki wrote a series of articles about a growing group of men who were not interested in sex, the 'relationship of the flesh'. She called them "herbivore men", or *soushoku danshi* (草食男子) which literally means "grass-eating men". Made up of men in their 20s and 30s who had grown up during the troubled, post-bubble period of the 1990s, herbivore men typically make and spend very little money. They have an interest in fashion and in their personal appearance but not their social status. A typical description of herbivore men attributes them with being slender, fragile, flaky and weak. Of course, this is not the case for all herbivorous men. For some, showing vulnerability or sensitivity is not a weakness; they are simply not afraid to do so. Unlike their predecessors whom were aggressive and proactive in regards to romance and sex, this generation lacked assertiveness and life goals. Most have a preference for a quieter and less competitive life.^{13,14,15} This is somewhat a result of seeing their fathers' masculinity or role of power waver as women gained more independence. Although the salaryman has always been a victim of derision with his ill-cut suits, monotonous ties, thick glasses and thinning hair, he was saved by his reputation as a dedicated

¹² Harney.

¹³ Morgan Neill, "Japan's 'herbivore Men' -- Less Interested in Sex, Money - CNN." *CNNWorld*. 05 June 2009, 22 Feb. 2011. <http://articles.cnn.com/2009-06-05/world/japan.herbivore.men_1_japanese-men-men-and-women-girlfriend?_s=PM:WORLD>.

¹⁴ Louisa Lim, "In Japan, 'Herbivore' Boys Subvert Ideas Of Manhood : NPR," *NPR : National Public Radio*, 25 Nov. 2009, 22 Feb. 2011 <<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=120696816>>.

¹⁵ William Pesek, "Dude Looks Like a Lady in Our Recessionary Times: William Pesek - Bloomberg," *Bloomberg - Business & Financial News, Breaking News Headlines*, 30 June 2009, 22 Feb. 2011 <<http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=aEMEP10Ama6g>>.

hardworker devoted to the improvement of his group, be it his company or his country. The bursting of the economic bubble, however, caused many men who were also heads of their household to lose face. During the bubble, they had been able to provide for their family with money to spare. Boys could look up to their fathers with pride and respect. Had the world stayed the same as it was in that Golden Age, many boys would have become just like their fathers – successful, capable bread winners. Lifestyles would remain the same as they have always been. However, after the collapse, fathers were no longer able to confidently say they were capable providers. As Japanese society started shifting from communal to individual goals, self-sacrifice to self-realization¹⁶ due to the need to adapt to the circumstances, the salarymen found themselves facing a sort of identity crisis and at a loss of their place in the world. Their self-confidence and energy was shattered as a result of Japan's recent failures.

The helplessness they felt at their inability to prevent the downward slide revealed a weaker side of themselves that devastated the shining image their sons held of them. Regardless of whether or not the children understood that the economy was to blame for their fathers' fall from grace, they saw their fathers' life work come to mean nothing. They saw them crumble underneath the pressure and felt the consequence of their "inadequacy". As a result, the traits that they used to esteem in their fathers no longer seemed to be worth having. What results are then the unambitious, passive personalities often found amongst the herbivore men. Having seen how volatile life is from their experiences growing up in the aftermath of the collapse, herbivore men focus on the now instead of the future. The controllable and immediately attainable, such as fashion and their outward presentation, instead of abstract hopes and dreams that could never come true. They do not care about their social status because it is unstable and decidedly insignificant when push comes to shove. Being middle class did not protect their families from

¹⁶ P. Matanle, L. McCann, and D. Ashmore, "Men Under Pressure: Representations of the 'Salaryman' and His Organization in Japanese Manga," *Organization* 15.5 (2008): 645.

feeling the financial crisis happening around them. As such, the bursting of the economic bubble during the childhood of herbivorous men caused the development of the more passive, feminine personalities associated with the identity today.

Another reason for their milder manner lies in the feelings of revulsion towards the older generation; herbivore men tend to not want to have the same work-centric lives as their fathers. The identity in itself is a rebellion against that type of life and a reflection of the disillusionment that came from growing up in post-bubble Japan. The disintegration of the lifetime employment system and the lack of job security also contributed to the disaffection from the typical work-centric life.^{17,18,19} This is not to say that the members of the older generation particularly enjoyed the long hours at work, but they were consoled by the fact that they were doing so to provide for their families. Before the economic collapse, the dedication to one's work was rewarding. There was disposable income and relations with co-workers you were likely to have for the rest of your life could be nurtured. The collapse brought down a financial burden on companies that consequently tore apart the lifetime employment system. Now, all that time put in at work seemed to be a waste. Regardless of how committed you were to the company, if it could not afford you, you were out. Loyalty was no longer rewarded as handsomely and the new generation realized this. At the same time, since more companies were only hiring non-regular workers, members of the younger generation would often find themselves working only for brief periods of time at each company. They did not belong to any particular company identity and so there was no point to center their lives around work since it did not and could not define who they are. As a result, the generation to which the herbivore men belong lack ambition and the assertiveness that comes along with a strong sense of identity. Once again, the conditions that stemmed from the

¹⁷ Neill.

¹⁸ Lim.

¹⁹ Pesek.

downward spiral of the economy affected the attitudes of those who grew up through it and caused the less aggressive, and hence more feminine, personas of the young male population.

Male effeminacy can be rendered in not just the demeanor of the herbivore men but also in his appearance. According to a theory by British cultural anthropologist Victor Turner, changes in fashion are a result and symbolic of cultural conflicts. Examples of this can be found in the use of certain symbols after an event occurs such as with the banning of headscarves. The accessory rose as a trend in France to symbolize the Muslim identity among Algerian women. After they were banned, headscarves started showing up on fashion runways. Likewise, the use of a traditional veil by a female Palestinian suicide bomber, who was known to be fashionable and modern by her parents and close friends, can also be interpreted as an emblem of identity that conveys difference and articulates conflict.²⁰ The fashion in which herbivorous men dress themselves is a reflection of their milder, more sensitive demeanor. It is also a way by which they detach themselves from their fathers who were typically not fashion-conscious and spent most of their time in suits. As Miller states in her book *Beauty Up*, the assumption of female sensibilities and bodily sensuality became a form of self-expression for men. It is not so much the passivity of women that they are trying to display. Instead, they utilize the contrasting gender definitions to draw attention to their rejection of their fathers' image and everything it represented from the Golden Age. Having the time to pay attention to one's appearance illustrates the shift from self-sacrifice to self-realization that Matanle, et. al describes as occurring on account of the economic collapse. Bodily sensuality emphasized by the stylish clothing the herbivore men wore, the immersion in the latest fashions are also examples of the new self-realization that was sweeping the younger generation. The herbivore men were no longer just another part of a group made up of uniformly-dressed, invariant personalities; they could be individuals with unique identities.

