THE “HERBIVOROUS” MEN OF JAPAN:
NEGOTIATING NEW MASCULINITIES

by

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Chapter One

Introduction

The image of the herbivore\(^1\) is simultaneously culturally specific and universal. The consumption of plants may evoke a wide range of associations, from herds of grazing sheep to diagrams of the ecological food chain, indeed, to vegetarianism. However, the herbivorous existence implies, irrespective of one’s social conditioning, the consumption of a naturally occurring foodstuff. The herbivore rarely must invest any considerable energy to obtain their sustenance, and thus, unlike carnivores, find their vegetation of choice, rather than pursue it.

In Japan, the herbivorous image may refer not only to the dietary habits of livestock, but also the gender identity of a specific male demographic. Young males of a certain type have, particularly in the years post-2006, constituted one of the most visible factions of outliers in the Japanese public eye. These males are called the sôshokukei danshi 草食系男子 (herbivorous men) because of their disinterest in carnal desires, generally passive attitudes towards romance and their careers, and “feminine” interests. The term “sôshokukei danshi” was first coined by columnist, Maki Fukasawa (b. 1967) in October of 2006 in an article in the Nikkei Business newspaper.\(^2\) Fukasawa explains that in the past, males were generally divided into two

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categories based on their romantic and sexual identities: “Aggressive” and “Unlucky”. The sôshokukei danshi, however, have no desire to even attempt to pursue the euphemistic “meat” that other males strive for, and thus, because they do not fit into either category, Fukasawa deems their “sexless” existence to be “herbivorous”. The sôshokukei danshi are further characterized by their disinterest in career advancement, reluctance to initiate romantic relationships, a strong bond with parents and especially with their mothers, the ability to handle domestic chores, and a knack for frugality, among other qualities. In addition, many have depicted the sôshokukei danshi as oppositional challengers to dominant and “traditional” models of masculinity, which maintains the image of the aggressively heterosexual “breadwinner” Japanese man as its spearhead. Masako Ishii-Kuntz argues, “The central concept of hegemonic masculinity reflects the ideal of those in power and all other masculinities are measured against it”. Therein lies the problem of modern Japanese masculinity. The sôshokukei danshi seek to carve out a new masculinity in response to existing gender paradigms, yet the achievement of such a goal is frequently interpreted as a potential blow to dominant Japanese masculinity and as a threat of the supposed “contamination” of the masculine with the feminine.

Relationships based on differences in power, whether actual or perceived, play a critical role in the dialogue surrounding the sôshokukei danshi. The generational nature of these issues adds another layer of division and tension. In essence, the sôshokukei danshi represent the intersection of a number of complexities lying beneath the glossy veneer of contemporary

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3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
Japanese society: “identity – in this case, masculine identity – is ‘crafted’ out of a myriad of co-existing and/or conflicting discourses and is embedded within a wider context of social, economic, cultural and political conditions”. Thus, the sōshokuai danshi are perceived to embody a supposed disconnect between the generations of the last half century, a contradiction of the assumed immutability of Japanese masculinity, an unfortunate but largely denied byproduct of the social and economic ills of the 90s, a challenge to the nationalistically imagined standard of male “Japaneseness”, and an unprecedented boldness in pursuing social deviance.

Typical images of the Japanese male, such as the "thunder father" 雷親父 and the “salaryman” サラリーマン, were established largely within the socially and economically charged atmosphere that permeated Japan during the mid to late twentieth century. Perpetuated by the Japanese media and the influence of social conditioning, these models of masculinity focus on the stoic strength of the provider father who is unwaveringly dedicated to work and who ultimately symbolizes the successes and failures of the post-WWII Japanese economy. The salaryman image is defined by Dasgupta as “full-time, middle-aged, middle-management, white-collar employees of private organizations”. Idealized otokorashii otoko (manly men), in contrast with the sōshokuai danshi, are emblematic of a sexually and professionally aggressive masculinity that exhibits a “take charge” attitude and virile nature. In addition, the dominant discourse of masculinity requires salaryman members, and in effect, all Japanese males, to

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8 The “thunder father” image refers to the stereotype of a headstrong, detached, and short-tempered patriarchal figure allegedly found in many Japanese families.
9 The “salaryman” is generally thought of as a typical employee of any Japanese company; however, they are technically defined as a “white-collar” employee of a private corporation (Dasgupta, “Performing Masculinities?,” 192).
adhere to and perform a rigidly defined “standard” of masculinity that grows out of a legacy of prescriptive gender roles: “his success (or lack of it) would be premised not only on his conduct in the workplace, but also on his ability to conform to the discourse of heterosexual patriarchal family ideology, i.e. to marry at an age deemed suitable, and once married to perform the appropriate gender role befitting a husband/father/provider”.¹¹ To clarify, the Japanese model of what I will refer to as “dominant,” “traditional,” “conventional,” or “hegemonic” masculinity is often portrayed as patriarchal, domineering, providing for one’s family, and embodying values such as “loyalty, diligence, dedication, self-sacrifice, [and] hard work”.¹² It is also important to note that neither the sôshokukei danshi nor the salaryman of the dominant masculinity should be thought of as uncompromising, absolute categories. Both groups are made up of individuals who either self-identify with the proposed models of masculinity or have been labeled as such and who reveal a wide, nebulous range of masculinities that are subject to change. Furthermore, the groups themselves have become enmeshed in various socially constructed identities and images that merely reflect, to varying degrees of accuracy, the lived realities of the sôshokukei danshi and the salarymen.

The principal aim of my research will be to closely examine the significance of the emergence and growth of the sôshokukei danshi, to investigate the social, economic, and political conditions that have led to the development of this specific masculinity, and to explore the internally and externally imposed meanings attributed to the sôshokukei danshi. Additionally, I will attempt to parse out the various accuracies and inaccuracies of the actual and perceived in the sôshokukei danshi existence. Questions that I will seek to answer include the reasons for and causes contributing to the social birthing of the sôshokukei danshi and the extent to which the

¹¹ Dasgupta, “Performing Masculinities?,” 194.
¹² Ibid., 193.
influence of the social, economic, and political conditions of the 1990’s allowed for a dialectical relationship between past and current masculine models. I also intend to take a critical look at the layers of commentary and censure that surround the concept of the “herbivorous” man. I will provide a thorough assessment of the judgment and disapproval that is disseminated by both older generation and peer critics of the sôshokukei danshi. This will lead to a broader evaluation of the greater significance of the sôshokukei danshi in contemporary Japanese society as they participate in conversation with earlier forms of Japanese masculinity. I argue that the sôshokukei danshi, through the condemnation of their critics, have been relegated to a marginalized space that is formed out of coded language and public discourse. However, I also claim that the sôshokukei danshi, in many ways, have actively refuted such criticism and have repurposed the “othered” space that they now willingly occupy, and in owning that space, have opened the door for the establishment of new models of masculinity. Thus, I will end with a discussion of the largely overlooked agency that the sôshokukei danshi exhibit in their reclamation of the privilege of self-directed identity formation.

In what follows, I analyze both primary and secondary sources related to the various components that comprise the sôshokukei danshi’s existence, including the negotiation of corporate culture, the navigation of romantic relationships and marriage, and the fashioning of a culturally and historically significant space for themselves. I draw from works by anthropologists such as Laura Miller and Romit Dasgupta, as well as by researchers such as Yumiko Iida, Gordon Mathews, Masako Ishii-Kuntz, and Kumiko Nemoto. I also examine various forms of popular media as primary sources for my research. In doing so, I utilize television shows, such as the television drama series Otomen and magazine articles and blogs such as Sôshokukei danshi no jittai 「草食系男子の実態」 (The True Condition of the
Herbivorous Men), which is a website authored by a self-professed sōshokukei danshi who seeks to demystify his social group. The website Kaisha seikatsu no tomo 「会社生活の友」 (Friend of Company Life) is a forum-style resource for employees of companies to express their desires and frustrations and receive advice on how to successfully navigate corporate culture. I also use the social networking site, Twitter to gather additional information and opinions surrounding the sōshokukei danshi. These primary sources provide valuable insight into the various representations and depictions of the sōshokukei danshi at large in modern Japanese society and will be used in dialogue with the analytical frameworks provided by existing scholarship.
Chapter Two

Historical Origins of the Sôshokukei Danshi

In this chapter, I will analyze the social, cultural, and economic impetuses, primarily of the 1990’s or the “Lost Decade” in Japan, that fueled the reconstruction of masculine identities. Many members of the older generations would prefer to forget the impact of social change during the 90s and insist upon maintaining the masculine models, such as that of the salaryman, of the 1980’s and before. Regardless, one of the major theories regarding the birth of the sôshokukei danshi hypothesizes that these young men were influenced most strongly during their upbringings by their absent, workaholic fathers in a period of economic instability and uncertainty. In response to their negative early experiences, the sôshokukei danshi have rejected traditional masculinity in favor of a more family-oriented and commonly conceived “feminine” image of masculinity. I agree with this hypothesis and believe that the evolution of Japanese masculinity into what it is today has been a largely dialectical process. Each successive generation of Japanese males has adopted, rejected, or reworked to varying degrees the masculine models of their predecessors. In the case of the sôshokukei danshi, their childhood experiences of turbulence at home and on a national scale have played a crucial role in shaping “herbivorous” masculinity and in strengthening the intentionality of the sôshokukei danshi’s departure from the masculine ideals of older generation males.

Romit Dasgupta defines the “Lost Decade,” or ushinawareta junen, of the 1990’s and early 2000’s, as “a period of economic slowdown, corporate restructurings, and rising unemployment rates, coupled with a growing sense of collective socio-cultural insecurity and anxiety”. Other scholars, such as Megumi Ushikubo, also refer to the turn of the millennium as a major “turning point” that occurred in the aftermath of the collapsed economy. According to Dasgupta, the seemingly sudden “breakdown” that transpired during this time had, in fact, been lying dormant under the surface of Japanese society for years. However, it was only in the specific conditions of the 1990’s that the brewing mess could finally find a leak in the perfect, glossy veneer of Japan’s 1980’s success.

Most notably, with the economic downturn and numerous corporate bankruptcies of the early 1990’s, many salarymen were laid-off in a move that undercut the dedication and seniority they had invested in their companies. From 1991 to 2001, the unemployment rate in Japan rose from 2.1% to 5%. This trend also came on the heels of the feminist movement in the 1980’s and the Equal Employment Opportunity Law, though the Japanese feminist movement was arguably limited in its effects. Dasgupta explains of the newly unemployed salarymen that “given the centrality of work in defining their identity up until that point, their very masculinity was compromised”.

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17 Ibid., 85.
18 Ibid., 80.
19 Yumiko Iida, "Beyond the 'feminization of masculinity': transforming patriarchy with the 'feminine' in contemporary Japanese youth culture," Inter-Asia Cultural Studies 6, no. 1 (March 2005): 64.
hierarchical work culture that governed Japan and which largely continues today, though Japan has begun to adopt some neoliberal capitalist practices in recent years.\textsuperscript{21} The middle-aged generation of salarymen in the 90s had been adopted into various companies during the economic boom of the 1960’s and 1970’s and most likely expected the Japanese economy to continue to thrive well into their retirement years.\textsuperscript{22} This would have allowed them to pay their dues as young employees and reap the benefits of delayed gratitude when they eventually reached the highest levels of seniority and esteemed status within the company.\textsuperscript{23} In reality, however, the economic “miracle” that Japan experienced after WWII took a nosedive when they had just reached the cusp of their long-awaited reward, leaving many promises of lifetime job security and guaranteed promotions unfulfilled.\textsuperscript{24} As a result, many employees were laid off, relocated, or offered fewer hours in an effort to reduce company expenditures.\textsuperscript{25} For the workers who remained, what awaited them was an epidemic of karoshi, or “death by overwork”, suicides driven by anxiety and depression, and increased pressure from their employers to maintain the same efficiency and productivity as in years prior, but with fewer coworkers.\textsuperscript{26} Indeed, as a result of these drastic changes in the structure of the Japanese corporate machine, there emerged a growing “feeling of having been betrayed by the corporate ideology and system into which they had invested so much”.\textsuperscript{27}

In turn, the families of many salarymen were scarred by the unexpected financial loss, especially because men had long been considered the sole breadwinner of the Japanese

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 84.\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 84-85.\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 85.
Some salarymen brought their stresses home, causing greater psychological divides between husbands and wives, fathers and children, and the male sphere and the female sphere. The association of masculinity and manhood with dedication to work and providing for one’s family and the linkage of femininity and womanhood with matters of the home are long-standing fixtures in the Japanese discourse on family. However successfully such a setup may have functioned in the blissful social conditions of the 80s, the turmoil of the 90s quickly exposed the flaws of adhering to a rigidly compartmentalized lifestyle. The separation of gendered spheres, corporate and domestic, fostered an accepted style of marital partnership that was characterized by a glaring lack of communication.

In addition, husbands and wives in Japan were measured to an ideal that advises against “burdening” one’s spouse with troubles that are outside of their “sphere” or removed from their gender role. For example, it is often thought that men should avoid bringing the stresses of their workplace home, which causes them to spend their after-work hours at bars with coworkers in order to create a buffer between work and home. In return, wives are expected to maintain a happy domestic environment and ensure the academic success of their children, yet they must refrain from sharing those responsibilities or any resulting problems with their husbands. Gordon Mathews also argues that many men, rather than explaining the circumstances behind their stresses, would often use their family as an “outlet for their frustrations at work,” which only served to promote the domineering “thunder father” image.

In upholding the clear separation of each gender’s role in an “ideal” marriage, the

28 Ibid., 83.
29 Dasgupta, “Performing Masculinities?,” 192.
31 Dasgupta, “Performing Masculinities?,” 192.
32 Mathews, “Can a ‘real man’ live for his family?,” 114.
inability of either spouse to rely on the other during the unprecedentedly overwhelming dilemmas of the 1990’s was due, in part, to a deeply ingrained desire to fulfill or at least retain some semblance of embodying preconceived ideal models for husbands and wives.

Mathews’s work centers around the concept of ikigai, which roughly translates to “that which makes life worth living” and can be thought of as a person’s motivations. He, too, notes the powerful and ideologically based preservation of distinct and unyielding gender roles: “When most men have to spend most of their waking lives at work, work necessarily remains what might be termed their ‘defacto ikigai,’ and defacto definition of who they are as men”. And as Kumiko Nemoto argues, “men’s wanting to be absent from the home requires women’s consent to devotion to the home”. In this way, despite the rapidly changing realities of Japanese society in the 90s, the men and women of Japan, as individuals and as a collective whole, resolutely, though perhaps subconsciously, continued to perpetuate the specific lifestyle that had come to be accepted as “normal” and “natural.” Thus, the singular and collectively imagined family – these men and women, in addition to their children, who would later become the sōshokukei danshi generation – became the greenhouse, the petri dish, the unit of disintegration and rebirth that spawned new models of masculinity.