²⁰ Annette Lynch and Mitchell D. Strauss, *Changing Fashion: a Critical Introduction to Trend Analysis and Meaning*, (Oxford, UK: Berg, 2007) 5, 49.

This freedom of self-expression has certainly appealed to a considerable portion of the Japanese population. Estimates by Media Shakers, a consulting company that is a subsidiary of Japan's largest advertising agency Dentsu, estimates that 60% of men in their early 20s and at least 42% of men in the ages of 23 to 34 consider themselves herbivore men. Partner Agent, a Japanese dating agency, conducted a survey that showed that 61% of single men in their 30s thought of themselves as such. A poll of 1000 single men in their 20s and 30s by Lifenet, a Japanese life insurance company, showed that 75% of the subjects also assumed that identity.²¹ All in all, no matter who examines the population, more than 50% of the subjects consider themselves herbivore men. With an unexpected majority of men claiming to be herbivores, the appearance of the herbivore man has also helped to encourage the feminization of the Japanese male population by providing a backdrop for group assimilation. With more men beginning to take care of their appearance and adopting a slightly feminine look, the effeminate style and self-grooming practices became increasingly widespread and accepted. This allowed for a comfortable environment for normal, non-herbivorous men who did decide to pay more attention to how they look. It is important to note this because it plays a large role in the perpetuation of effeminacy to the average Japanese man; in most cases, people do not like feeling estranged so, even if a guy may truly want to be more conscious of his image, if he stood alone in that desire, he would leave himself more vulnerable to ridicule. Especially with social expectations such as "real men don't cry", a guy can feel stressed and uncomfortable with anything that could bring his masculinity into question. This includes grooming which in modern times especially has unfairly become a female practice. However, even every day events show that if there is a group that collectively partakes in an "unusual" act, more are willing to indulge their hidden desires. Likewise, with more than half of the male population being image-conscious herbivores, it would be okay to

²¹ Harney.

become image-conscious yourself. And thus the effeminacy of the male population in Japan expanded.

Hentai Oyaji: The backlash of compensated dating

In addition to facing repulsion from their own kids, the salaryman was also burdened by an association with the more disagreeable image of a *hentai*, or perverted, *oyaji*. Although *oyaji* literally translates to “uncle” and more colloquially to mean middle-aged man in general, there is a negative connotation attached to the word that resulted from, not only their old-man image that many young people found repulsive, but also the phenomenon of *enjokousai*, or compensated dating.

During the economic bubble, young, middle-class girls grew accustomed to a luxurious, expensive lifestyle funded by their fathers. When the economic bubble burst, these girls found themselves suddenly plunged into a life where money was tight and their parents were no longer able to provide for their materialistic needs. One’s social status was still represented by one’s materialistic possessions though so money to maintain a prosperous front was necessary. Since they were discouraged from getting part-time jobs (being told to use that time to study instead), they were forced to look for other ways to get money. Some turned to compensated dating. Although it had existed before, compensated dating was never in as much public light as it was when it emerged towards the end of the economic boom.²²

As the name suggests, compensated dating is essentially paid dating: an older man would pay a younger girl for going to dinner, an event, or even just spending some time with him. This was considered different from prostitution which is illegal in Japan. Sex was not always

²² "Enjo Kosai (Compensated Dating)," *Japan for the Uninvited*, 23 June 2004, 22 Feb. 2011 <<http://www.japanfortheuninvited.com/articles/enjo-kosai.html>>.

necessarily part of the engagement. A poll by Tokyo Gakugei University psychology professor Fukutomi Mamoru showed that only 23% of girls who had done compensated dating had sex while another 23% had engaged in some alternative sexual activities.²³ However, even if sex was involved, the authorities would have a hard time proving that it was prostitution. As compensated dating, the man could say that he was dating the girl and was merely buying gifts or providing money so that she could shop, buy books, or go have fun with friends. Therefore, the relationship was not one where money was traded for sex. Furthermore, the legal age of consent in Japan is 14, which implies a societal acceptance of sex with minors. Engaging in paid sexual intercourse with a child under the age of 18 was made illegal in 1999 in an attempt to curb the occurrences of compensated dating. However, due to the legal age of consent, enforcement of that law was extremely difficult.²⁴

When news of this activity came out in public, it drew a lot of media attention and was a hot topic for some time. People were distraught that the young females of their country were selling out their innocence. They were also shocked when several disclosed high profile cases revealed that some of the male participants held exalted positions such as teachers, police officers, and judges. When girls were asked about their reasons for participating in compensated dating, answers revealed that many did so out of spite towards their father's behavior (which would include long work hours, time spent drinking at hostess clubs, having extramarital affairs, and coming home late and drunk); some stated that it was a "rite of passage", allowing them to learn how to have mature relationships. They could learn how to converse, how to go to dinner, and how to behave around the opposite sex...things that they could not learn as well in the constricted school environment that was really the only location where the two genders would

²³ Jennifer Liddy, "Name Brand Beauties for Sale," *Enjo Kosai: "Compensated Dating"*, 14 Mar. 2002, 22 Feb. 2011 <http://www.flatrock.org.nz/topics/men/name_brand_beauties_on_sale.htm>.

²⁴ "Enjo Kosai (Compensated Dating)."

interact.^{25,26} Despite the hype surrounding compensated dating and increasing concern over how many girls were involved, studies showed that in actuality only 5-13% of girls surveyed had participated in compensated dating while 75% of girls had been offered money to go on dates with older men.²⁷

Since middle-aged men have been the demographic most often caught participating or seeking compensated dating, they have understandably had a “pervert” label tacked onto them. The *hentai oyaji* is not restricted to just compensated dating. They are often the culprits of sexual harassment, molestation, and/or groping that women are subjected to in public areas, particularly in subways. The occurrences are so frequent that today you will find signs all over warning women to beware of *chikan*, which singularly refers to the act and the man who commits it. There are even women-only subway cars in place during rush hours as a response to the incidents of *chikan*. Anime and manga that depict *chikan* scenes or scenes where a middle-aged or older man is sexually harassing a young female character, such as in the popular series *Ranma ½*, *Full Metal Panic*, *Great Teacher Onizuka*, and *Detective Conan*, have further propelled the bad image. As a result, there is a hyperawareness for these kinds of men that has been fostered particularly amongst the younger generation. Although compensated dating certainly did not give birth to the *hentai oyaji*, it brought the media spotlight and ensuing hype upon it. Government attempts to “fix” the problem invoked a building of an even stronger desire to avoid the *oyaji*. Women did not want to be near them and young men did not want to become or be associated with them. Thus compensated dating, which took off after the economic collapse, inadvertently helped to pave the way for the effeminate, extreme contrast of the salaryman to institute itself.