The 2008 film, Tokyo Sonata provides a filmic yet insightful fictional depiction of the collapse and renewal of one such family during the 1990’s. The father in the film, a typical salaryman and absentee father, is fired from his job, but cannot bring himself to divulge that fact

33 Ibid., 109.
34 Ibid., 113.
to his family and continues to hide his shameful unemployment under a façade of normalcy. His choice of deception over honesty seems to stem from an insurmountable level of pride that he has established in being an averagely successful salaryman, in being a commanding, authoritarian father figure, and in performing an acceptable and dominant form of Japanese masculinity. He is domineering towards his wife and physically abusive with his two sons, most likely out of a desperate need to retain power in at least one aspect of his life if not at work. When his younger son, inspired by a girl in the neighborhood, asks for permission to take piano lessons, his father immediately refuses to allow it and calls it a “whim,” while the boy’s mother remains silent at first, but later encourages his musical talents. The conflict over the younger son’s passion for music, which may be interpreted as “artistic” and “feminine” by both audience and father, seems to highlight the important role that mothers played in the shaping of the sōshokuai danshi generation. His father seems to simultaneously disregard and suppress the younger son’s interest in music, which is reflected in the son’s fear of speaking openly about his piano lessons. Likewise, in the relative void left by their fathers and due to the gendered division of work and home, the sōshokuai danshi were raised primarily by their mothers, which may have engendered the remarkably strong bond with their mothers that many sōshokuai danshi exhibit in their adult lives. In addition, the younger son remarks at one point in the film that he would rather be alone than engage in the riskiness of interpersonal relations.

37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
42 Morioka and Ushikubo, 「ひょっとしてアナタも!? 注目される新人種「草食系男子」が増えてるってホント!?」. 
which mirrors the sôshokukei danshi’s aversion to romantic commitments.\textsuperscript{43} The young boy is also repeatedly exposed to the apparent corruption and shortcomings of older males, such as his teacher who reads pornographic comics and his father who falsely hides his unemployment and abuses his family.\textsuperscript{44} The son’s experiences serve to strengthen the correlations between his character and the sôshokukei danshi, who were largely affected by a sense of disillusionment regarding the dominant discourses of masculinity that they encountered as children of the 90s.\textsuperscript{45}

Indeed, both sons are burned by their father’s unhealthy denial and inability to cope with his sudden unemployment and emasculation.\textsuperscript{46} The father’s stubborn insistence on performing the expected masculinity of a stoically domineering patriarch stems from feelings of personal failure and shocking loss, which carry over into his hurtful and dishonest relationships with his wife and sons.\textsuperscript{47} As a result of the fractures within their family, the younger son continues to practice the piano in secret, and the older son decides to join the American military as a way of attempting to fix the problems of the world.\textsuperscript{48} It could be said that the younger son is representative of the sôshokukei danshi generation, while the older son represents a slightly older and more angrily disillusioned generation of males.\textsuperscript{49} The younger wants to exist unobtrusively and follow his interest in music, yet is witness to the brokenness of his family and his father’s choleric assertion of his masculinity; the older aims to rebel against authority and seeks to effect change in Japan and the world at large.\textsuperscript{50} However, the father is physically and verbally rough with both sons; he does not see his older son off at the airport when his son leaves for the

\textsuperscript{43} Kiyoshi Kurosawa, Director, \textit{Tokyo Sonata}, 2008.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{45} Dasgupta, “THE ‘LOST DECADE’,” 83.
\textsuperscript{46} Kiyoshi Kurosawa, Director, \textit{Tokyo Sonata}, 2008.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
military, and he also throws his younger son down the stairs of their house.\textsuperscript{51} In this particular case, then, I would hypothesize that the father in the film and other members of the dominant culture of masculinity have confused the placid sense of individuality of the ๋sòshokukei danshi with the impassioned rebellion of the older brother’s generation. Echoing the argument made by Mathews, by suppressing the desires of both sons, the father in the film seeks to maintain authority within the home, especially as he can no longer do so in his career.\textsuperscript{52} Subsequently, his treatment of both sons is quite similar, despite the fact that their desires and actions are considerably disparate; the older openly joins the American armed forces, while the younger secretly learns to play the piano.\textsuperscript{53} Thus, in an almost identical pattern of the anxious conflation of deviant social groups, it seems that the older generation of Japanese males has grown to view the ๋sòshokukei danshi with fear and as a vengeful faction of dissidence, which has led to their critical and antagonistic approach towards the ๋sòshokukei danshi.

At the end of the film, each family member individually reaches a point of crisis and catharsis, and after each has returned home, they resume life in a stage of seeming rebirth.\textsuperscript{54} Father, mother, and son each forcibly detach themselves from the home and the brokenness that filled it, yet reunite in the morning, awakening to a sense of renewal.\textsuperscript{55} This process represents the widespread breakdown of existing power structures in the 90s and the collapse of the economic basis for the salaryman ideal. In this context, the absence of effective communication within the Japanese family became the catalyst for degeneration and the restructuring of post-1990’s masculinities. Dasgupta summarizes this well by arguing that “the equation of Japanese

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{52} Mathews, “Can a ‘real man’ live for his family?,” 114.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\end{footnotesize}
masculinity with the middle-class, white-collar, work-defined ‘salaryman’ splintered, allowing for numerous different masculinities to emerge into public visibility”.\(^56\) Indeed, in the final scene of *Tokyo Sonata*, the younger son achieves an outstanding piano performance, and as the family walks out of the recital hall, there is a sense that the quiet brilliance and triumph of the younger son is the capstone of the family’s healing, which also seems to be an offering of hope for the future of Japanese families in the initially unconventional yet reparative “herbivorous” masculinity that the young boy embodies.\(^57\) Regarding this markedly optimistic denouement, one potential avenue of refutation is the interpretation of the young boy as an *exceptional* piano prodigy, though I would argue that it is more the process of disintegration and regeneration that produces the aforementioned sense of hope, rather than the boy’s specific musical gifting.

Thus, it is out of similarly broken and hurtful family structures, comparable to the ones in the film, that the *sōshokukei danshi* model of masculinity found both its provocation and its genesis. Although *Tokyo Sonata* is a fictional film, it serves as a near caricature of the social conditions of the 90s and the generational tensions that were established, as it brings to light the deeply entrenched salaryman paradigm that has largely retained psychological dominance through the present. It also highlights the hidden instability of the dominant patriarchal masculinity, and perhaps even seeks to criticize the pathetic feebleness of the salaryman, which remained largely unnoticed, in the growing schism separating the salaryman icon and the salaryman reality.

Although it is important to recognize that not all men during this time were salarymen, the image and culture of the “corporate warrior” had become so dominant and pervasive that as these ideally stable and hardworking figures were thrown into economic uncertainty, the entire

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\(^56\) Dasgupta, “THE ‘LOST DECADE’,” 80.
socially constructed system of masculinity at that time was also thrown off balance.\textsuperscript{58} The salaryman’s sudden loss of apparent power and security was thereby tinged with an uncomfortable awareness that they had been emasculated by an invisible and threatening hand of fate and not at all by their own choice. Thus, widespread unemployment and loss of financial security symbolized a knife of bitter betrayal by the companies the salarymen had devoted their lives to. It was then the uncontrollable collective and individual loss of agency in dictating their masculinity that provided the proverbial salt in the wound.

The economic crisis and subsequent instability of the occupational basis for the salaryman model of masculinity was perhaps the most notable symptom of decline during the Lost Decade, but it was by no means the only source of anxiety. The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) had long dominated the Japanese political scene, but in the 1990’s, accusations of corruption and rumors of illicit relations between the LDP and large corporations began to surface.\textsuperscript{59} In January of 1995, the Great Hanshin Earthquake devastated the Kansai region of Japan and left a mark of trauma and grief in the collective memory of the Japanese people that lasts to today.\textsuperscript{60} The damaging legacy of this event was further exacerbated by the lack of governmental efficacy in responding to the crisis, which created a sentiment of distrust and disappointment.

This sense of loss and ruin was coupled with feelings of hopelessness and a palpable undercurrent of “collective anxiety, much of it centered around youth, about the impeding social and cultural collapse”.\textsuperscript{61} It was thus the youth of Japan, much like the young son in \textit{Tokyo Sonata}, who were simultaneously made to bear the brunt of pressures to reform and blamed for

\textsuperscript{58} Dasgupta, “THE ‘LOST DECADE’,” 83.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 82.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 81.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
acting in ways that aggravated, or merely revealed, existing fractures in Japanese society. For example, *enjo kosai*, or monetarily compensated dates between teenage girls and middle-aged men, seemed, particularly to older generation members of society, to represent the moral depravity that, while far from unnoticed, remained largely unacknowledged. Many teenagers eventually “snapped” under societal and educational pressures and committed minor crimes. Then in March of 1995, the fanatical Aum Shinrikyo religious cult, disenchanted with existing social structures, executed an unexpected terrorist attack on major Tokyo subway lines using sarin gas, which killed or injured many and shocked an already fearful nation. Some young adults could not find employment in the difficult economy and were forced into the lifestyle of the “*furiitaa*” (someone who is not employed full-time or as a regular employee), which often comes with a shameful stigma of laziness and ineptitude.

These circumstances are often used to rationalize the significant changes that have occurred in Japanese society over the last few decades, not the least of which is the emergence of the *sōshokukei danshi*. Thus, those growing up during the 1990’s, including the *sōshokukei danshi*, were influenced greatly by an atmosphere of social unrest and a disproportionate amount of pressure and media attention directed towards their generation. The tumultuousness of the 90s created a precedent of instability, a dire lack of paternal care, and disillusionment with male corporate culture. In addition, the *sōshokukei danshi* have never truly known the economic prosperity and social tranquility that their fathers experienced and strived for. As a result, the *sōshokukei danshi* were molded by the anxiety and trauma of their childhoods and have therefore

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62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
66 Ibid.
67 Otake, “Blurring the boundaries”.

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sought to distance themselves from the masculinity of their fathers, which they perceive as a remnant of the wounds of their past and ultimately, as a failed form of masculinity.

The sōshokukei danshi were thus motivated to distance themselves from the social and economic horrors of the 90s, which was most visibly represented by the salaryman icon. The sōshokukei danshi, as members of the younger generations, represent a step towards a departure from the salaryman masculinity of their fathers’ time, and thereby uphold the dialectical model that I argue most effectively reflects the constantly shifting nature of discourses of gender in Japan. The sōshokukei danshi have seen and experienced the destabilization of the salaryman model in the 90s, and as a result, have become disillusioned with the specific and prescriptive masculinity it represents. To the groups, like the sōshokukei danshi, that desire change, the seemingly indestructible image of the salaryman is weakened by the sudden exposure of vulnerabilities that have long been concealed. As such, at least a portion of the salaryman image has become sullied and disgraced, even passé. The sōshokukei danshi generation also seems aware of the impermanence of masculine models, which previous generations attempted to ignore. Their paradigm is also shaped by their distrust of the corporate system, especially as they recall not only the actual unemployment, but also the symbolic betrayal that was afforded those who preceded them. Ultimately, the gender deviance of the sōshokukei danshi stems partly out of a psychosocial response to the traumas of the past and partly out of their negative interpretations of the position of salaryman masculinity in the context of the present.

Indeed, such a desire in the present to cast off the salaryman masculinity of their fathers may be one of the central motivations of the sōshokukei danshi’s adoption of alternative masculine practices. Laura Miller terms this desire “oyaji-rejection,” where the label oyaji refers to the ubiquitous older generation male, who most likely works as a salaryman and whose
reputation can be likened to that of the term “old geezer” in English. Miller describes these *oyaji* as “de-eroticized” in popular culture and thought of as thoroughly unfortunate, undesirable, and passé. In fact, Miller, whose work deals primarily with male beauty practices in Japan, identifies two central reasons for increased male participation as consumers in the beauty industry: the disposal of both the appearance and masculine ideals of the *oyaji* salarymen and the gratification of the new aesthetic preferences of women. Iida echoes Miller and adds three other reasons: escaping from confining societal roles and duties, finding an “imaginative outlet” for self-exploration, and embracing an element of “narcissism” in presenting himself in an aesthetically pleasing way. Miller states, “An emphasis on male appearance counters the salaryman reification of men as workers, while women appreciate these new styles because they are aesthetically pleasing and erotically charged”. This aesthetic shift was fueled by a “visual pedagogy” of images in the media of the new ideal male appearance and found a niche in male consumerism. Beauty products and beauty salons, which specialize in areas such as hair removal, weight loss, and skin care, became a resource for young men seeking to avoid the fate of the *oyaji* at all costs. Miller argues that male beauty practices, and to an extent, the production of alternative masculinities, is indeed a “rejection of imposed and proscribed norms.

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69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
71 Iida, "Beyond the 'feminization of masculinity',' 62.
72 Miller, “Male beauty work”, 38.
73 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
of the world of schools and corporations, and especially of images of short, stocky, dark-suited oyaji with pomade-plastered hair”.  

Iida postulates that the first visible group of males to employ beautification practices as a part of their masculine identity were the bijarukei pop idol musicians, who were popular in the 90s and whose appeal was interlaced with their outward beauty.  On another note, these bijarukei men can also be thought of, informally, as the aesthetic predecessors of the sôshokukei danshi in terms of their attention to outward appearance. In fact, the “kei”, meaning “lineage” or “system,” in “bijarukei” and “sôshokukei” are one and the same. However, to clarify, while the bijarukei, as well as aesthetically conscious young men on the whole, and the sôshokukei danshi are connected by their attention to appearances, these groupings are not interchangeable. The bijarukei represent a fad in the music industry of the 90s, which led to a rise in male beauty practices that has become a major component of Japanese youth culture. The sôshokukei danshi, as relatively young members of society, have adopted these beauty practices simultaneously as a marker of their subscription to youth culture and also as an element of performed deviance from conventional masculinity. Therefore, while most, if not all, sôshokukei danshi engage in male beauty practices, not all men who do so are necessarily sôshokukei danshi. The sôshokukei danshi masculinity encompasses much more than just a stylized appearance. Thus, it is critical to avoid the conflation of related social groups. In my research, I strive to conscientiously utilize these “relatives” of the sôshokukei danshi, such as the bijarukei, aesthetically conscious youth culture at large, and others, as compartmentalized and segmental units of understanding “herbivorous” masculinity as a whole. Furthermore, the confusing nature of these categories serves to highlight the significant flexibility, amorphousness, and indeed, the socially constructed

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75 Ibid., 52.
76 Iida, "Beyond the 'feminization of masculinity',” 59.
nature of their existence, as well as to underscore largely imagined nature of the boundaries that they represent.

Iida identifies the 90s as a decade in which the power of the image intensified and created a culture in which “the boundary between the ‘artificially imagined self’ and the ‘true self’ is blurred”. Similarly, Miller argues that male beauty practices are used by young Japanese males to actively fashion a self that is altered and therefore contains implications for the often assumed “innateness” of gender practices: “Male engagement with many of these forms of beauty work not only challenges conventional gender constructions, it also contends with traditional notions about the malleability of the self”. For the bijarukei singers, their carefully crafted appearances were distinctly different from that of the “cute” female pop idols, intending, rather, to portray “independence, gentleness and sensitivity”, and thus maintaining the heterosexual component of their identity and denying a simple mimicry of their female components. According to Iida, “feminine” young men in Japan do not seek to merely embody a feminine existence, but instead, choose to use the conventionally feminized sphere of beauty to further remove themselves from the rigid boundaries of the dominant form of masculinity and to build their own cultural space in which they can formulate a new masculinity: “these young men strategically distance themselves from conventional masculinity by artificially standing in the position of the ‘feminine’, where they can more freely engage in the creation of alternative gender identities”. Iida’s argument is much like that of Miller, which postulates that appearance-conscious young men in Japan have not taken on a feminine identity, so much as they have simply appropriated beauty for their own goals within the context of masculinity and challenged the notion that beauty work is a feminine

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77 Ibid.
78 Miller, “Male beauty work”, 49.
79 Iida, "Beyond the 'feminization of masculinity',” 59.
80 Ibid., 56.
pursuit.\textsuperscript{81} Miller argues that far from standing outside of masculine identity, men who engage in the realm of self-beautification, including the \textit{sôshokukei danshi}, have merely drawn attention to the fact that the “ideological sphere of reference of masculinity has widened to include a greater diversity of physical styles, with beautification as another component of masculinity”.\textsuperscript{82} Thus, against the historical backdrop of the \textit{bijarukei} fad of the 90s and the aversion to the stigmatized \textit{oyaji} image, the \textit{sôshokukei danshi}’s stylized appearance can be interpreted most succinctly as an outwardly visible rejection of old models of masculinity.

Concurrently, “\textit{oyaji}-rejection”, especially within the domain of beauty, has become a method of gaining the approval of young women who, it is significant to note, also grew up in the discord of the 90s: “For many young Japanese women, patriarchal values, or at the very least a dowdy conservatism, go hand in hand with the cloned salaryman body style”\textsuperscript{.83} The \textit{oyaji}, caricatures of dwindling social status and power, have been utilized by young men and women currently in their twenties and thirties as a vehicle of ridicule and repudiation aimed squarely at antiquated value systems, the authoritarian masculine culture of the 90s, and everything that the \textit{oyaji} stand for.\textsuperscript{84} The \textit{oyaji} are even likened to cockroaches and rumored to have a particular odor (“\textit{oyaji no nioi}”), which Mathews identifies as “the stench [...] of failed older men”.\textsuperscript{85}

As a result, we have two common images of the middle-aged salaryman to which the \textit{sôshokukei danshi} often stands in contrast. We see him as a domineering, workaholic, uninvolved father figure, and also as a disgraceful shadow of bygone glory, still clinging obstinately to the vestiges of a purist and outdated version of dominant Japanese masculinity. In

\textsuperscript{81} Miller, “Male beauty work”, 52.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 37.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 44.
\textsuperscript{84} Mathews, “Can a ‘real man’ live for his family?,” 112.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
essence, these salarymen, and more specifically, firm adherents to the doctrines of the salaryman model of masculinity, play upon deeply entrenched gender norms within the collective consciousness of the Japanese people in order to upkep a mere skeleton of power and hegemony. The body has been drained of its blood by the flourishing of a new and unconventional youth culture, particularly that of the 2000’s, which is intertwined with consumerism, focuses on media images, and hints at postmodernist thought. The body has been emptied of its organs by public disillusionment with the fallibility of the salaryman-driven economy and failed family structures of the 1990’s. The body has been stripped of its musculature by the current economic crisis that has made full-time employment ever more difficult and has fostered a new level of exclusivity and impossibility within the deified salaryman existence, thus undermining the universality and accessibility that was originally responsible for making the salaryman model of masculinity appear to be so dominant and incontrovertible. The powerful “body” of the salaryman has been slaughtered and reduced to the satirized oyaji, because, as Yumiko Iida says, “contemporary Japanese youth culture is a battle zone where established and emergent values collide against each other, each claiming a higher authority and legitimacy”.

Now, all that is left is a skeleton-like tool of what once represented authority, stability, and veneration. However, that is not to say that such a skeleton is an ineffective one.

Returning to the relationship between the oyaji and the sōshokukei danshi, it is clear that the particular nature of the sōshokukei danshi lifestyle and identity has been strongly influenced by a decision to abandon or avoid the now repulsive masculinity of the older generation. This decision highlights the significant agency of the sōshokukei danshi in using male beauty practices as a tool to achieve their goals. One of these goals, which has not yet been fully

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86 Iida, "Beyond the 'feminization of masculinity',” 61.
discussed, is the desire for female approbation and satisfying the female “gaze”.\(^87\) Miller states that subscribing to a female-approved aesthetic can project a bevy of implications, namely that “one has both the sensibilities to recognize this new aesthetic and also the time and resources to achieve the socially desired body for compulsory heterosexual marriage”.\(^88\) Thus, successful male beauty work can even function as a means of asserting one’s socioeconomic status and personal character. However, it is important to note that, as previously discussed, the sōshokukei danshi are characterized by an apparent lack of interest in romantic relationships.\(^89\) This would seem to contradict Miller’s argument that young, appearance-conscious men, including the sōshokukei danshi group, use beauty practices as a calculated method of gaining the approval of women. Indeed, while the relationship between oyaji stereotypes and the sōshokukei danshi’s markedly alternative gender practices indicates an attitude of mutual distaste and rejection, the relationship between women and the sōshokukei danshi is less clear. Masahiro Morioka argues that the sōshokukei danshi do not seek romantic relationships, not because they lack sexual drive, nor because they are secretly homosexual, but rather out of a fear of the interpersonal risk and responsibility involved in such relationships.\(^90\) Taken in this context, it is essentially a fearful relationship that drives sōshokukei danshi interactions with women. Morioka calls this fear a desire to avoid both hurting others and being hurt.\(^91\) According to Ushikubo, the only relationship that does not evoke this fear is that of the family, which offers relative security and low risk of being abandoned.\(^92\) Furthermore, from the viewpoint of the sōshokukei danshi, it

\(^{87}\) Miller, “Male beauty work”, 49.
\(^{88}\) Ibid., 51.
\(^{89}\) Fukasawa, 「U35 男子マーケティング図鑑：第 5 回 草食男子」.
\(^{90}\) Morioka and Ushikubo, 「ひょっとしてアナタも!? 注目される新人種「草食系男子」が増えているってホント!？」.
\(^{91}\) Ibid.
\(^{92}\) Ibid.
would follow that the safest relationship in the family is their relationships with their mothers, especially in light of their potentially problematic relationships with their fathers, as discussed previously, and the primarily maternal care they received in their fathers’ absence. Therefore, it is only appropriate that the sōshoku kei danshi would seek to satisfy the female gaze through a specific and stylized aesthetic. In doing so, they reduce the risk of scorn from the women around them and even provide the opportunity for praise without having to tackle the perils of human interaction. Thus, through the pursuit of female approval, the sōshoku kei danshi do not seek the unpredictability of romance, but rather, they continue to participate in a system of beauty in order to alleviate some of the same fears of interpersonal rejection that cause their passivity in romantic relationships.

Today, while the initial shock of the 1990’s economic crash and various social ailments may have worn off, the need remains for Japan’s youth to explore the ways in which they will respond to the current political, social, and economic global atmosphere by redefining gender paradigms and formulating apt new perspectives on masculinity. Culturally and psychologically, the sōshoku kei danshi exist at the intersection of the female “gaze” and the hegemonic male “gaze.” While a rejection of salaryman masculinity or the oyaji’s failure may motivate them to engage in new and unconventional gender practices, the sōshoku kei danshi are far from able to escape the condemnation and enmity of the skeleton of hegemonic masculinity. In the following chapter, I will outline the various criticisms that have been voiced against the sōshoku kei danshi and how such tendencies towards disapproval are founded in the turbulent historical contexts from which the sōshoku kei danshi have emerged, as well as in the seemingly unshakeable cultural tenets of dominant Japanese masculinity that have become integral participants in many other aspects of society.
Chapter Three

Older Generation Critics of the Sôshokukei Danshi

The current social, economic, and political state of Japan does not lend itself well to the acceptance or even tolerance of those who cause any form of disruption. Much like in the 90s, various societal stresses have created points of potential fracture. However, unlike during the “Lost Decade”, Japan has largely recovered from the initial rupture of the miraculous “bubble economy”, and current issues, though uncomfortably familiar of a decade past, must now be navigated by an unprecedented amalgamation of broadly disparate demographic contingents that are divided primarily along generational and dogma-driven fault lines. Japan is currently reeling in the aftermath of a devastating series of natural disasters in March of 2011 and the subsequent Fukushima nuclear crisis that shook the nation on not only an infrastructural and economic level, but a deeply psychological one as well. In addition, declining birth rates and a consistently aging population continue to plague the consciousness of the Japanese people and policymakers. These tensions, coupled with the visibility of the alternative gender practices of the sôshokukei danshi, have produced a number of outspoken, wholly undisguised critics of the sôshokukei danshi, as well as virtually anonymous voices of disapproval that come from a varied spread of academic, governmental, and amateur backgrounds.

In the previous chapter, I discussed the turbulent historical context of the 90s from which the sôshokukei danshi emerged. Now, I will turn to the lasting effects of the gender discourses of the Lost Decade and of the salaryman masculinity of today. Indeed, the relentless criticism
that the sōshokukei danshi have faced begs the questions of “who” and “why”. Who are the critics of the sōshokukei danshi? And why are they intent on expressing their dissatisfaction?

The sōshokukei danshi’s critics can be categorized into two groups: the disdainful peers of the sōshokukei danshi and the older proponents of salaryman masculinity. Within each group, there are professional, academic constituents mixed with casual amateur participants. The criticism from their peers appears to be focused on turning the soshokukeidanshi into an ostracized minority and essentially, a joke. I will return to the viewpoint of said peers in the following chapter. The older generation, especially former salarymen, seems to disapprove of the sōshokukei danshi on the basis of their departure from dominant masculine models and the supposed threat that they pose to the hegemony of the salaryman model. Although there are inevitably many other “types” of critics involved and numerous other possible reasons for disapproval, these basic subsets will form the framework for the following analysis of the “problem of the sōshokukei danshi”.

It is also important to note that, as Dasgupta asserts, “the dominant, hegemonic discourse is itself in a constant state of instability and flux”. Thus, although I often seem to refer to the dominant salaryman model of masculinity as though it is a fixed and everlasting antipode of sōshokukei danshi masculinity and deviant Japanese masculinity at large, I do so with the recognition that this usage is based on the veil of seeming immutability and tradition that has been crafted by members of the dominant masculinity, though many factors indicate that hegemonic masculinity itself is indeed subject to substantial transformation. The agency of the sōshokukei danshi and challenges to the supposed permanency of dominant masculine models will be discussed in full in Chapter 5. In this chapter, I will examine criticism from older

93 Dasgupta, “Performing Masculinities?,” 191.
generation males in terms of the various “defects” that they perceive in the sōshokukei danshi, namely involving the declining birthrate, family structures, denationalization, male beauty practices, and the perceived intrusion of femininity into the masculine sphere. In doing so, I argue that the primary motivations of older generation critics of the sōshokukei danshi stem from a desperate desire to maintain the illusion of complete hegemony over “deviant” masculinities and from the desire to suppress the “lesser” female half of the assumed gender binary. I also argue against the validity of such desires and attempt to dissect the deeper implications of the meanings that have been affixed to the sōshokukei danshi by their older generation critics.

Perhaps the more bitter and indignant of the two divisions, the older generations of Japanese males have lambasted the perceived ideals of the sōshokukei danshi in an effort to defend their own sense of hegemony from the “threat” of deviant masculinities and to express their disdain for the contaminating “weakness” and “effeminacy” that the sōshokukei danshi supposedly promote. Iida speaks to the perceived “feminization of masculinity” that men of the dominant masculinity desperately attempt to guard against, and she suggests that these elements of deviance are often interpreted as treacherous “challenges” to the power that members of the hegemony cherish. Indeed, Iida asserts that the “feminization of masculinity” creates an atmosphere of “fear and anxiety over gender boundary-crossing and the consequent loss of power of those who are included in the privileged half”. Ironically, it was out of the anxiety of the 1990’s that the sōshokukei danshi were created and through anxiety that they are ostensibly contained. Iida argues that this anxiety spurred “an attempt to manage and contain a crisis on the part of Japanese patriarchy and the phallocentric masculine subject, which came to be increasingly challenged by shifting gender power relations, assertions of new gender ideals, and

94 Iida, “Beyond the 'feminization of masculinity'”, 57.
95 Ibid.
intrusions of other destabilizing factors to the patriarchal economy”. 96 Indeed, criticism thus becomes a means of damage control.

The foundation of the criticism voiced by older generation males lies in their own experiences with masculinity and in the specific paradigms that those experiences have engendered. Returning again to the concept of “ikigai” that Mathews outlines, the older generation of now retired salarymen retain a deeply internalized allegiance to work as their ikigai. 97 As a generation, these men and the generation above them were raised in and around the World War II era, and thus have come to regard wealth and a stalwart commitment to national economic resurgence as the principal goals towards which men must dedicate themselves to. 98 Because Mathews conducted his research from 1989 to 1990, his interviewees are slightly older than what I refer to as the “older generation” and “Japanese youth”, but his research remains relevant to my discussion of the sôshokukei danshi and their fathers because of the generational divide that his interviewees reflect. 99 To clarify, the fathers of the sôshokukei danshi tend to fall somewhere in between the generation of the children of WWII and the subsequent generation that was raised during the post-war economic miracle. In many ways, the currently middle-aged to elderly population of men in Japan were often credited with the rebuilding of Japan after WWII and were largely applauded in both domestic and international circles for their effectual work ethic and unshakable determination. 100 However, much like the

96 Ibid.
97 Mathews, “Can a ‘real man’ live for his family?,” 111.
98 Ibid., 110.
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid., 112.
layoffs that occurred in the 1990’s, compulsory retirement policies have created an abruptly forced change in *ikigai* for many of these men.\(^{101}\)

Thus, it is out of such a precedent of idolization and praise that the older generation’s adherence to stringent gender roles has been established and has come to significantly influence their condemnation of the *sôshoku* *kei danshi*, particularly in the association of work and masculinity. Mathews even goes so far as to insinuate a degree of allegiance that borders on brainwashing as members of corporate culture are made to believe a “false consciousness” that advocates the idea that “their sacrifice of themselves to the organizations they work for represents not their exploitation but rather their apotheosis as men”.\(^{102}\) These paradigms consequently inform their views on younger generations of men and the *sôshoku* *kei danshi*: “I get upset when I see a young man with dyed hair driving around in a fancy car with a pretty girl. Fifty years ago, people his age all died in the war; they didn’t have the chance to enjoy their youth!”.\(^{103}\) Young men are expected to be “*otokorashii otoko*”, or “manly men”, and are criticized for refusing to subscribe to the same ideals that the older generations once held.\(^{104}\) Another one of Mathews’s interviewees declares, “Today’s young people don’t have any fighting spirit! They relax with their families before they think about work!”.\(^{105}\) Embedded within this statement is the idea that living for one’s family is somehow wrong or indicative of a lazy lifestyle. At the same time, however, these older generation critics harp on the *sôshoku* *kei danshi* generation for their supposed failure to produce offspring that will sustain future generations and the growth, or maintenance, of the Japanese as a people.