²⁵ Liddy.

²⁶ William Sparrow, "The young ones," *Asia Times Online*, 10 May 2008, 22 Feb. 2011 <<http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Japan/JE10Dh01.html>>.

²⁷ "Enjo Kosai (Compensated Dating)."

Establishment of Women's Power

The burst of the economic bubble brought about a severe blow to the respect towards and confidence of many Japanese men. The same can not be said of the effect on women. With the passing of Japan's Equal Employment Opportunity Law in 1985, more and more women were allowed to assume larger positions and roles in the workplace. Female executives began to be more prominent and a shift in the balance of power between men and women in the workplace started to occur (Figure 2-3).²⁸ As the number of women who had further education and enjoyed their work more than their male counterparts increased, the times gave rise to the foil of the herbivore men: the economically-empowered, self-assured carnivore women.²⁹ Females in general started becoming more financially independent and no longer needed to rely on a man to meet the monetary needs of daily life and materialistic inclinations. Their power grew and men subsequently felt increasingly inferior and frightened of them.²⁸

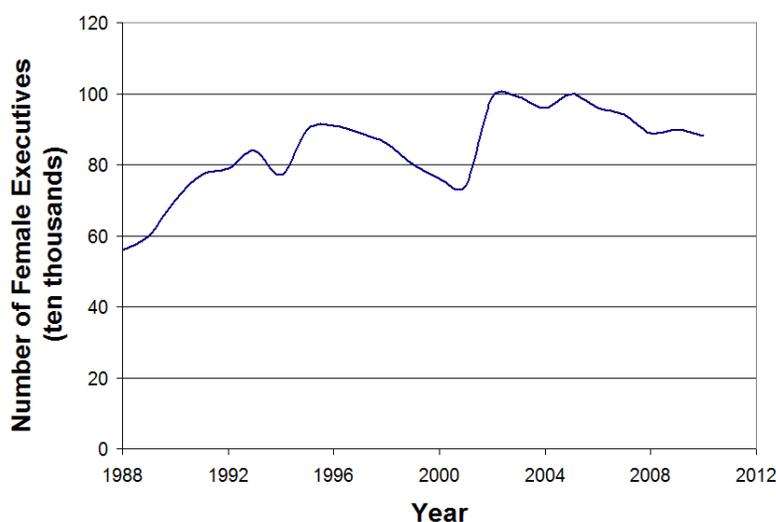


Figure 2-3. Number of female executives (in ten thousands) in the Japanese workforce, 1988 – 2010 [Source: Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 26 Feb. 2011]

²⁸ Harney.

²⁹ Lim.

As their position in society strengthened, more women were able to decide whether or not to get married. In an impressive rejection of the Japanese tradition that praises early marriage and criticizes women who delayed marriage, many women started choosing not to marry at a younger age (Figure 2-4); the average age at which women first got married was 23.0 in 1950. In 2009, the mean had increased to 28.6.³⁰

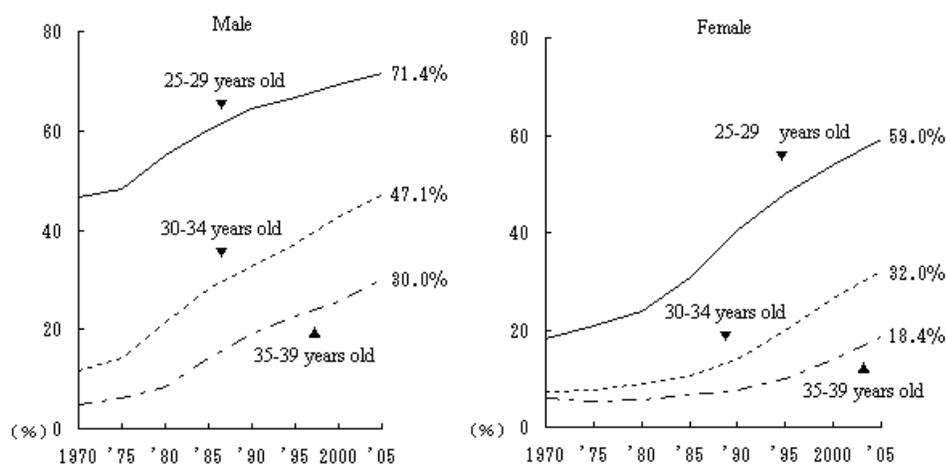


Figure 2-4. Changes in the Never-Married Rate by Age Groups (25-39 Years Old) – Japan (1970-2005) [Source: Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 26 Feb. 2011]

Although men were also marrying later and later, the often-cited reason was either that they were having a hard time finding a job that would be able to sufficiently support a family or that they were reluctant to assume the responsibilities that came with marrying and making a family.³¹ For women, the motivation to not marry was different: they considered it a burden, blaming the typical male who expected a wife that would obediently conduct her role as housekeeper either as a housewife or while juggling a career. The women were also expected to take complete control of child-rearing.³¹

³⁰ Statistics Bureau, 27 Feb. 2011 <<http://www.stat.go.jp/english/>>.

³¹ Yuri Kageyama, "Japanese Women Are Increasingly Passing up Marriage," *The Seattle Times / Seattle Times Newspaper*, 23 Nov. 2004, 27 Feb. 2011 <http://seattletimes.nwsources.com/html/nationworld/2002098343_japansingle23.html>.