\(^{101}\) Ibid., 111.
\(^{102}\) Ibid.
\(^{103}\) Ibid.
\(^{104}\) Ibid.
\(^{105}\) Ibid.
The Issue of Offspring and Reproduction

According to the US Central Intelligence Agency’s 2011 and 2012 estimates, the average number of children born per Japanese woman is 1.39 children, which barely puts a two-parent household over the single child mark.106 In addition, the national birth rate remains only 8.39 births per 1,000 people, in contrast to the average of 9.15 deaths that occur per 1,000, putting the overall rate of population growth at an understandably concerning –0.077%.107 In other words, the number of children being born each year in Japan is not even sufficient to merely balance the number of deaths of elderly individuals, who, in the 65 years of age and older bracket, constitute 22.9% of the total population.108 In essence, the population of Japan is slowly decreasing and “aging” to form an “upside-down pyramid” where the largest proportion of the Japanese populace is also the oldest. To further the possibility of such a reality, the average life expectancy is 83.91 years old and third highest in the world, indicating that the Japanese elderly can expect to be around for quite some time.109 However, without a young base to support them, their future remains unclear.

Although the Japanese government has taken various measures, ranging from propaganda campaigns to formal legislation, to support the growth of families, many continue to be anxious over the potential shrinking of the nation. These concerns have led to the use of the sōshokukei danshi as a popularly accepted scapegoat, especially in light of their allegedly irresponsible lack of aggression in romantic relationships. One such initiative that gained significant attention was the “2006 Policy on a Declining Birth Rate”, which pushed for greater governmental and

107 Ibid.
108 Ibid.
109 Ibid.
corporate support for families with young children in the form of childcare resources and “family-friendly work environments” that were aimed at promoting a healthier “life-work balance” and revising the gendered division of work and home. However, Nemoto refutes the effectiveness of the 2006 Policy because of its unilateral approach to increasing national birth rate numbers and disregard for the deep-seated and institutionalized inequalities in pay and advancement opportunities that Japanese women face in the workplace, which all but force them to defer the bread-winning role to their husbands. Masako Ishii-Kuntz makes a similar argument and draws attention to the fact that Japanese women are generally relegated to lower level positions and afforded an average annual salary that measures to only 60% of the average male salary. Therefore, regardless of overall shifting systems of belief, these structural inequalities in the workplace make keeping women in the home and men in the office less a matter of beliefs, and more a matter of realizing that defying these norms would be, at the very least, a financial impracticality. In addition, the currently struggling economy of Japan has significantly inflated the price of subscribing to the dominant masculine lifestyle: “whereas the ‘salaryman-housewife model family’ is still a hegemonic model of marriage in Japan, less and less men can afford to have this marriage”. Subsequently, such social and economic realities render government policies fundamentally meaningless.

Previous milestones in public policy include the 1985 Equal Employment Opportunity Law and the 1991 Childcare Leave Law, which afforded both mothers and fathers the

111 Ibid., 4.
112 Ishii-Kuntz, “Balancing fatherhood and work,” 211.
113 Ibid.
115 Ishii-Kuntz, “Balancing fatherhood and work,” 211.
opportunity to take childcare leave.\textsuperscript{116} However, Dasgupta argues, “The shift in government policy was not necessarily prompted by genuine commitments to challenge dominant gender paradigms. Rather, it was driven more by the economic and demographic realities (and projected implications) of falling birthrates and an aging population”.\textsuperscript{117} Admittedly, the implications of these social conditions are staggering. If the “upside-down pyramid” population distribution of Japan were to become a reality, the narrow base of young Japanese in the workforce would be unable to support the precariously “top-heavy” placement of the middle-aged to elderly demographic. In all likelihood, this would cause the nation to suffer economically, due to a lack of workers who are able to fill vacant jobs and pay taxes to sustain the non-working population, and may eventually cause the “upside-down pyramid” to topple and shatter. This danger, coupled with the \textit{sōshokukei danshi}’s perceived lack of concern, is understandably frustrating for the men of the older generations, who fail to comprehend both the impracticality of the \textit{sōshokukei danshi}’s apathy and their blatantly irreverent departure from the “correct” work ethic of the salarymen and assertiveness of males in pursuing romantic relationships.

Indeed, within the homogeneous environment of the workplace, “to perform successfully as a salaryman, one needs to perform (or give the outward appearance of performing) successful heterosexuality,” which provides the basis of criticism of the \textit{sōshokukei danshi}’s decidedly “herbivorous” instead of carnal sexuality.\textsuperscript{118} Even more vexing to members of the older generation is the fact that these older males are now retired and no longer possess any tangible agency in contributing to a solution. The only method of input or influence that they have maintained somewhat successfully is the adamant vocalization of their dissatisfaction with the

\textsuperscript{116} Dasgupta, “THE ‘LOST DECADE’,” 86.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{118} Dasgupta, “Performing Masculinities?,” 198.
younger generations and the sôshokukei danshi. Their attempt to retain at least the semblance of control over the discourse of dominant and “normal” masculinity is found in the outspoken expression of their dogmatic beliefs and abstract solutions, which are presumably filtered through the lens of the masculine culture of the 1980s that they experienced and continue to espouse. Although they are no longer participants in the workplace, older generation males continue to exert their influence and claim hegemony by adhering to a rigid and uncompromising view of “acceptable” masculinity through the “skeleton” that was discussed in the previous chapter. In reality, however, the power of the old “salaryman model” of masculinity no longer exists because its truest proponents have long since retired and have no physical presence in the workforce. Despite this, they strive to uphold a lasting cultural and ideological presence, through a culture of loyalty to one’s company and a rigidly prescriptive hierarchical structure, that compensates for their inability to effect tangible change for themselves and to preserve the nuclear family and gender structures that they have held so dear.

It would appear that, in an effort to address pressing issues such as the dwindling number of births per year in Japan, the status quo of Japanese masculinity has shifted away from the work-centered “salaryman masculinity” of the past. National legislation and governmental propaganda have led many to believe that gender paradigms in Japan have accepted and even encouraged a number of perhaps remedially unconventional and “un-salaryman-like” lifestyles. While on the surface, such rhetoric would seem likely to embrace non-dominant forms of masculinity like the sôshokukei danshi, the experienced reality of contemporary Japanese society shows that the ideological roots behind the economic and population crises, namely the idea that these problems stem from an element of error and failure, have created a tendency to peg the sôshokukei danshi as said faulty element. Thus, even though the rhetoric of healing the nation’s
social ills has successfully crafted a thin veneer of carefully moderated alterations to hegemonic masculinity, the institutionalized nature of Japanese gender norms has rendered these movements essentially ineffectual, while the deeply ingrained prejudices against deviant social groups like the sôshokukei danshi have allowed for a perpetual pattern of blame and dissatisfaction. In other words, members of the hegemony have conceptualized the sôshokukei danshi as simultaneously being both the problem and the solution.

These factions recognize that changes, even changes in masculinity and femininity, may be necessary to fix the problems at hand, yet they continue to oppose and condemn a group that embodies a new, “changed” form of masculinity simply because it would be unthinkable to grant them access to the hegemony and a “sidekick role” in the heroic salvation of the economy and declining birthrate. The sôshokukei danshi embody a family-oriented lifestyle, much like the “revised” models of gender that are meant to encourage greater attention placed on the importance of childcare, yet are rebuked for the “femininity” of their alternative gender practices. Japanese society at large seems to expect the mere thought or appearance of gender equality and revised gender norms to miraculously fill maternity wards across the country, but when these new models of masculinity come in the form of meticulously styled hair and apathy towards career advancement, the whistle is blown and all bets are off. Despite surface-level alterations, the ideology of Japanese masculinity has remained unforgiving of groups, like sôshokukei danshi, that allegedly subvert rather than help their cause, though the opposite may in fact be true. Therefore, the “change that went too far” is discarded, rejected, and ostracized, then blamed for perpetuating the problems that should have been fixed by an uncannily similar plan. The sôshokukei danshi are then further subjected to even more intense pressure to conform to the ideology of the majority as a means of paying “reparations” for alleged “damage” to existing
masculine norms or the feminizing “contamination” that they are often conceived to represent. Essentially, the line of gendered scrimmage has moved, but the division that such a line represents remains consistent and the sōshokukei danshi are still left playing what often appears to be “underdog defense”.

It is within the rigid boundaries of the “playing field” and along the “line of scrimmage” that the sōshokukei danshi are expected to “win the game” for the opponent, yet are kept from crossing the dividing line and joining the “offensive team” by an ideology of tradition and correctness. Gordon Mathews speaks to the confusing nature of the sōshokukei danshi position by stating, “Even though younger men no longer take for granted that a man should live for his company and his ikigai, it seems that many find themselves still having to live as if that were the case”. Thus, it is within such a confusing and contradictory space that the sōshokukei danshi attempt to negotiate a new model of masculinity.

**Fatherhood and Family**

In response to their fatherless upbringings and out of a desire to reform accordingly their masculinities within the context of their future fatherhood, the sōshokukei danshi fall on the side of the post-modern “family man,” despite a level of aversion to the risks of potential rejection and commitment that are inherent in romantic and marital relationships. Ishii-Kuntz exposes the pressures that are imposed on the “ikujimen” subset, which is comprised of men who choose to prioritize their child-rearing duties over their careers. This mindset is strongly opposed by dominant masculine culture because of the notion that successful masculinity hinges upon power and mastery: “Being ‘truly’ masculine is thus equated with competence and control over self and...

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119 Mathews, “Can a ‘real man’ live for his family?,” 113-114.
others, including women and children”.121 Even as young boys, Japanese males are traditionally taught to align themselves with hegemonic masculinity, to be “strong, self-reliant, competitive, aggressive and successful,” or else face censure.122

Once again, it is critical to note that not all ikujimen are sôshokukei danshi, though many sôshokukei danshi could be considered to have a similar familial paradigm to the ikujimen. Just as with the bijarukei pop idols and aesthetically conscious young men described in the previous chapter, the ikujimen should be thought of as close relatives, perhaps “uncles”, of the sôshokukei danshi, which makes them ever more important to my discussion of “herbivorous” masculinity. Furthermore, although the ikujimen and sôshokukei danshi are not synonymous, they are, in actuality, somewhat informally and loosely defined categories. In effect, the ikujimen view of paternal duty can be conceptualized as a singular, though crucial, aspect of the sôshokukei danshi identity. There may, however, be ikujimen who are not “herbivorous” in other components of their masculine identities. The term “ikujimen” also denotes an extra level of specificity in that the ikujimen existence is fundamentally that of a father, whereas many sôshokukei danshi may still be unmarried and without children. However, these sôshokukei danshi may conceivably be called “ikujimen in the making” because of their comparable aversion to the style of uninvolved or authoritarian fatherhood that they experienced and that the ikujimen reject. One of Ishii-Kuntz’s interviewees states, “I don’t want to be like my father, and I’d rather be free from that kind of pressure. By being an active childcaring father, I feel that I have accomplished that”.123

Just as the sôshokukei danshi relieve themselves of the constraints of dominant models of masculinity through venues such as “anti-oyaji” self-beautification, the ikujimen defy masculine

121 Ibid., 199.
122 Ibid., 198.
123 Ibid., 206.
norms by dedicating their time to their children. Thus, the current link between these two groups is the shared exposure to and discarding of hegemonic masculinity and fatherhood, which falls within the proposed dialectical relationship between different generations of Japanese masculinities. In short, both the masculinity of *ikujimen* and that of the *sôshokukei danshi* have been significantly influenced by their relationships to the masculinity of their fathers’ generation in a process of *response* and *adaptation*. Therefore, because the *ikujimen* style of involved parenting closely resembles the reformist paradigm of the *sôshokukei danshi*, and because it is clear that the masculinity of each generation is strongly influenced by that of their fathers, as was the case with the *sôshokukei danshi*, the current and future sons of the *ikujimen* and *sôshokukei danshi* will likely experience a much more collaborative parenting blueprint. As such, these shifts in gender and family structures speak volumes for the future of Japanese masculinity.

Ishii-Kuntz outlines the criticism that these *ikujimen* face in choosing to take childcare leave, declining an invitation to go drinking with his coworkers after work, or joining a likeminded group called *Otoko mo Onna mo Ikuji Jikan o Renrakukai*, which roughly translates to “Childcare Hours for Men and Women Network”. Ishii-Kuntz hypothesizes that the trend of creating an unconventional and quietly oppositional new masculinity stems from men’s discontentment in the workplace due to the struggling economy, an increasing number of women earning a supplemental income, and governmental initiatives aimed at countering the declining birthrate and allowing more financial incentives for both parents to focus on child rearing responsibilities. The *ikujimen*, while far from playing a “Mr. Mom” role, are seemingly motivated to embody a more active paternal presence with their children by a sense of responsibility as a father more than as a breadwinner, a desire to offer their children the

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124 Ibid., 198.
125 Ibid., 199-200.
developmental advantages of interaction with both mother and father, a negative opinion of the uninvolved attitudes of their fathers, a disassociation with conventional markers of masculinity, and encouragement from their wives.\textsuperscript{126}

The \textit{ikujimen}, who represent a younger generation than the middle-aged salarymen of the 90s and one that is slightly older than the current \textit{sōshokukei danshi}, actively choose to oppose the conventional structures of the Japanese nuclear family and thus are thought to represent a deviant form of masculinity.\textsuperscript{127} The riskiness of their life choices stems from the disapproval they may endure from coworkers or bosses because “Japanese society expects everyone to act in a similar way”.\textsuperscript{128} Some of Ishii-Kuntz’s interviewees even noted being “bullied” by their peers or superiors through forced relocation or vocal criticism.\textsuperscript{129} As a result of their decisions, some were given derogatory names, such as “\textit{otoko no haji}” (embarrassment to men) or “\textit{otoko no teki}” (enemy of men), thus illustrating the fact that through the simple act of participating in the domestic sphere, the very masculinity and dignity of these men was often called into question.\textsuperscript{130} Again, the paragons of “acceptable” gender have become so deeply enmeshed within the culture of the corporate workplace, that hegemonic masculinity is often upheld by all branches of the populace: “Japanese fathers’ hegemonic masculine identity has thus not only been maintained by their own commitment to work and the subsequent distancing from their families but also by the manly provider images held by their wives and children”.\textsuperscript{131}

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 204.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 201.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 209.
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., 199.
However, Ishii-Kuntz argues that many *ikujimen* have reasserted their own ideals in a move that reclaims not only their agency but also their sense of masculinity.\textsuperscript{132} Some escaped criticism by demonstrating exceptional productivity without working extra hours, while others earned the respect of their peers by achieving a higher status within the hierarchy of the company.\textsuperscript{133} Such efforts to succeed professionally while still adhering to personal goals has even earned the admiration of their peers not simply because of their bravery in pursuing a childcare role, but rather because they have re-earned the crown of masculinity by proving their dedication to work.\textsuperscript{134} In essence, the *ikujimen* in Ishii-Kuntz’s study use *conventional* markers of masculinity to strategically displace criticism of their unconventionally masculine pursuits.\textsuperscript{135} The conceptual basis of this unexpected and often overlooked form of agency, as well as that of the *sōshokukei danshi*, will be revisited in Chapter 5. Thus, the *sōshokukei danshi* face a double-edged sword; one edge being the pressures to comply with the prescriptive roles of dominant masculinity that are espoused by the environments they live and work in, and the other edge being the idealized and popularized notion of embracing the nouveau life of a family man, as promoted in governmental initiatives.\textsuperscript{136}

**Nationalist Rhetoric and the “De-Japanization” of Youth Culture**

The *sōshokukei danshi* and Japanese youth culture at large are also criticized on the basis of prevailing nationalist rhetoric that equates acceptable masculinity, namely that of the

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., 201.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 209.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 211.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{136} Mathews, “Can a ‘real man’ live for his family?,” 117.
“traditional” patriarchal model, with acceptable “Japaneseness”.

Essentially, definitions of what it means to be a “man” have become inextricably linked with what it means to be “Japanese”, and more specifically, a “Japanese man”. As such, deviance from dominant masculine ideals is tantamount to a “loss of traditional Japanese virtues, the weakening of national (assumed masculine) spirit, or even the decay of the national moral fabric”. Such assumptions become especially pertinent in light of increasing western influence on youth culture in Japan, which Iida argues is a conscientious and selective appropriation of non-Japanese elements in order to create a “different but familiar enough” identity apart from the status quo. Indeed, these young Japanese, and by extension, the sōshokukei danshi, seek to incorporate western practices, whether in their aesthetics or belief systems, as a means of escape and diversification rather than westernization: “The generational rebellion of Japanese youths, moreover, is not only waged in terms of gender, but against the assumed singularity of national, cultural and ethnic identity of being Japanese, or Japaneseness”.

Consequently, nationalist critics, who primarily belong to the older generation, fear the fact that these young members of society are able to create new selves that are not limited to preexisting models within the boundaries of accepted “Japaneseness”. In response to young males who they perceive as “inappropriately feminine”, these critics express “moral condemnation in national voices that see gender blurring as un-Japanese”. Iida, however, asserts that such a pattern reflects more a desire for “de-Japanization” than simple emulation or

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137 Iida, "Beyond the 'feminization of masculinity',” 69.
138 Ibid., 70.
139 Ibid., 66-67.
140 Ibid., 66.
141 Ibid., 67.
142 Ibid., 69.
“westernization”. Miller also cautions against the careless assumption that Japanese merely seek to mimic their western counterparts. Indeed, western images of beauty have played a pivotal role in the aesthetic preferences of the younger generation; however, preferences like hairlessness seem to point to a deeper process of reconditioning rather than duplication. In other words, the supposed “westernization” of Japanese culture, especially youth culture, is by no means a unilateral endeavor or a simple blanketing of the Oriental with the Occidental. Instead, it is crucial to conceptualize western influence in Japan as a process of selective and intentional adoption that underscores the agency of the Japanese in ascribing new meanings to originally western practices: “This is an aesthetic that pulls in ideas from outside Japan for inspiration but also draws on local concepts and proclivities, and is not merely ‘failed Western’ or ‘faux-American’”. Iida concordantly argues that young Japanese are “strategically appealing to the images of foreignness with full awareness of their representational effects”. Thus, in a similar fashion, the “herbivorous” nature of the soshokukei danshi can be seen as an attempt to pull away from the overbearing tower of masculinity rather than an attempt to draw near to femininity; the soshokukei danshi thus fundamentally seek to simply be “un-carnivorous” but in doing so, have risked the label of “herbivorous.”

The “Herbivorous” Aesthetic

Another front on which the soshokukei danshi are often attacked is the use of supposedly feminine beauty practices, the reasons for which have been detailed in the previous chapter. In

143 Ibid., 67.
144 Miller, “Male beauty work”, 51.
145 Ibid.
146 Ibid.
147 Iida, "Beyond the 'feminization of masculinity',” 67.
short, the sōshokukei danshi have adopted a more stylized aesthetic in an effort to dispel any traces of the repulsive oyaji persona and to gain the approval of women.\(^{148}\) As a result, the sōshokukei danshi, and Japanese male youths on the whole, of which the sōshokukei danshi are one subgroup, have received significant backlash from older generations.\(^{149}\) However, Miller argues against the “assumption that ‘beauty’ is defacto ‘feminine’”\(^{150}\), and even points out that from a historical standpoint, cosmetics in Japan had never been a gender-specific commodity.\(^{151}\) One of the most popular reasons for frequenting esute beauty salons among men is hair removal, especially after the late 1980’s when the ruggedly hairy image of western celebrities fell out of favor and both males and females began to prefer a hairless male body type.\(^{152}\) Advertisements by beauty salons prey upon the “Male fear of negative female evaluation of their hairiness” and seek to promote their services by cultivating feelings of shame over excessive body hair.\(^{153}\) More importantly, the ways in which advertisers frame these beauty practices strongly emphasizes the underlying masculine and heterosexual nature of such pursuits.\(^{154}\) The products are often given “names that sound densely technological and masculine” and the designers of the packaging of such merchandise are “careful to indicate that the target audience encompasses the heterosexual male by attaching admiring female commentary or endorsements”.\(^{155}\)

Even so, the older crowd continues to look with derision upon this new trend, calling these hair-conscious young men “tsurutsuru-kun”, a name that mocks the shiny smoothness of

\(^{148}\) Miller, “Male beauty work”, 38.
\(^{149}\) Ibid., 44.
\(^{150}\) Ibid., 52.
\(^{151}\) Ibid., 44.
\(^{152}\) Ibid., 41.
\(^{153}\) Ibid., 42.
\(^{154}\) Ibid., 43.
\(^{155}\) Ibid.
their skin and which implies a degree of desperation in attaining female attention. Some young men, who nonetheless support the traditional and *au naturel* ways, criticize their hairless counterparts not because of a fear of actual feminization or of homosexuality, but rather because they feel that such eagerness to please female preferences is disgraceful: “the hairless man has no pride and has given in to the demands of women and their desires”. Thus, it is the association with weakness and inferiority rather than femininity itself that is most alarming to members of the hegemonic masculinity.

At the core of the “problem” of male beauty work, and by association, of the *sōshokukei danshi* aesthetic, is the notion that it “challenges the ‘naturalness’ of gender stereotypes”.

Indeed, such a desire to change one’s appearance and the ability to do so does not simply indicate a sense of aesthetic freedom or a passing fad, but also contains greater implications for the “malleability of the self”. This is a frightening realization for defenders of the dominant masculinity as themes of “correctness”, “naturalness”, and “immutability” have played a key role in legitimizing their hegemony. Many critics draw upon the seemingly unassailable fortress of “biology” to bolster their claims of males’ inherent superiority. Michiyoshi Hayashi is one such critic who presumes a biological basis of gender and advocates for the preservation of existing and purportedly “natural” gender roles. As such, Hayashi “links the inability to act appropriately in society among Japanese youths with the decline of ‘proper’ gender identities in them”. Because the basis of masculine value in previous generations did not include one’s

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156 Ibid., 44.
157 Ibid.
158 Ibid., 46.
159 Ibid., 49.
160 Iida, "Beyond the 'feminization of masculinity',” 63.
161 Iida, "Beyond the 'feminization of masculinity',” 63.
162 Ibid., 64.
appearance, the pervasiveness of this new arena of masculine identity poses a threat to the existing order of gender hierarchy and an allegedly unadulterated form of masculinity.\footnote{Miller, “Male beauty work”, 37.} The post-WWII generation, having only known hard work and power as the predominant features of masculinity, often interprets practices such as eyebrow shaping to be so far removed from the realm of manhood as to be “indulgent” and wholly inconceivable.\footnote{Ibid., 47.}

**Femininity as Inferior Intruder**

Thus, a discussion of the validity or invalidity of the binaries of feminine versus masculine and male versus female returns us to the concept of the “feminization of masculinity” and the marginalization of “othered” groups like the sôshokukei danshi. Critics of the sôshokukei danshi have used the phrase “feminization of masculinity” or other similar sentiments to imply a sense of inherent irony in the juxtaposition of supposed opposites.\footnote{Ibid., 60.} The use of such coded and gendered language also seeks to accuse males who engage in conventionally feminine practices of a certain quality of the unnatural and the forbidden.\footnote{Ibid.} Indeed, by drawing upon deeply entrenched gender binaries, critics of the “feminization of masculinity” reaffirm the assumed naturalness of patriarchal superiority by “implying the degeneration of the ‘superior’ gender into the ‘inferior’ one”.\footnote{Ibid.} In the case of the sôshokukei danshi, as with other alternative gender groups, “the voluntary abandoning of the ‘superior gender identity’ by young men inevitably puts into question the biological ground of the assumed superiority”.\footnote{Ibid., 69.} Thus, by rejecting the normative behavior of the hegemonic salaryman model and by extension, forfeiting
the power and privileges of participating in the dominant masculinity, the sōshokukei danshi represent a perplexing and counterintuitive existence.

Indeed, it is primarily out of a fear of losing their grip on the dominion they have long held over the female half that members of the dominant Japanese masculinity seek to disparage and contain countercultural young males.\textsuperscript{169} In fact, the expression “feminization of masculinity” stems from “feminization of culture”, which originally referred to the infiltration of women into the previously male-dominated workplace.\textsuperscript{170} Femininity itself comes with prescribed connotations that often serve as a foil for the superiority of masculinity; these connotations serve to confine “women to the lesser half of the binary, i.e. the private (not public), cultural (not political/economic), amoral (against norms) and sexual (not professional)”.\textsuperscript{171} Iida reiterates the broader implications of the masculine-feminine divide as “structurally embedded in modern language and discourse, operating according to the assumed dualism between masculine, rational, authentic, productive, and orderly on the one hand, and feminine, pleasure, inauthentic, consuming, and chaotic, on the other”.\textsuperscript{172} Thus, dominant masculinity seeks to stave off what it sees as its antithesis and a potential source of threat to the integrity and superiority of the masculine half.\textsuperscript{173} The “appropriate” gender roles concordant with a distinct gender binary are often ingrained in the psychological foundations of Japanese children under the terms “otokorashii” (manlike) and “onnarashii” (womanlike), with the “implication that what is deemed appropriate to one sex is by definition inappropriate to the other”.\textsuperscript{174} As such, the tensions surrounding the very notion of the “feminization of masculinity” highlight not only an

\textsuperscript{169} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{170} Ibid., 60.  
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid., 65.  
\textsuperscript{172} Ibid., 68.  
\textsuperscript{173} Ibid., 69.  
\textsuperscript{174} Dasgupta, “Performing Masculinities?,” 194.
attitude of scorn towards the trifling and laughable alleged erroneousness of feminine males, and especially of males who actively choose to engage in feminine practices, but also an underlying element of fear of an uprising of the feminine, which has long been regarded as controlled and inferior. Indeed, femininity is thought to represent what “is not,” as opposed to the masculinity that “is”.

This fear of challenges to the established hierarchy of gender leads to what Iida describes as a “self-destructive” paranoia: “critics may worry that the highly malleable, flexible and ungrounded expressions in contemporary youth identities are manifestations of the subject in crisis”.\textsuperscript{175} The \textit{sōshokukei danshi} have willingly embraced passivity, which had previously been assigned to females, rather than actively chosen. In essence, by declining the “biologically” determined role that they have been favored with, the \textit{sōshokukei danshi} open the door for a myriad of implications for the potential self-determination of gender identity for males as well as females.

Therefore, it is not only the femininity of the \textit{sōshokukei danshi}’s refashioned masculinity that concerns critics, but the very act of refashioning oneself seems to oppose the qualities of “solidness”, “consistency”, and “certainty” that are expected of men.\textsuperscript{176} As Iida explains, “those who strategically gender themselves in the given hegemonic codes with targeted results are often seen as ‘feminine’, in the sense that femininity is a masquerade, the conscious acting out of a role”.\textsuperscript{177} Especially in the arena of beauty, femininity and a feminine aesthetic are seen as devised, calculated, and constructed entities. Even the shaping of eyebrows, by both women and men, can be seen as a “masquerade” in that it is a method of physical differentiation

\textsuperscript{175} Iida, "Beyond the 'feminization of masculinity',” 71.
\textsuperscript{176} Ibid., 63.
\textsuperscript{177} Ibid.
and produces a “gendered look”. Men, however, often seem to be expected to represent an aesthetically indifferent and organic existence. On the contrary, the sōshokukei danshi generation was heavily influenced by the cultural climate of the 90s, which included a “capitalist economy centring on image creations”, and young Japanese were “encouraged to modify and recreate their identities”. Thus, the sōshokukei danshi come under fire not simply because of their engagement in conventionally feminine practices, but also because in doing so, the supposedly superior and unadulterated character of masculinity and their biologically given maleness is thereby undermined, and perhaps “doubly” made feminine, by the alleged variability and inconsistency latent in the reconstruction of prescribed gender roles. Indeed, the “feminization of masculinity” encompasses a rejection of the supposedly lesser female half both in the way that non-dominant masculinities often incorporate, or have been “polluted” by, elements of the feminine and also in the flexibility of the masculine identity that they assume in doing so.

A Scripted Performance

In effect, however, all gender – hegemonic, marginalized, masculine, or feminine – is a form of performance. Even some participants of the dominant salaryman model of masculinity, though engaged in the lifestyle of the “ideal” salaryman, remain sceptical and admit to a feeling of “resignation” to the role they have been afforded, as well as “a recognition for the need for correct performance”. The theory of gender performativity was first established by Judith Butler in 1990 and essentially argues that gender is a social construct that is created and

178 Miller, “Male beauty work”, 46.
179 Iida, ”Beyond the 'feminization of masculinity',” 59.
180 Dasgupta, “Performing Masculinities?,” 200.
reinforced through the specific ways in which individuals “perform” gender according to accepted norms.\textsuperscript{181} Dasgupta defines performativity as “the process whereby identity is created and constructed through certain repetitive enactments (‘performances’) such as rituals and ceremonies”.\textsuperscript{182} The performance of dominant models of masculinity, especially within the workplace, is encouraged through highly regimented new employee training programs, which, in a country where immediate full-time employment is expected of all students who have just graduated from college, heavily emphasize the transition from a carefree student lifestyle to that of a responsible adult member of society.\textsuperscript{183} There is also a strong undercurrent of performativity in the salaryman ideal, which often manifests itself in the form of “loud and repeated greetings, instructions on how to bow to the correct level, how to exchange business cards, how to respond to a superior’s beckoning”.\textsuperscript{184} Subsequently, the refusal of the \soshokukei danshi to subscribe to these models of “correct” performance is perceived as a significant threat to the supposed legitimacy of the dominant masculinity. Furthermore, by viewing the salaryman through such a lens, the very same fabrication of a gendered “masquerade” that is so often used to the discredit of unconventional forms of masculinity, like that of the \soshokukei danshi, seems to go relatively, and perhaps strategically, unnoticed by members of the dominant masculinity.

Furthermore, Dasgupta argues that the rigidity and forced homogeneity of the salaryman ideal exposes, ironically, the fragility and desperation of proponents of the dominant masculinity to hold together the crumbling pieces of the stale gender roles they autocratically attempt to maintain: “Yet the very fact that such aggressively idealized portrayals are necessary – this

\textsuperscript{182} Dasgupta, “Performing Masculinities?,” 190.
\textsuperscript{183} Ibid., 195.
\textsuperscript{184} Ibid., 196.
necessity to *instruct* correct performance – serves to highlight the instability of the seemingly all-powerful and pervasive dominant discourse*. Dasgupta’s argument mirrors that of Iida, which, as previously discussed, similarly points to the ineffectuality and indeed, detriment that the dominant masculinity inflicts upon itself through a policy of intolerance and anxiety. This then leads to the question: although many have voiced active criticism of the *sōshokukei danshi*, to what degree do these feelings of disgust and contempt actually stem from perceived inadequacies in oneself? Perhaps the true venom of critics of the *sōshokukei danshi* arises from the lingering insecurity that inevitably arises from struggling to navigate a society that is so quick to criticize, which leads to a hushed sense of desperation to claim ownership of a share in the hegemony’s stock.