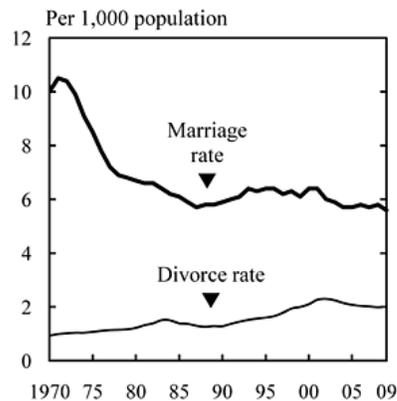


Figure 2-5. Changes in marriage and divorce rates in Japan [Source: *Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications*, 26 Feb. 2011]

An article in the Seattle Times quotes a single 38-year old female as saying (about why women were reluctant to get married): “It’s not that we’re set on being single. We’re thirsting for a good marriage, but we can’t find the right guy. Men haven’t changed their mind-set. Women have grown too powerful for them.” For decades, if not centuries, a good Japanese wife was one who was obedient and submissive to her husband. This expectation continued to be carried on into the modern day without much progress going on towards women’s equality. Despite the strengthening of women’s power in the workplace, household roles remained as they had traditionally been, making the coping of being female discombobulating. At work, she could be a high-ranking manager of a staff comprised of both men and women, but once she returned home she was expected to submit completely to her husband? Doing so undermines her accomplishments and discontent over which spouse had more accomplishments or was more successful could run deep beneath the marriage. Government statistics do suggest an unhappiness and dissatisfaction with marriages in Japan resulting in the decreasing of marriage rates and the increasing of divorce rates as shown in Figure 2-5. The root cause of this trend is unknown but most likely lies in the same shift from self-sacrifice to self-realization that threw salarymen into a whirlwind of self-doubt. Coupled with the independent women, men would face a power struggle

that would eventually drag the marriage through the mud. Thus, instead of risking a bad marriage with the wrong guy who would refuse to acknowledge their new roles, women are merely opting to wait which they are feeling increasingly comfortable doing as a result of the changing times.

However, a problem lies in the expectations women have for their ideal husband. Chikako Ogura, a professor of gender studies at Waseda University in Tokyo, explains to the Seattle Times that “Women are looking for a marital partner who’ll allow them to do whatever they want. They want a marriage that's perfect, economically and mentally. There aren't that many men who can offer that and they're all taken.” Studies have shown that men spend less than ten minutes a day on average doing housework while working women spend around two hours. Since many women are opposed to quitting their jobs, as long as men refuse to change and continue to expect the women to keep house as if they were not employed, they are wont to reject a marriage that would not deliver a more comfortable life. A side effect of this is the declining birth rate that is a major point of concern to the government since it could result in workforce shortage and diminishing sources of support for the elderly. However, the government cannot force the women to wed and shunning their choice to remain single is an archaic stressor that holds no ground in today’s day and age. Since it is all about women’s choice to marry or not, men will have to start meeting women’s expectations if they want to entice one into marriage. The next chapter will focus more on what makes up the ideal man, why the *ikemen* is a fantastical representation of that ideal, and how it will affect the future of heterosexual relations in Japan.

Tying the aftereffects of the economic bubble burst together

Growing up during the economic golden age and through the collapse of the bubble afflicted a deep wound in the mentality of many Japanese men. The failure of the economy seemed to have reflected on the men themselves. As companies had to reinvent their business

strategy and the lifetime employment tradition was no more, the number of non-regular staffers in the labor force increased. The herbivore men were the products of these events and made up a large enough group for the stable permeation of the image-conscious young male into modern society. The spread of the effeminate male was also a response to the negative image derived from the perversion of salarymen and *oyaji*. Adopting an identity that was the complete opposite of the older generation allowed for the younger generation to express their rejection of the past and to symbolize the cultural and societal conflicts present at the time. While the predecessors of these young men were expected to have a dominating presence associated with manliness, herbivore men and the other members of the young male population saw themselves as still being manly despite being more passive and less ambitious. The softening of male dominance in society then allowed women to forge ahead and bring about a shift in the balance of power.

With the increase in the number of women in the workplace and the rise of the female executive, women were becoming more financially independent and emotionally empowered. Many did not need to marry to survive and, as such, chose not to marry at the early age that had been the tradition and expectation in Japan for years. Instead of being something that would save a lady from disgrace and secure her future, marriage now meant throwing away their careers or accepting a more difficult life balancing work, housekeeping, and child-rearing. It became something that would tear their freedom away and weigh them down with endless responsibilities. Women now had the choice to marry and many chose to delay marriage until they found the “perfect man” who would respect them and let them do whatever they wanted to do as opposed to being chained down again.³² During the bubble era, this ideal husband was expected to have requirements known as the “three highs” or “three Hs”: high salary, high educational credentials and high physical stature. After the bubble burst and the 21st century rolled in, it was no longer the three Hs but the three Cs – comfortable, communicative, and

³² Kageyama.

cooperative – that were sought.³³ And nobody encompassed all these traits as well as the *ikemen*...the new man of the 21st century.

³³ Miller 158.

Chapter 3

The Ideal Man: A Female Fantasy in the *Ikemen*

Women's reluctance to marriage made it harder for men to find willing spouses. Since marriage could be considered a rite of passage for heterosexual men who are dependent on the domestic labor typically provided by the female, this posed a serious problem. In addition, there was a stigma in being a single male as they were seen as “immature losers” and “negatively sanctioned in their professional and private lives for their failure”.³⁴ So, in order to better attract women and possibly entice them into marriage, men had to pay more attention to what women wanted, what they liked. And what they liked were the *ikemen* shown on TV. Herein lays the necessity of understanding the popularity of the *ikemen*.

The Ikemen Appeal

Ikemen – written as イケメン – is a formal word that comes from an abbreviation of both イケテル面 and イケテル men (both read as iketerumen), meaning “cool/sexy face” and “cool/sexy man”, respectively.³⁵ Unlike *bishounen*, *ikemen* imparts a more sexual connotation and is synonymous with the new man character of rising *talentos*. One would be more likely to lust after a guy described as *ikemen* than a guy described as *bishounen*. It is also important to note that *ikemen* written entirely in katakana like イケメン should not be mistaken for *ikemen* written with *kanji* (Chinese characters) like 逝け面. The former is the more

³⁴ Miller 157.