Thus, in many ways, the salaryman ideal is an ideal that is unattainable and one that even participants in the dominant masculinity strive to emulate: “Indulging in heavy drinks and intimate discussions and joking about themselves as heroic victims with other men seemed to be a process in which they validated and confirmed each other’s salary-man manhood”. Therefore, it is crucial to an understanding of the critics of the *sōshokukei danshi* that one is also aware of the underlying forces of tension that fuel the fires of their opprobrium. Ishii-Kuntz states that “a man needs constantly to construct a masculine image that will be accepted by others”. Indeed, even those who identify as a salaryman at the very core of their being cannot claim full achievement of the masculine ideal. The fundamental nature of a masculine ideal or masculine model, such as that of the salaryman and dominant Japanese masculinity in general, includes the *impossibility* of existing completely within the bounds of such a closely guarded

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185 Ibid., 199.
image. The goal they strive for is an *ideal*, and therefore, intrinsically elusive, if not wholly unattainable. Although adherents to the salaryman model of masculinity, especially those of the older generations, are often referred to as belonging to the “dominant” or “hegemonic” masculinity, it is only because they seek to replicate in themselves, to the furthest extent possible, the idolized paragons of masculinity that do not, and never have, existed in the flesh.

The masculinity these men live out is not dominant masculinity itself, but rather the product and evidence of buying into the collectively imagined masculine ideal and the “false consciousness” that Mathews speaks of.\(^{188}\) Mathews argues that this “false consciousness” feeds into the idea that “a man who sacrifices himself for his company is like a cowboy, we are told, truly a manly man”.\(^{189}\) Thus, the members of the dominant masculinity, whether they choose to acknowledge it or not, are all, without exception, merely chasing the same *shadows* of power, hegemony, financial security, control over family, acceptance into a brotherhood of corporate culture, and above all, the exalted existence of a “successful” Japanese man.

In the end, the criticism that the *sôshokukei danshi* often face from conventionally masculine males of the older generations produces an effect that is two-fold: “the description of young Japanese men’s search for different masculine identities in terms of the ‘feminization of masculinity’ imposes a patriarchal perspective that simultaneously demoralizes men’s efforts and devalues femininity, while reinforcing the clarity of the binary opposition of the modern phallocentric economy”.\(^{190}\) Thus, the denunciation of the “feminized masculinity” of the *sôshokukei danshi* effectively passes negative judgment on both *sôshokukei danshi* masculinity and female femininity as a whole.

\(^{188}\) Mathews, “Can a ‘real man’ live for his family?,” 111.  
\(^{189}\) Ibid.  
\(^{190}\) Iida, "Beyond the 'feminization of masculinity'," 68.
The Role of Language

As seen with the phrase “feminization of masculinity”, the role of language in the “othering” of the sôshokukei danshi is more profound than can be perceived at first glance. Iida speaks to the significance of language in naming deviant “challengers” to the norm and argues that the external affixation of a name reinforces the dominant hegemonic male gaze that seeks to suppress and belittle those who appear to subvert the status quo.\(^{191}\) Subsequently, with the repetitive use of such a name, the legitimacy of the naming practice and the sentiment of appraisal and implied deeper meanings become firmly embedded in the social conditioning of a people. The internalization of a name is gradually secured with each use, each mention, each vocalization, and each inscription of the name. As Iida argues, naming is a strategy used to pigeonhole and “morally condemn” a particular social group.\(^{192}\) On the other hand, naming also implies that what does not require a name is acceptable, standard, and expected.

The term “sôshokukei danshi” was first coined in 2006 by columnist Maki Fukasawa and has continued to gain popularity since.\(^{193}\) Her reasons behind the use of animalistic “herbivorous” versus “carnivorous” language stemmed from what she saw as a lack of aggression and carnal desire in these young men.\(^{194}\) As with the “feminization of masculinity”, the label “sôshokukei danshi” is the vehicle by which the gaze of the majority is able to “other” a non-dominant group and confer a specific identity onto them. Furthermore, language, naming, and categorization are fundamentally intertwined with the socially constructed nature of gender. In the case of the sôshokukei danshi, those belonging to the hegemonic masculinity, as well as participatory agents of social conditioning, particularly in certain areas of popular media, have

\(^{191}\) Ibid.  
\(^{192}\) Ibid.  
\(^{193}\) Fukasawa, 「U35 男子マーケティング図鑑：第 5 回 草食男子」.  
\(^{194}\) Ibid.
reinforced a rigid binary of “men” and “women”, “normal” and “abnormal”, “nikushokukei danshi” (carnivorous men) and “sōshokukei danshi”, and “self” and “other”. The establishment and perpetuation of such binaries has led to the scrupulous “othering” of non-dominant groups like the sōshokukei danshi. The act of externally ascribing a particular name to this specific group of males is an extremely powerful means of perpetually branding what has been given a name as *not* part of the self, and therefore, not correct. What is “correct” is rarely given a name, much less a name that would serve to isolate and pass judgment on its existence. Thus, the significance of the sōshokukei danshi category extends far beyond the simple desire to articulate who these men are, though there is certainly that intention wrapped into the bigger picture.

Therefore, the sōshokukei danshi represent not only a specific existence, but also a judged existence.

Backed by the desperation of the dominant masculinity to retain hegemony, the branding of other groups with terms such as “herbivorous” or “feminized” is a method of vocalizing criticism under the guise of classification and categorization for the sake of conversational or sociological convenience and practicality. The efficacy of such a subtle and widespread coping mechanism hinges on the assumption that language is intangible and therefore inconsequential, despite the very real and usually negative effects that it has on its intended targets. Then, as we have seen with various other terms, such as “ikujimen”, “tsurutsuru-kun”, or even the caricature of the “oyaji”, the term “sōshokukei danshi” serves as a strategy for those who observe these “other” masculinities to rationalize and explain away the behaviors of these groups and to draw boundaries between mainstream status quo culture and what they perceive to be deviant exceptions to the norm. Thus, although the popularization of the sōshokukei danshi as a topic of public discourse would seem to indicate a trend towards greater freedom of expression and
gender identity formation, the tendency for self-professed members of the dominant culture to
categorize and affix definitions to others indicates instead the promotion and perpetuation of
existent gender norms by demarcating sectors of society that are implicitly, and now explicitly,
understood to be set apart from what is normal and accepted. In doing so, the critics of the
sōshokukei danshi simultaneously attempt to reinforce the boundaries of the dominant
masculinity, which they falsely believe are stable and fixed.

To Divide and Quarantine

Recalling that the primary fear of hegemonic masculinity is of the intrusion or defilement
of the stronghold of masculinity by femininity, older generation critics’ reactions to feminine
males like the sōshokukei danshi can be viewed as remarkably similar to the common societal
reaction to any physical illness or infection: to remove and indeed, to quarantine. Iida, however,
contends that such a response, though thoroughly preservationist in theory and intention, actually
causes more harm than good: “the cultural hegemony of contemporary Japan could better sustain
itself by incorporating non-hegemonic gender identities, which would allow it [to] maintain an
open space for critical imagination and effectively diffuse an obsessive and ultimately self-
destructive desire for transparency/identity”. Iida points to femininity as the ultimate “other”,
which allows for the conservation of masculine hegemony by its exclusion, but because the
critics of these perceivably “feminized” young men seek to remove deviant groups from body of
masculinity, they create a “secondary crisis” that is, in fact, counterproductive to their goals of
maintaining control over the gender hierarchy: “the anxiety generated in the hegemonic subject
internalizes fracture in masculinity itself, as well as shifts the ground of contestation and struggle

195 Iida, "Beyond the 'feminization of masculinity',” 56.
from gender to generation”. Thus, while explicit criticism of the sôshoku-kei danshi does effectively “other” and marginalize the “herbivorous” model of masculinity and its participants, such an approach simultaneously undermines the cohesiveness of Japanese masculinities as a whole. Iida’s counsel to critics of deviant masculinity is then to reevaluate the groups they seek to cut off and embrace them an element of palliation: “what the patriarchal perspective understands as causes of instability, ‘the feminine’, is the very source of relief for the patriarchal elite national subject, in the sense that the former mitigates the latter’s obsessive pursuit for identity”. Iida further asserts that “the practice of gender ambiguities can have a neutralizing effect and therefore, actually be conducive to the healthy regeneration of social hegemony”. As such, the criticism that the sôshoku-kei danshi face works against all three parties involved: men of the dominant masculinity, the sôshoku-kei danshi, and conventional femininity.

Thus, the older generation critics of the sôshoku-kei danshi, particularly those who subscribe to the paradigms of the dominant masculinity, wage their attack on the “herbivorous” men in terms of a wide array of deficiencies that they see as being irreconcilable with conventional Japanese masculinity and Japanese national identity. These include the sôshoku-kei danshi’s stylized appearance, their incorporation of non-Japanese elements, and their familial relations. However, as we have seen, their opprobrium stems from a fear of losing power and control over the supposedly inferior feminine sphere. In addition, the variability and flexibility that the sôshoku-kei danshi allow in the reconstitution of their masculinity appears to oppose the assumed transparency and unambiguity of the masculine ideal, which produces further censure and debate. The next chapter will examine the opinions that are voiced by the sôshoku-kei danshi.

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196 Ibid., 69.
197 Ibid., 70.
198 Ibid.
danshi’s peers from a perspective that is perhaps more informal, nonprofessional, and spread across both male and female contributors.
Chapter 4

Peer Critics of the Sōshokukei Danshi

In the previous chapter, I examined the attitudes and motivations of the critics of the sōshokukei danshi who are of the older generation and who cling to the conventional and hegemonic salaryman model of masculinity. Their criticism stemmed primarily from a desire to maintain a position of superiority over the feminine half of the presumed gender binary, and to suppress elements of other masculinities that could be perceived as a threat to said superiority. Theirs is a way of upholding the tradition and supposed immutability of the past through a doctrinal lens. Members of the younger generations and more specifically, the peers of the sōshokukei danshi, who generally fall between the ages of 15 and 40, approach the alleged passivity and “inept” masculinity, per se, of the sōshokukei danshi from a stance of ridicule and satire. Whereas the criticism of the sōshokukei danshi by older generations is often a male-dominated forum, the views voiced by the “peer generation” are spread more evenly across both male and female participants from a wide array of socioeconomic backgrounds. This peer generation seems significantly less focused on themes such as the declining birthrate, nationalism, or work ethic, and seems to respond to the sōshokukei danshi from a predominantly social perspective that is shaped by the popular discourse.

As such, the following portion of my research relies more heavily on primary sources, such as contemporary popular media and online social media, to interpret the nebulous and multifaceted assortment of critical viewpoints that the sōshokukei danshi face from their peers.
Thus, an equally important component of the sôshokukei danshi phenomenon is the web of conversations and jumbled feelings of concern, intrigue, and humor that are driven not by academic figures but rather by everyday commentators. These primary sources will also provide valuable insight into the various representations and depictions of the sôshokukei danshi at play in contemporary Japanese society. However, as previously stated, in no way should it be assumed that the dominant masculinity in Japan is fully static or as invariable as many older generation males hope it to be. A description of the critics of the peer generation as more diverse simply serves to indicate that, in contrast with the younger generation, the older generation’s participation is more uniformly driven by an overarching salaryman lineage and doctrinaire views on the specific masculinity that they have experienced.

**Kaisha seikatsu no tomo: The Legacy of the Older Generation Salaryman**

The website *Kaisha seikatsu no tomo* (Friend of Company Life) is an online resource for corporate employees, namely salarymen and “Office Ladies” (OL), who act in a similar capacity to receptionists, as well as the wives of salarymen, who are termed “misesu” from “Mrs.” The site provides various articles and survey results that may be of interest to those working in a Japanese company, though the main purpose of the website seems to be as a forum-style outlet for the frustrations, dreams, and thoughts of participants in the corporate lifestyle. The topics are listed by “Work Talk”, “Corporate Lifestyle Talk”, “Life Talk”, and “World Talk”, as well as “OL”, “Male”, and “Mrs” categories, with the most diverse range of topics dedicated to the OL’s, which include gossip, popular television shows, food, cosmetics, and listings for group dates.

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200 Ibid.
201 Ibid.
The “Male” category consists of three topics: “Yesterday’s sports”, “Murmurings of Salarymen”, and “Listen! Anger of Salarymen”. There are also general topics that allow users to post their dream jobs and upload videos that show users how to do “Office Yoga” in their desk chairs.

This website offers a glimpse into the corporate lifestyle that the sōshokukei danshi simultaneously participate in and seek to distance themselves from. To clarify, the term “salaryman” is primarily a job description, though the salaryman image and culture has come to encompass a much wider scope of meanings. Therefore, it is often the case that many sōshokukei danshi work as salarymen, though they do not subscribe to the dominant model of masculinity often performed by their peers in the context of the workplace. In Kaisha seikatsu no tomo, the culture of the Japanese corporate workplace and the various issues that corporate employees face are presented in a fairly raw and unedited form that is markedly different from secondary or tertiary sources. It is also interesting to note that the format of the website guides users into certain categories, topics of interest, and resources that are assumed to be useful or relevant to office workers. Thus, the deliberate structure of the website belies certain characteristics of the institutional and ideological frameworks that the website and its users inhabit and subsequently seek to negotiate. Institutionally, the corporate lifestyle includes a system of hierarchy based on prescriptive roles, the use of honorary titles, and strictly regulated hiring and retirement practices. Ideologically, a fastidious work ethic, unwavering loyalty to one’s company, and the relatively homogeneous performance of work-centered identities, are reflected and lived out in the daily experiences of members of Japanese corporate culture.

Although the peer generation may engage with websites that seem to be aimed at allowing more freedom of expression, like Kaisha seikatsu no tomo, or KST, as it is often

202 Ibid.
203 Ibid.
shortened to, members of the peer generation also maintain, at least on a foundational level, firmly rooted gender roles, such as those of the OL and salaryman. Interestingly, the terms “Office Lady” and “Salaryman” are both highly conspicuous in the gendered nature of their work. These titles even go so far as to include the words “lady” and “man”, and thus create a language-based psychological framework that makes the mere idea of a female salaryman or a male OL seem jarringly inconceivable. It is also important to note that the work of an OL is often limited to secretarial duties and assisting male coworkers, which often includes the conventionally feminine role of providing tea to her usually male superiors.

Therefore, although *KST* does not seem to be used for explicit criticism of deviant groups such as the *sōshokukei danshi* or even for the discussion of gender, it is relevant to an exploration of the *sōshokukei danshi*’s peers in that the content of *KST* is generated by current participants in the corporate workplace and offers a look into the institutional and cultural legacy that has been left by the older generation. The themes and accepted norms of corporate lifestyle that the website plays upon represent the quieter and subtler pressures placed on the *sōshokukei danshi* to conform to a specific model. Through brightly colored animations and the informal discussion thread format, the world that the website depicts seems unthreatening and benevolent. Indeed, *KST* almost appears to convey a sense of enlightenment from the constrictive and workaholic times of the past. However, beneath the glossy surface of *KST*, there endures a subdued awareness of the status quo.

The domineering older generation salarymen may be less visible or less prevalent in the current workforce, but they have succeeded in establishing an undercurrent of conformity that has carried over into contemporary Japanese corporate culture. For example, the animated

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204 Ibid.
graphics on the website depicts two OL’s, an *oyaji* salaryman, and a younger salaryman. The older salaryman is balding with a “comb over” hairstyle and wipes his brow with a small handkerchief, which examples the turning of the image of the older generation salaryman into a stigmatized caricature of the *oyaji*, heroes a bygone era. Each of the cartoon figures spouts tiny speech bubbles, which reflect the character that each is assumed to embody. One OL says, “Where should I go for lunch?”, which seems to trivialize the daily work of an OL and imply that she has the time to ponder her lunch options while her male counterparts are hard at work. The other OL turns and asks, “Will somebody pick up the phone?”, to which there is no response, and the animated figure eventually answers the call herself. On another page, an OL is shown to be watering a potted plant. These characterizations seem to indicate that the role that the OL is expected to play in the workplace is reduced to “feminine” tasks that are too unimportant to be handled by her male coworkers. The younger salaryman, on the other hand, is shown with a wide smile on his face, and even when the thought “I’m starving” flashes above his head, his frowning expression quickly reverts back to the same grin. The depiction of this character is perhaps most significant in terms of a discussion of the *sôshokukei* danshi, as the younger salaryman’s apparent cheerfulness and dedication to his work over his bodily needs belies an assumption that the ideal salaryman is ultimately satisfied, even pleased with his salaryman identity and position in the corporate structure. It is to this model of happiness in work and loyalty to company that the *sôshokukei* danshi are compared and evaluated, and to which they are often expected to conform.

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205 Ibid.  
206 Ibid.  
207 Ibid.  
208 Ibid.  
209 Ibid.  
210 Ibid.
Members of KST or other such domains may not criticize “feminized” masculinity or the sōshokukei danshi in the same way that older generations of males might; however, they also complacently perpetuate the comfortable, though perhaps reformed normalcy of the standard corporate environment, which, as is almost tacitly understood, the sōshokukei danshi must participate in and ultimately yield to. As one of Ishii-Kuntz’s interviewees states, “If one acts differently, there is a negative sanction”.\textsuperscript{211} Likewise, the KST website is touted as a “community site for the sake of company employees”; however, implied in this mission is the idea that corporate identity is a communal identity.\textsuperscript{212} There is a sense of commonness both as workers and as people. The implied singularity of the corporate community underscores the assumed, though largely inaccurate, homogeneity of its members. As demonstrated in KST, the simultaneously shifting yet sustained corporate culture of the peer generation serves as an often underestimated vehicle, if not of explicit criticism, then of implicit curtailment.

\textit{Otomen: Criticism in Humor and Satire}

Another instrument of implied disapproval is found in the arena of popular media, of which I will focus on the use of humor in the hit television show, \textit{Otomen}.\textsuperscript{213} In the 2009 television drama series, which is based on the 2006 manga comic series of the same name by Aya Kanno (b. 1980), the protagonist, Asuka Masamune, is a popular and “manly” high school student and kendo martial arts team captain.\textsuperscript{214} However, Asuka also secretly enjoys

\textsuperscript{211} Ishii-Kuntz, “Balancing fatherhood and work,” 209.
\textsuperscript{212} 「会社生活の友」.
\textsuperscript{213} 『オトメン（乙男）』, dir. Masaki Tanimura, based on original series by Aya Kanno, (Fuji TV, 2009).
\textsuperscript{214} Ibid.
conventionally feminine hobbies such as sewing, cooking, and reading young girl’s fiction. After his father leaves the family “to become a woman” and a transgender author, Asuka’s mother pressures him to be as masculine as possible to avoid following in his father’s footsteps. Asuka meets Ryo Miyakozuka, a pure-hearted girl who was raised by a single father and trained in conventionally masculine activities such as martial arts but never in “appropriately feminine” pursuits. The plot revolves around the distinctly unorthodox gender roles that Asuka and Ryo depict, as well as their seemingly complementary natures, which remain grounded in stereotypical gender binaries.

It is also critical to note that Asuka, while in many ways, may be a fitting example of an “herbivorous” male, he is never explicitly referred to as a sōshokukei danshi. However, this might be due to the fact that the term “sōshokukei danshi” most likely had not become popularized until slightly after the original Otomen print series had been published. As such, it is possible to analyze the portrayal of Asuka’s unconventional masculinity with the recognition that the identity of an “otomen”, or a “lady-like man”, has many overlaps with that of the sōshokukei danshi, though they are not necessarily interchangeable.

Because a full analysis of the twelve-episode series would be far beyond the scope of my research, I will limit my survey of the show’s significance to the way that it utilizes humor to simultaneously embrace and parody the marginalized masculinity that writers perceive and viewers consume. As opposed to other examples of popular media that pertain to masculinity and gender, Otomen presents a unique premise in that both hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities are embodied within a singular protagonist. This is similar to the non-dominant

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215 Ibid.
216 Ibid.
217 Ibid.
218 Ibid.
masculinity of the sôshokukei danshi in that the sôshokukei danshi often concurrently participate in both arenas of commonly conceived masculinity and femininity. However, the overwhelmingly comical tone of the Otomen series serves to represent Asuka and Ryo’s alternative gender roles in an unthreatening and joking fashion, which undercuts most if not all elements that could be interpreted as advocating for more flexible interpretations of masculinity and femininity.

Indeed, the humorous portrayal of a feminine male protagonist seems to rely heavily on the tensions caused by his seemingly discordant inner and outer identities. In the series, this struggle takes a form that implies less of an internal personal crisis and more of a haphazard attempt to hide his feminine preferences from the judging eyes of his peers and mother.\(^\text{219}\) Throughout the series, Asuka’s “feminine” hobbies are never shown to be an extension of his masculinity so much as a temporary deviation from his masculine persona.\(^\text{220}\) For example, upon finding the house empty one afternoon, Asuka begins to sew adorable stuffed animals with a hidden stash of sewing materials, but the unexpected return of his mother sends him into a panic as he frantically attempts to hide his work.\(^\text{221}\) In another scene, Asuka’s romance comic book is discovered by some teammates, and he follows their censure of such an “unmanly” book being found in their practice hall, pretending to have no connection to the book.\(^\text{222}\) When Asuka decides to teach Ryo how to cook, the finished product is clumsily accredited to Ryo so as to assuage his mother’s fears of Asuka having any engagement with conventionally feminine activities.\(^\text{223}\) Indeed, his mother’s paranoia leads to a number of scenes depicting Asuka’s

\(^{219}\) Ibid.
\(^{220}\) Ibid.
\(^{221}\) Ibid.
\(^{222}\) Ibid.
\(^{223}\) Ibid.
attempts to hide his femininity and thus evade suspicion of becoming like his transgender father.\textsuperscript{224} This tension appears to be related to the idea that gender is somehow biologically innate, while implying that deviant behavior in one’s gender role can be genetically inherited. In fact, when Asuka’s mother faints after his father’s confession of “always having wanted to be a woman”, she is shown lying on a gurney, gripping young Asuka’s hand and begging him to swear that he will become “manly”, while a doctor exaggeratedly readies a defibrillator.\textsuperscript{225} The message here seems to say, humorously of course, that deviant masculinity is at once “a laughing matter”, as revealed by the exaggerated campiness of the scene, and yet a thoroughly grave affair, because, evidently, such behavior could send your mother to the hospital.

Thus, the pervading sense of disconnect between the feminine and the masculine in Asuka’s character seems to serve as the springboard for lighthearted humor, as well as other plot elements, such as his timidity and unwillingness to pursue a romantic relationship with Ryo and his careful dodging of seemingly calculated traps set out by his mother to test his masculinity.\textsuperscript{226} In \textit{Otomen}, the norms of dominant masculinity are enforced by Asuka’s mother, rather than by a paternal figure, as is often the case with the \textit{sōshokukei danshi}.\textsuperscript{227} However, the early exit of Asuka’s father from their home seems uncannily reminiscent of the absenteeism of many fathers of the \textit{sōshokukei danshi} during their childhoods in the 90s. Whether Asuka’s affinity for traditionally feminine pursuits stems from his upbringing with a single mother or from his father’s own gender deviance is largely unaddressed.\textsuperscript{228} However, because Asuka is shown in flashbacks to have been a seemingly effeminate child, the series seems to imply that his

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{224} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{225} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{226} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{227} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{228} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
“feminine side” is innate, perhaps even genetic. As a high school student, it can be assumed that this “gene” in Asuka has been curbed by the instruction of his mother and peers to hide his “true” self under a guise of ideal masculinity. Much like the stigmatized oyaji, Asuka’s character, as well as unconventional masculinity at large, is made into a caricature that, in the end, seeks to criticize and create amusement out of an overture of supposed unnaturalness. A broad motif in the series, Asuka’s fumbles and near misses in evading the exposure of his “otomen” nature becomes comparable to an obstacle course of gender that derives comedic entertainment from the various hoops, mud ponds, and moving platforms that he must traverse.

Additionally, the title of the series is a play on words that combines “otome” (乙女), meaning “young girl” and the English word “men”, while the character for “male” replaces the “female” character in “Otomen” (乙男). This use of gendered and manipulated wording reaffirms the important role that language and naming play in the crystallization of boundaries between the “self” and “other”. The juxtaposition of the masculine and the feminine in the title of the show is most likely intended to produce a farcical and oxymoronic effect, though it harkens back to the deeper connotations embedded within other such turns of phrase, like Iida’s “feminization of masculinity”.

Finally, the show seems to appeal primarily to a younger audience, especially because the characters are all high school students and because the show relies primarily on campy humor. Kanno, the original author of the series is also of the same general age group as the sôshokukei danshi, though her work seems to satirize the sôshokukei danshi existence, which once again emphasizes the diverse array of viewpoints that the peer generation represents. Thus, it is it

229 Ibid.
230 Ibid.
231 Iida, "Beyond the 'feminization of masculinity','" 56.
232『オトメン(乙男)』.
through the intended humor of the series that subtle, barely visible criticism and mimicry is made popular in public discourses, especially among the peers of the sôshokukei danshi.

**Twitter: Tweeting About the Sôshokukei Danshi**

Explicitly vocalized criticism by the peer generation, especially when posing the sôshokukei danshi in a negative light, is often conveyed anonymously or via media outlets that seem to offer an element of separation from the reality that they seek to evaluate. One such medium is the popular social media website, Twitter. Because Twitter is such a widely utilized form of social media in Japan, “tweets” provide valuable insight into a microcosm of the diverse perceptions of the sôshokukei danshi that are at play within the larger arena of young Japanese society. Thus, by searching for postings that contain the phrase “sôshokukei danshi”, I was able to collect a variety of examples of anonymously projected criticism, ridicule, and confusion related to the sôshokukei danshi. The primary limitation of using a source like Twitter is that the pool of Twitter users in Japan consists mostly of individuals who are relatively young and/or technologically savvy, which, in actuality, lends itself well to an examination of the opinions of the peer generation. Indeed, the use of social media, like the emergence of the sôshokukei danshi, is a fairly recent development, and I would argue that Twitter is the most suitable social media platform for examining the sôshokukei danshi because of its popularity in Japan as well as the short, 140 character “tweet” format that produces quick, pithy statements that can be submitted with relatively low risk to social reputation or identity exposure. As such, Twitter provides the ideal conditions for collecting the freely expressed perspectives of the sôshokukei danshi’s peers. Anonymous and proclamatory, Twitter is a greenhouse of thought and dialogue.
I found that while many use Twitter as a means of voicing both joking and serious criticisms of the sóshokukei danshi, some Twitter users are also self-professed sóshokukei danshi who use the site and title of sóshokukei danshi as a reclaimed avenue of self-expression or tool for achieving certain ends. However, the tweets of such self-proclaimed sóshokukei danshi, particularly as a means of agency, will be discussed further in the following chapter. A significant portion, however, of the tweets related to the sóshokukei danshi expressed criticism and derision. One such tweet by a male user on 11/29/11 at 3:25 PM stated, “What’s so good about the sóshokukei danshi? Even a greasy, gross otaku is still better”. The term “otaku” refers to the fervent, often male enthusiasts of various hobbies, including manga comics and anime television series, who are generally stigmatized in the same way that the English words “loser”, “geek”, and “nerd” are. Thus, the label “sóshokukei danshi” is contextualized alongside other derogatory terms like “otaku” and as a result, becomes placed at the very bottom of a ranking system of named categories. Thus, because the language of “better” or “worse” comes into play, the “sóshokukei danshi”, as a term and as a social group, becomes pigeonholed as a devalued member within the lowest ranks of a hierarchy of both language and masculinity. Indeed, the marginalization of one form of masculinity is routinely qualified relative to the marginalization of another.

One female Twitter user posted on 11/29/11 at 1:44 PM, “As expected, I dislike the sóshokukei danshi both mentally and appearance-wise… I like the aggressive, ‘carnivorous’ type of person”. Thus, the criticism of the sóshokukei danshi by their female peers is often vocalized as an evaluation of the sóshokukei danshi as potential romantic partners. It is then a

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233 @soutarou77, Twitter post, November 29, 2011, 3:25 p.m., https://twitter.com/#!/soutarou77.
234 @BANAVICH, Twitter post, November 29, 2011, 1:44 p.m., https://twitter.com/#!/BANAVICH.
heterosexual gaze that informs their appraisals of the sôshokukei danshi and which denounces
the “herbivorous” type as unfavorable. Another tweet by a female Twitter user on 11/29/11 at
2:21 PM proclaimed, “But Uchishiba Masato is really cool and attractive! Can’t believe [his]
sexual harassment [scandal]!! But [he is] cool l(‘o’) [He is] totally better than the so called
sôshokukei danshi!!” 235 Uchishiba Masato, a two-time gold medal Olympian in Judo, coached
the women’s Judo team at Kyushu University of Nursing and Social Welfare and was accused of
sexual harassment in November of 2011. 236 Thus, implied within this statement is the sense that
“masculine” sexuality, physical attractiveness, and athletic prowess are appealing qualities to
women, even if those carnal desires are taken to an (illegal) extreme. Indeed, it is assumed that,
romantically, one would prefer a sexual offender to a sôshokukei danshi.