³⁵ “イケメン店員,” *JapanKnowledge*, 11 Dec 2003, 7 Feb 2011.

commonly used written form for the cool, sexy man whereas the latter is a slang word that describes a man that is exceptionally ugly.³⁶

The importance of the *ikemen* in a social context is found in the way it offers men and women the possibility to symbolically redefine gender roles. KimuTaku's breakout drama, *Asunaro Hakusho*, in 1994 was such a hit because of KimuTaku's outstanding performance as a shy, sensitive boy named Osamu who falls in love with his friend Narumi. Other TV characters of his are frequently seen crying or dealing with some emotional conflict, even in spite of an exterior "tough guy" act. All of his characters are expressive and good with children. They are able to communicate with women and are not afraid to show their feelings. As an idol, KimuTaku is particularly well-liked because he is smart, witty and sensitive. He is not afraid to be feminine as shown by his frequent appearances as "Takuya Mama", the short-skirted female version of himself. These are traits not found in the normal, every day Japanese man, but the recurrence of these characters suggests that they are normal or can be normal either in this reality or another one similar to this one. As another plus, KimuTaku and all the other young male celebrities popular today are all good looking; the ones often described as *ikemen* usually have works in which they are shown in sexually-charged situations to assert their masculinity and their places as sex objects as demonstrated by the *An-An* covers in Figure 1-2. In KimuTaku's 1997 hit drama, *Gift*, his character is woken up by his girlfriend's fondling, startling him and causing him to jump out of bed thus revealing his nearly-naked body clad only in Calvin Klein underwear. Another scene shows him coming out of the bathroom, having recently taken a shower, toweling his hair dry with another towel wrapped low on his hips.³⁷ These vicarious glimpses of skin and clothing worn dangerously low on the hips, bed scenes with women and scenes where the man is being chased by a woman who wants to molest him all help to convey the actor's sex appeal and to

³⁶ "逝け面," *JapanKnowledge*, 18 Apr 2004, 7 Feb 2011.

³⁷ Darling-Wolf, "SMAP, Sex, and Masculinity", 360.

imply that he is extremely desired by women. KimuTaku's explicit mentions of pornographic consumption, masturbation habits, and favorite sexual positions further serve to emphasize his sexuality.³⁸ He and his generation of actors are the absolute opposites of the emotionless, distant, sexist salaryman. Though they have a softer look about them, there is no doubt that they are men. Heterosexual men and men who are lusted after by women. The most obvious reason why they are appealing is because of the rarity of a well-taken-care-of male body. Actors work out constantly and their diets are restricted so that they stay thin. Some even go to skin clinics to maintain blemish-free skin. Human nature leads us to like having things nobody else has because it boosts our sense of worth. The bodies of the *ikemen* are not easily attained – a girl cannot just get an average guy off the street with a body that is taken care of to the same degree – so that makes them all that more desirable. But why is this important and what role do the *ikemen* serve in a social context? In a male-dominated society filled with an excess of material that caters to the male sexual pleasure, their presence act as a liberation for women to explore their own sexual identity.

Historically, women have always been the ones viewed as sex objects. Men took an appreciation of the female body but women were never publicly allowed to show an equal amount of interest in the male body. Women were expected to remain pure and innocent until marriage and, even after that, she belonged to her husband. She would not have been exposed to other men's naked bodies. Today, women can easily see any number of actors bare their chests and sometimes go near full nudity on screen. This provides women a chance to see a variety of body types and shapes thus allowing them to discern what they do and do not like. Total body depilation trends that took hold in the 1980s, for example, were most likely a result of women discovering a preference for seeing hairless male bodies on screen. Nudity in media acts to

³⁸ Fabienne Darling-Wolf, "Male Bonding and Female Pleasure: Refining Masculinity in Japanese Popular Cultural Texts," *Popular Communication* 1.2 (2003): 77.

educate and broaden women's knowledge of the male body. They become more empowered and more confident with their new awareness of sexuality. At the same time, they become able to define their own sexual behavior and consciously assimilate it into their sense of self. The result is a much more assertive woman who better understands herself and is more capable of finding success in life. Thus, the appeal of the sexy side of the *ikemen* lies in the sense of power and control women get as they come to appreciate a man's physical attributes.

Another thing that draws women to the new man is the portrayal that he is home-oriented and creative. Many of the characters played by male celebrities are not salarymen, but hair stylists (KimuTaku in *Beautiful Life*), pianists (Tamaki Hiroshi in *Nodame Cantabile*), patissiers (Mizushima Hiro in *Absolute Boyfriend*), interior designers (Katou Kazuki in *Hotaru no Hikari*), dancers (Matsumoto Jun in *Kimi wa Petto*) and more. They are playful and carefree, which contribute to the feelings of safety and intimacy for the women that surround them.³⁹ At the same time, their cute, childish acts instill in women a desire to take care of the men, to be a mother-figure for them.⁴⁰ They are the perfect female fantasy, the ideal men that embody all the characteristics desired by women: physical attractiveness, wealth, cooking ability, facility with child care, sensitivity and self-confidence.³⁹

These criteria have become important because of how the economy has affected Japanese society and gender roles as well as what environment women would best thrive in. A male's physical attractiveness is necessary for a healthy sex life (which has been associated with good, long-lasting marriages) and to ensure the continual passing of the gene pool. Anthropologically, beauty or physical attractiveness was an indication of health, and those who were more attractive were more likely to procreate. Thus, we gravitate towards those with good looks in order to conserve our own genes and pass them to the next generation. Wealth is also an important factor

³⁹ Darling-Wolf, "Male Bonding and Female Pleasure," 78-79.

⁴⁰ Darling-Wolf, "Women and New Men," 292.

simply because money is necessary to live. The more you have, the more secure the future of your life and your family's life will be. Cooking ability and facility with child care come from the increase in women at the workplace. In order to have a better work-life balance, spousal involvement is essential. Sensitivity and self-confidence are not key components but they are promoters to a happy relationship: sensitivity allows for the consideration of the women's feelings and thoughts, and self-confidence is tied to the perception of the man's ability to protect the family. If he cannot stand up for himself or does not believe in his own skills, how could he possibly play the role of protector?

Dramas take care to address this point through violent fight scenes that prove the male character's masculinity and strength. To maintain that the character is a "good guy" though, the fights occur either to the reluctance of the protagonist or as a result of some evil side of his personality.⁴¹ By the end of the series, the hostility is resolved so as to no longer threaten the stance that the protagonist is essentially a good guy. The viewers know what he is capable of nevertheless and this adds a hint of excitement, danger and drama to his otherwise good-natured persona.⁴² The character's appeal is strengthened as a result because not only has strength been demonstrated but also a commitment to morality and fairness. He is not weak and he is confident enough in his abilities that he does not need to prove himself to anyone else.

Of course, any male who completely possesses all of these characteristics would have to be a being that is much more than human; and dramas do not attempt to make a male character who is supposed to be the average human male so ideal as to no longer be believable. However, the male leads tend to encompass a good number of the ideals. Nakatsu Shuichi from the hit drama *Hanazakari no Kimitachi He* (nicknamed *Hana Kimi*), which is based on the popular manga of the same name, is an excellent example of this. Although he is not the main character,

⁴¹ Darling-Wolf, "SMAP, Sex, and Masculinity," 362.

⁴² Darling-Wolf, "Male Bonding and Female Pleasure," 81.

he garners a lot of attention and support from female viewers. He is manly but sensitive, cool but comical. Just in the first episode of the drama, the audience is already given an opportunity to see Ikuta Toma, who plays Nakatsu Shuichi, in nothing but a towel wrapped around his hips. Having been given the honor of being the feature of one of the issues of *An-an*, Ikuta Toma is already considered as a sexy idol and, the use of his body as Nakatsu's impresses that sexuality onto Nakatsu the character. The shot of Nakatsu's bare torso also shows that he is indeed male. His manliness is also alluded by his excellence in soccer: in the first episode, the audience learns quickly that he is the best at sports in the school and was the sports champion in the previous year. In the same episode, the audience also finds out that he is a very good friend: he gives up this year's title of sports champion in order to help Ashiya Mizuki (the new transfer student who is actually a girl pretending to be a guy in order to enter the boys' school) who was injured. Later on in the series, his more sensitive side is revealed as he often ends up being one of the people Mizuki turns to for help. He listens to her troubles and comforts her, doing so both when he thought she was a boy and after he found out she was actually a girl. Although he is serious during all of these scenes, Nakatsu's character is actually that of a comic.

In the drama, he is always bumbling around, shouting irrationally, and acting cute, insighting laughter in the other characters as well as in the audience. His personality makes girls want to take care of him, especially after he gives up Mizuki when he realizes that the one she loves is Sano Izumi, not him. However, another great trait of Nakatsu's is his optimism and his ability to pick himself up afterwards. After discovering that his love was unrequited, he was depressed for a short period of time before deciding to continue loving Mizuki from afar and to always be her friend, allowing him to return to his normal, bubbly self by the end of the series. In the last episode, the audience is also shown Nakatsu's acceptance of his female side when he dresses up as a female nurse in a pink uniform with a knee-length skirt and eagerly plays the role for the class' maid café in the school festival. He does not display much discontent with taking up

more female-associated roles such as cleaning and preparing food, as shown in episode five when the group goes to work in the dorm head's aunt's beach café for the summer. Unlike the typical, real-life Japanese male, Nakatsu is not afraid to occasionally indulge in his feminine side nor is he unwilling to take up roles usually given to women. In addition, he puts his all into chasing after his dream of becoming a professional soccer player. This drive is uncommon in the average young Japanese male, especially in that of an herbivore man, who has been characterized as lacking ambition. When Nakatsu's mother comes to bring him back to Osaka so that he can take over the family business during the special shown after the series ended, Nakatsu stands firm on his intent to become a professional soccer player and refuses to go with his mom. He eventually shows her his talent and makes her understand and accept his love for the sport and his aspiration. As discussed prior, these are the types of traits that women like and they contribute to Nakatsu's status as an ikemen.

Nakatsu of *Hana Kimi* is just one of the many examples of the *ikemen* and the new man favored in and promoted by the texts prevalent in popular Japanese culture. *Hana Kimi* was first released as a *manga* and it is not alone in its depiction of men. Many *shoujo manga*, comics that are targeted towards women, have beautifully drawn and sometimes androgynous men who are lusted after by the readers, even in spite of the fact that they are two-dimensional characters. They embody qualities attributed to the new man such as self-confidence, respect towards women, and emotional sensitivity and awareness. Regardless of whether these men are heterosexual (as in the case of hit mangas like *Hana Yori Dango* and *Hanazakari no Kimitachi He*) or homosexual (such as in the popular boys-love manga *Junjou Romantica*), these stories give female readers the opportunity to fantasize about loving relationships between equals.

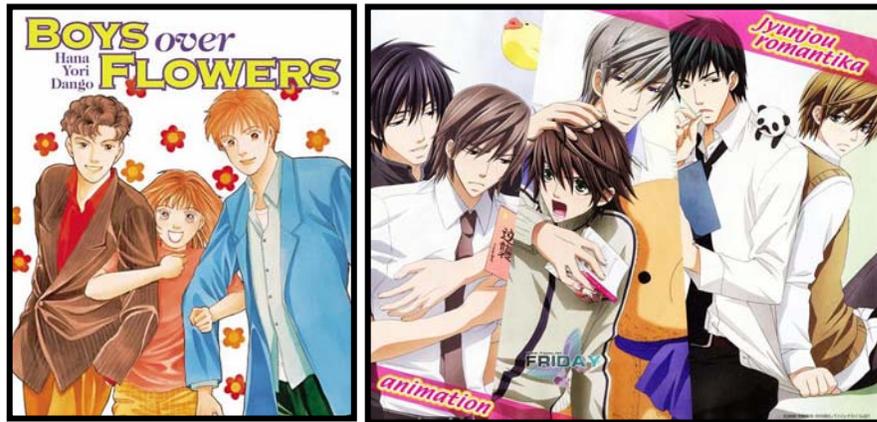


Figure 3-1. *Hana Yori Dango* (left) and *Junjou Romantica* (right) [Source: Google Images, 7 Apr. 2011]

Boys-love *manga*, in particular, would permit the imagining of an egalitarian relationship that Japanese women would find surreal if it was between a male and a female. According to Darling-Wolf (“SMAP, Sex, and Masculinity”), this stems from societal standards that place men collectively on a higher pedestal than women as is typical in male-dominated societies. This causes an inequality in a male-female relationship because the men are supposedly worth more and naturally have the role of authority to which the women must answer because they are lesser beings. This does not happen in male-male relationships. Instead, since both participants are male, they are on the pedestal together and, from the start, there is equality in the relationship. Without regarding taboos related to homosexual romance, society allows them to treat each other as equals due to their gender which also results in an equal respect for one another’s worth. The androgyny with which the male characters are drawn works as an avenue for women to identify with and assume the role of one of the male characters so that they can imagine the relationship as their own. By doing so, they can “experience” a romantic connection between two equals without actually endangering or calling into question the status quo.

As an example, Kamijou Hiroki (Hiro) and Kusama Nowaki make up one of the homosexual couples in *Junjou Romantica* and who have a relationship wherein their equality and

love for each other are constantly reaffirmed. Hiro is always unsure of Nowaki's feelings for him and finds himself doubting Nowaki's conviction towards him. This usually results in Hiro feeling like he is being left behind by Nowaki and thus has to chase after Nowaki in order to keep him with him. Likewise, Nowaki, who is several years younger than Hiro, feels like he is not capable of supporting Hiro because he is always behind him in terms of their careers. When Nowaki was a student, Hiro was an associate professor. In order to catch up to Hiro's career status, Nowaki went to a 2-year medical program in the United States and finished the curriculum in one year. However, upon his return, he finds out that Hiro has advanced and become an associate professor, supposedly leaving Nowaki behind once again. They continue in their insecurity until they confront each other about it and discover that even worrying about their career success affecting their relationship was a ridiculous notion because they love each other for being who they are. If this was a heterosexual relationship, it would not be such a ridiculous notion however and it is often a cause for conflict in real relationships. Likewise, Hiro – who is the submissive and tends to assume the female role in the relationship – often resorts to throwing the nearest objects and harsh retorts and insults at Nowaki when he is mad. For women, being able to assume the place of Hiro allows them a freedom to see themselves behaving this way and still be accepted and loved without question by their partner that, in reality, would most likely not occur. In addition, Nowaki takes care of most of the housecleaning and cooking which makes him an ideal man that women would want to be in a relationship with. As such, in conjunction with the depiction of popular idols and broadcasted live-action television, *mangas* and the *anime* that are created from them provide scenarios that women can safely engage in.

Why is the ikemen merely fantastical?

Although women lust and fangirl like crazy over male celebrities and idols, their response is surprisingly negative when normal men around them emulate and adopt an *ikemen* style. In an interview conducted by Fabienne Darling-Wolf in “Women and New Men: Negotiating Masculinity in the Japanese Media”, a 25-year old Japanese woman named Chieko states that “[androgyny is] not a problem. As long as he’s not my boyfriend!”. It is not that women do not like an image-conscious male; they do, but women are repelled if he pays too much attention to his looks is repelling. The women interviewed in Darling-Wolf’s article reflected that additional turn-off points included the perception that young men were less reliable, softer and more indecisive than compared to earlier generations. They felt that the effeminate men were weaker and more capable of being broken by the stronger women of the modern day.⁴³

Members of the young male population who pay attention to their appearance may not all necessarily be the frail beings that women perceive them to be. Yet, with a large portion of men in their 20s and 30s identifying themselves as herbivore men and the stereotype that herbivorous males are weak, fragile and submissive, it is understandable why many women associate a well-dressed, well-kept man with that typecast. There is a possibility for women to envision a hidden strength in these men, as is present in so many protagonists of dramas, manga and anime. However, there is a clear distinction between reality and fiction in the minds of the female viewers that makes it difficult to see normal people in the violent situations that asserted the masculinity of the male leads in those stories. As a result, the effeminate men tend to remain weak and too feminine in the eyes of most women. In terms of anthropology, the male in a relationship is supposed to protect his mate and offspring. That is why male bodies are generally larger and stronger than those of women. Natural selection drives women to select mates that they

⁴³ Darling-Wolf, “Women and New Men,” 293-296.

believe would help them win in the survival of the fittest. For that, a capability to protect, and thus strength, is a necessity. Consciously or not, the same inclination exists even in the evolved, cognizant modern human and so, if effeminate men cannot demonstrate that ability to protect, women are deterred and do not select or consider them as possible mates.

Another reason why *ikemen* remain merely fantastical is the radical change that would need to occur in Japanese men and the way they think in order to more closely meet the criteria that would make women want them. The two genders would have to be more equal, both at home and at work. Although in terms of career opportunities improvements have been made and women are on the rise in the office, they are nowhere near receiving the prestige that men enjoy; a woman still gets paid significantly less than a man in the same position as her by about 50%. Although the US also has not closed the gap between men and women, the *Huffington Post* reported in March 2011 that females earned 75% of what their male counterparts earn⁴⁴, which is significantly higher than what is observed in Japan. In meeting women's ideals, disparities such as these would have to be addressed. This means men would have to concede that women are just as skilled and capable as men, but doing so would threaten their authority. It would also possibly be damaging to their male pride if a woman ascended the ranks and ended up having the right to give orders. It would be completely out of their comfort zone. Women acknowledge the impossibility of men to change their minds and attitudes towards women so completely in such a short time. Using Nakatsu from *Hana Kimi* again, this can be seen in the many traits that make Nakatsu so lovable yet cannot often be found in the typical young Japanese male. Nakatsu's ambition that drives him to throw himself into soccer, for example, is lacking in today's younger generation. It would take a tremendous effort to garner such a fire in one of the youths of today because, to them, there is no benefit to working so hard for their career. Even if there was

⁴⁴ "White House: Women Still Lag Behind Men In Pay," *The Huffington Post*, 3 Mar. 2011, 22 Mar. 2011 <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/03/03/white-house-women_n_830458.html>.

something they loved to do, if it was not a financially secure job, they would most likely be discouraged from doing it by their parents because it is impractical. As such, the personality traits that they so esteem in their *ikemen* idols cannot be fathomed in the average every day man and the *ikemen* just remains as a fantasy, a dream that Japanese women wish would come true.

Using *ikemen* as a model

In spite of the impossibility of the Japanese male population becoming tangible *ikemen*, some common men still attempt to become new men in order to attract women; and women are pushed to desire them even more by the way media presents and packages idols. The *ikemen* image has become mass-marketed most likely because it is what can be easily sold to the consumers, of which women in their 20s to 40s hold the most purchasing power, as illustrated by the multitudes of screaming fans at idol concerts such as SMAP's concerts as well as the attendance of the same fans at airports when idols leave for a different country or return from an overseas job. At the same time, in order to further appeal to these fans, a sense of intimacy or being able to interact with the celebrities forces companies to not place their talent on pedestals. Young celebrities today are staged to the public as the typical boys next door, neighbors that were just lucky and chosen to be stars so that they could be representatives of their generation. They are made to be multitalented yet never to the extent of being too extraordinary. They are humanized in order to become more realistic and life-sized for the audience to identify with. Television promotes them in a familiar and informal manner for the purposes of attracting audiences, winning top ratings, and stressing the "unity and interconnectedness between stars" while "[locating] the celebrities as part of a larger circle and community known as Japanese

society”.⁴⁵ As a result, they became models of what people could become. Even if that meant the effeminacy of the male viewers, it was increasingly acceptable with the relaxing of Japanese attitudes towards what was appropriate for what gender in the aftermath of the economic bubble burst.⁴⁶

From a female perspective, the intimacy to celebrities provided by TV shows made the *ikemen* ideal seem to be so close yet at the same so far. Women would feel connected to these idols. They were like friends and female viewers shared in their secrets. However, they could not be touched. The male stars were still physically intangible. Consequently, the desire for those ideal men to be within reach was fueled and, recognizing the opportunities that surfaced, average men moved to fulfill it.

More pressure was also placed on the male population to undergo even the smallest bit of feminization with the inundation of advertisements featuring endorsements by new man celebrities. These ads can be found all over Japan, making it seem like the new man look is normal. The bandwagon approach sends the message that “everyone else is doing it so why aren’t you?” which makes the customer or observer feel estranged if they have not already started paying more attention to their grooming and/or style. Another message that these ads send is that the cool people look like this and are chased by women so if you want to be popular with the ladies, you should look like this too. Any hot-blooded, heterosexual male would want that for themselves – especially in the face of their female counterparts’ disinclination to marry – so they get sucked up into the feminization trend surrounding them. Male cosmetic companies use illustrations demonstrating female preferences to suggest that not grooming would result in female derision. For example, there are hair removal ads that show, on one end, girls with disgusted faces next to a man with body hair and, on the other end, girls with smiles near a man

⁴⁵ Andrew A. Painter, “Japanese Daytime Television, Popular Culture, and Ideology,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 19.2 (1993): 304.

⁴⁶ Darling-Wolf, “Women and New Men,” 296.

without body hair. As a result, guys are led to believe that they can only get girls if they remove all their body hair, wear stylish clothes, and essentially copy the look of a celebrity. This is not uncommon even in the US though where Americans will don clothes in the same style or cut their hair in the same way as their favorite celebrity. The only difference is that our celebrities look a certain way while Japanese celebrities look another – that other way being more feminine than what is tasteful according to American standards.

Chapter 4

Conclusion: Ikemen of the Future

Knowing the drastic shift in mindset that would have to take place in order for the *ikemen* to penetrate the masses, would it be possible for *ikemen* to stay trendy in popular culture or for the new man to be actualized? Or would it come and go like any other fad? Considering the Western equivalent of *ikemen* found in the metrosexual man that rose up in the early 2000s and continues to be present today, it is unlikely that the trend for Japanese men will revert back to the days when the salaryman was the hot commodity. Recent sales in the cosmetic industry seem to support this: between 2000 and 2006, men's beauty care market doubled in size with domestic sales increasing by 30%. Just between 2005 and 2006, an advancement of 12% in sales was achieved, and in 2006 the male beauty market brought in an annual revenue of \$248 million. A survey by Shiseido, a major Japanese cosmetics company, showed that 70% of their respondents (comprised of both men and women) think taking care of one's appearance is important. 15% of those people spend at least \$17 a month on cosmetics alone. The growth of male grooming can be seen especially in the effect that the launching of the for-men skin care brand Shiseido Men had on company sales: in just one year, they increased by 20%.⁴⁷ This only shows the start of the expansion of male effeminacy in Japan. However, this phenomenon is not limited to just this island country.

The feminization of men has seemed to touch all areas of the world. Though the metrosexual first appeared in the United State in the early 2000s and was also present in Europe, male grooming has persisted through time. A Datamonitor survey revealed that 73% of European

⁴⁷ "White House: Women Still Lag Behind Men In Pay," *The Huffington Post*, 3 Mar. 2011, 22 Mar. 2011 <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/03/03/white-house-women_n_830458.html>.

and American men believed that it was important for them to devote time to their personal appearance. This was 1% larger than the 72% of European and American women who answered similarly.⁴⁸ Surprisingly though, the metrosexual has even been on the rise recently in Pakistan as a result of a liberalized banking sector and a massive influx of media into the country. The number of male beauty salons has increased and beauty treatments typically associated with female pampering – facials and manicures, for example – are becoming increasingly trendy amongst Pakistani men.⁴⁹ The expanding presence of the effeminate or metrosexual man is a global phenomenon and Japan is merely following the pack. However, this redefining of masculinity hints at a possible change in male-female interactions in the near future.

The prospect of this change has an even greater impact in Japan where heterosexual relations are considered further behind socially than those in Western countries⁵⁰, which are probably described as such due to the lack of development in women's equality compared to other developed countries. The complete equalization of men and women in Japan may yet be feasible though. Already, there has been a transformation of men's attitudes and the responsibilities they are willing to take up from women. According to an article on Japan Today, recent polls are showing that a majority of men in their 20s and 30s have no negativity towards being househusbands for their families.⁵¹ More are opting to participate in housecleaning and child-rearing. This has partially been sparked out of necessity by the increasing number of women joining the workforce and having successful careers. The continuation of this trend would mean rising opportunities for women to build careers without the extra burden of simultaneously

⁴⁸ Fan Shean Cheng, Cheng Soon Ooi, and Ding Hooi Ting, "Factors Affecting Consumption Behavior Of Metrosexual Toward Male Grooming Products", *International Review of Business Research Papers* 6.1 (2010): 574.

⁴⁹ "'Metrosexuals' on the Rise in Pakistan," *The Independent Newspaper*, 9 Feb. 2011, 28 Feb. 2011 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/metrosexuals-on-the-rise-in-pakistan-2208787.html>>.

⁵⁰ Darling-Wolf, "SMAP, Sex, and Masculinity", 365-366.

⁵¹ "More Japanese Men Relish Joy of Homemaking > Japan Today: Japan News and Discussion," Japan Today: Japan News and Discussion, *Japan Today*, n.d., 28 Feb. 2011 <http://japantoday.com/category/lifestyle/view/more-japanese-men-relish-joy-of-homemaking>>.

being solely responsible for the house and family. Women's power and influence would continue to grow and a more equal balance between the genders could be achieved without emasculating men. This could provide the change needed for Japan to see an increase in its marriage – and thus birth – rates and to re-stabilize its economy and labor force.

Though the new man image really evolved from the circumstances of the economic bubble burst, it has been fueled by the desire of women and the need of men to appeal to them in the face of their ever-growing strength. The new man embodies aspects that women increasingly want in a man: physical attractiveness balanced with sensitivity, self-confidence, and a respect towards women. This is, in large part, a response to the unhappiness of bad marriages in the past. Some members of the older generation see the feminization as the stripping of masculinity but it can be argued that it is actually the alteration of what makes a man in the 21st century. The phenomenon has also brought about a reclassification of gender roles in Japan. It has become more acceptable for women to be single and financially independent and for men to be more open to assuming roles in the household typically taken up by women. As such, the effeminacy of men being observed today in Japan is not the deterioration of society but a progressive step towards an improved world where men and women are equal.

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- Schreyer Honors College Internal & External Scholarships
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- John R. and Jeanette D. McWhirter Undergraduate Scholarship in the Department of Chemical Engineering
- Waltemeyer Howard Senior Scholarship
- Donnalley Memorial Scholarship in the Department of Chemical Engineering
- Riess, L Scholarship in the Department of Chemical Engineering
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- DeMoss Award for Excellence
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