Other instances of criticism focus on the supposed weakness and inadequacy of the
sôshokukei danshi. One female user claimed at 4:54 AM on 3/22/12, “The ones who are
deceived by a woman’s tears are always sôshokukei danshi”. 237 This seems to suggest that the
woman who posted this tweet has either experienced or witnessed the credulousness of the
sôshokukei danshi and the ease with which they are deceived. Thus, the sôshokukei danshi are
also portrayed in a position of weakness and lacking power. Furthermore, by making the
distinction that the tears that “deceive” the sôshokukei danshi are specifically a woman’s tears,
this tweet works off of the assumed gender binary and idea of male superiority and aims to pose
the sôshokukei danshi in an emasculating light. Thus, this case becomes even more intriguing
because the speaker is female and seems to acknowledge the conventionally inferior status
afforded to the feminine sphere in Japan, yet seeks to place herself, and indeed, the female half

235 @aayakaa06, Twitter post, November 29, 2011, 2:21 p.m., https://twitter.com/#!/aayakaa06.
236 「柔道五輪金、内柴氏にセクハラ疑惑」, Sanspo.com, November 9, 2011, accessed April
237 @pointgetmpc, Twitter post, March 22, 2012, 4:54 a.m., https://twitter.com/#!/pointgetmpc.
of the presumed gender binary, above marginalized “herbivorous” masculinity. In aligning herself with the dominant masculinity that also intends to condemn the “othered” sōshokukei danshi, she arguably succeeds in gaining, temporarily, a taste of the privilege and authority of the hegemony.

The insults of young males who subscribe to the dominant model of masculinity, specifically in regards to power and sexuality, are equally biting in tone. A tweet on 3/21/12 at 11:43 PM by a male Twitter user states, “The sōshokukei danshi is a castrated male dog”.238 Again, this sentiment points to the emasculated weakness that is often projected onto the image of the sōshokukei danshi, as in the previous tweet. It is also reminiscent of the tweet that prefers sexual harassment by Uchishiba Masato to the lack of sexuality, or perhaps “neutered” sexuality, assumed to be central in sōshokukei danshi masculinity. Thus, by attaching an impression of deficiency and incapacitation to the sōshokukei danshi, some young males who identify with “normative” masculinity strive to affirm and give a semblance of legitimacy to their own sense of belonging and manhood. As Nemoto says, they are “marking the boundaries between themselves and marginalized Japanese men”.239 In addition, the corporate sphere, in which both subscribers to and deviants from dominant Japanese masculinity participate, upholds a culture of power struggle: “the corporate environment in Japan is, further, dominated by competition, with those who rise above others perceived as the most prestigious”.240

One tweet on 3/22/12 at 7:22 AM shared a link to a website called 「草食系男子のための付き合い方マニュアル」 or “A Dating Manual for Sōshokukei Danshi”.241 The posting of this website seems to imply a commonly accepted notion that the sōshokukei danshi are

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238 @teeda76, Twitter post, March 21, 2012, 11:43 p.m., https://twitter.com/#!/teeda76.
241 @kkdiry, Twitter post, March 22, 2012, 7:22 a.m., https://twitter.com/#!/kkdiry.
somehow inept at initiating romantic relationships, and therefore require assistance. The website itself advertises a “manual” that sōshokukei danshi can purchase, which will provide them with love advice and enable them to navigate their difficulties in dating.242 The subheading on the website appears to be directed at sōshokukei danshi who visit the site and poses the question, “[Saying] things like ‘Romance is a bother’ is really just a lie, isn’t it?”243 Indeed, this website seems to not only suggest that the sōshokukei danshi are inherently romantically inept, but also insinuates that the sōshokukei danshi are, or perhaps should be, ashamed of this incompetency and thus, must resort to lying. It seeks to expose the incorrectness and impossibility of a man actually feeling dispassionate towards dating relationships. By assuming that the sōshokukei danshi identity as romantically passive is based on a fabricated cover, this website conveys the impression that sōshokukei danshi masculinity, and also deviant masculinity, is dishonest and invented. These sentiments are similar to Iida’s argument, as discussed in Chapter 3, that femininity is associated with a “masquerade” and that the variability that the sōshokukei danshi seem to embody is often interpreted as oppositional to the “consistency” and “certainty” of “correct” masculinity.244

Still yet, some men tweet about their interactions with and reactions to the term “sōshokukei danshi” and other such loaded gendered language. For example, a tweet posted by a male user on 3/22/12 at 2:06 PM confesses, “I really am a sōshokukei danshi. (-_-;) When I told my younger sister, ‘I am carnivorous,’ I was told ‘There’s no way!’”.245 Another male tweeted on 3/23/12 at 5:33 PM that after being told that he “is a sōshokukei danshi in all kinds of ways”,

243 Ibid.
244 Iida, ”Beyond the 'feminization of masculinity','” 63.
245 @ayasakiayame, Twitter post, March 22, 2012, 2:06 p.m., https://twitter.com/#!/ayasakiayame.
“all he could do was smile bitterly.” These posts again underscore the significance of language and naming in solidifying the sōshokukei danshi as a group and also as a concept. The speakers in these tweets clearly do not view themselves as sōshokukei danshi, or at least do not want to be viewed by others as such, and thus, by being called “herbivorous,” they are ashamed and displeased. It is only because the term “sōshokukei danshi” has come to be used as a stigmatized label for a marginalized sector of masculinity that the use of the term carries more weight, and generally a negative impression along with it. The internalization of the “sōshokukei danshi” name and its deeper implications in the popular national vocabulary has thus solidified the perceived undesirability of being associated with the “other”. Thus, although the term “sōshokukei danshi” itself is comprised of nothing more than the words “herbivorous” and “man”, through the tensions and criticisms their deviant masculinity has produced, the term “sōshokukei danshi” has been repeatedly transfigured into a demeaning and unfavorable insult.

Finally, other members of the peer generation express confusion over the sōshokukei danshi phenomenon. For example, a tweet on 3/22/12 at 11:04 AM asks, “Why is the mass media intensely trying to sell [and build a market out of] the sōshokukei danshi?” This question and others like it, such as “What kind of person, really, are the sōshokukei danshi?”, which was asked by a female user on 3/23/12 at 4:13 PM, seem to indicate that the sōshokukei danshi, while regularly criticized, are also not well understood by many. Thus, there seems to be an aura of uncertainty and perplexity surrounding this new “type” of Japanese male.

It is also important to note that not all peers or commentators of the sōshokukei danshi view them negatively. Indeed, as previously mentioned, the voices responding to the sōshokukei

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246 @timidblack_Bot, Twitter post, March 23, 2012, 5:33 p.m., https://twitter.com/#!/timidblack_Bot.
247 @birdsong_jp, Twitter post, March 22, 2012, 11:04 a.m., https://twitter.com/#!/birdsong_jp.
248 @ditraderkaori, Twitter post, March 23, 2012, 4:13 p.m., https://twitter.com/#!/ditraderkaori.
danshi model of masculinity are, in fact, considerably diverse and some even express approval of
the sōshokukei danshi. One female Twitter user posted at 1:04 PM on 3/22/12 in response to
another tweet, “I love the sōshokukei danshi”. 249 Saeki Junko, a professor at Doshisha
University in Kyoto, Japan, wrote an editorial piece titled 「草食系男子への疑問」, or “A
Question to the Sōshokukei danshi”, which ran in the February 17, 2010 copy of the Nikkei
Newspaper Evening Print. 250 Saeki seeks to refute the notion that a man who cooks and is
involved in domestic affairs is undesirable. 251 She points to the existing double standard that
implies that a woman who is able to successfully manage work and children is considered a
strong and capable woman, but a man who attempts to balance career and family is pegged as
“herbivorous” and “effeminate”. 252 Her argument is similar to the one made by Ishii-Kuntz, who
says that the ikujimen occupy a social space comparable to the working mother. 253 Ishii-Kuntz
also emphasizes the diversity of experience that contemporary Japanese males represent, which
often include components that fall outside the conventional realm of masculinity: “The
salaryman model and the traditional definition of hegemonic masculinity in Japan fail to describe
the activities that these men are engaged in”. 254 Saeki also cites her experiences as a foreign
exchange student in the U.S. as a turning point in her conceptualization of gender, masculinity,
and men’s role in the home. 255

Thus, just as neither “hegemonic masculinity” nor sōshokukei danshi masculinity may be
defined as stable and constant entities, the contributors to the complex web of opinions, criticism,

249 @mmtrdesu, Twitter post, March 22, 2012, 1:04 p.m., https://twitter.com/#!/mmtrdesu.
250 Junko Saeki, 「草食系男子への疑問」, Nikkei Newspaper Evening Print, February 17,
2010.
251 Ibid.
252 Ibid.
254 Ibid., 212.
255 Saeki, 「草食系男子への疑問」.
and praise regarding the sōshokukei danshi should not be thought of as homogeneous or 
unidirectional. However, as we have seen in the corporate culture reflected in Kaisha seikatsu 
no tomo, in the satirical humor of Otomen, and in the frank tweets of Twitter users, whether 
explicit or implicit, the peers of the sōshokukei danshi continue to freely judge and evaluate their 
masculinity as though the existence of the sōshokukei danshi invites, even necessitates appraisal. 
In the following chapter, I will discuss the responses of the sōshokukei danshi to the criticism by 
the older generation and the peer generation, as well as the ways in which the sōshokukei danshi 
reclaim a level of agency in the reconstitution of their masculinity within the wider discourse of 
gender in Japan.
Chapter 5
Agency of the *Sôshokukei Danshi*

Although Chapters 3 and 4 outlined the various sources of criticism that the *sôshokukei danshi* face, I will now move to a discussion on the agency that many “herbivorous” men have responded with, as well as the processes by which they have reclaimed their capacity for self-determination. Indeed, criticism is often thought, both by those who give and those who receive criticism, to be an external conferment of identity that is received passively, where as identity formation and ownership are active practices that indicate strength and self-respect. Poignantly ironic, the very “passivity” and “weakness” that the *sôshokukei danshi*, as examined in previous sections, have been condemned for, are the very qualities that are refuted by their demonstration of agency in reconstituting their “herbivorous” identity.

Thus, I argue that the *sôshokukei danshi* are not simply passive recipients of criticism and suppression, but also active participants in the larger discussion of Japanese gender and sexuality. Dasgupta argues that all males and all types of masculinity “constantly engage with the hegemonic discourse in varying ways – they may conform to it, use it to exert power over others, be dominated by it, resist it, or even work towards subverting it”. Iida similarly asserts that “diverse gender identities and performative gender practices among contemporary Japanese youth can no longer be reversed nor controlled by the singular hegemonic gaze”. As such, it is

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256 Dasgupta, “Performing Masculinities?,” 192.
257 Iida, “Beyond the ‘feminization of masculinity’,” 66.
critical to examine both hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities as multi-dimensional and fluid performances, rather than in the rigid, prescriptive roles of oppressor and oppressed, abuser and victim. Although such a simplistic and tidy conceptualization of power dynamics is a tempting and often persuasive one, there are much more complex and accurate ways of explaining, defining, and analyzing the sōshokukei danshi and other non-dominant models of masculinity. To limit my research to the historical causes and resulting criticism of the sōshokukei danshi would render it incomplete. Further, to conclude with only the views that have been projected onto the sōshokukei danshi would be a both ill-considered and inaccurate representation of the broader narrative. Therefore, I will examine the ways in which the sōshokukei danshi do, in fact, embody a certain level of agency and influence in the construction of their space within Japanese society. To do so, this chapter will focus on providing evidence that refutes the seemingly definitive preexisting notions of power and dominance that are often superimposed onto the case of the sōshokukei danshi and will also highlight the various and frequently overlooked methods of agency that allow the sōshokukei danshi to regain the ability and means to formulate their own identities related to gender and sexuality.

In many ways, the historical context of the emergence of the sōshokukei danshi illustrates the agency that they have grown into both as a generation and as a specific model of masculinity. Shifts in Japanese youth culture have resulted in the incorporation of the realm of beauty into the masculine sphere and the revision of “appropriate” masculine activities. Iida argues that young males “actively seek and employ aesthetic styles and characteristics conventionally associated with women for their own purposes”. Miller’s work also indicates that beauty work is not simply a youth-driven fad as some older men also use beauty salons to receive tanning

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258 Ibid., 59.
259 Ibid.
treatments, and one twenty year-old interviewee declared, “Even when I turn 50, I’ll continue to do it”. 260 This seems to indicate that the sōshokukei danshi aesthetic is conceptualized in ways that extend beyond the bounds of youth culture and into the gender paradigms that their generation has come to embody. In Chapter 2, I analyzed the use of “oyaji-rejection” as a means to an end; the sōshokukei danshi, and young Japanese men on the whole, have employed seemingly anti-oyaji beauty practices to not only differentiate themselves from the oppressive patriarchal masculinity, but also in order to gain the approval of women. 261 Their negative impressions of the stigmatized oyaji image and the dominant discourses of masculinity that are associated with the oyaji create the impetus for self-beautification. At the same time, their aesthetic choices represent a sense of control over their externally projected selves, and as a result, the sōshokukei danshi are able to direct the “gaze” of others who seek to locate them within the broader spectrum of masculinity. Thus, “oyaji-rejection” is simultaneously a cause of the rise of the sōshokukei danshi, as well as an indicator of their active initiative.

Other methods of maintaining agency include the overt and subtle subversion of established systems of dominant patriarchal masculinity, which includes company responsibilities and expectations to perform certain sexualities in relation to women. The family-oriented ikujimen examined in Chapter 3 also provide a look into the dialectical progression of Japanese masculinity and the subversive independence of many males who stand outside of the dominant masculinity. It is important to reiterate once again that the ikujimen are not synonymous with the sōshokukei danshi, though there are considerable overlaps, and the ikujimen can be most constructively thought of as “relatives” of the sōshokukei danshi. As previously discussed, a few of Ishii-Kuntz’s ikujimen interviewees were able to evade criticism.

261 Ibid., 38.
from coworkers and bosses by reaffirming their masculinity in other ways, which was most often accomplished by maintaining a successful record in the office or by attaining a higher status relative to one’s peers. In addition, many of the *ikujimen* acknowledged that their negative experiences with their own fathers’ parenting style, which was generally uninvolved or authoritarian, or with other societal standards of masculinity served as the catalyst for their decisions to become active father figures. Thus, as with “oyaji-rejection” through male beauty practices, the child-caring fatherhood masculinity both developed out of existing masculine models as well as serves as an oppositional response to dominant masculinity. The same could be said of the *sôshokukei danshi*’s strong bond with their mothers. Because they have seen the neglectful masculinity of their fathers and have been raised primarily under the direction of their mothers, the *sôshokukei danshi* would only logically develop more powerful maternal relationships. In this way, although the *sôshokukei danshi* are often characterized in a way that implies a naiveté and dependency that renders them unable to “pull away” from their mothers, the *sôshokukei danshi* may very well be actively engaging in interpersonal relationships that are meaningful and fulfilling, yet offer a sense of safety that the riskiness of romantic relationships counteracts. Many have also suggested that the *sôshokukei danshi* have witnessed the unhealthy or rash marriages of previous generations and thus are less drawn to make a similar commitment. In contrast, their relationships with their mothers offer a proven record of nurturing and attention. It may also be because the *sôshokukei danshi* have so strongly rejected the masculinity of their fathers that they naturally gravitate towards the “other”/feminine half of the socially constructed gender binary that they have been acculturated into. In any case, the

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263 Ibid., 206-207.
264 Otake, “Blurring the boundaries”.
sôshokukei danshi’s familial relationships reveal simultaneously the past that they have been influenced by, as well as their decisions to effectively distance themselves from that legacy. Thus, the very emergence and formation of non-dominant masculinities reflects a marriage of both the reactive and the proactive.

In Chapter 3, I discussed how the concept of preserving “Japaneseness” formed the basis of the older generation’s fears of de-nationalization, especially in terms of western influences on young Japanese aesthetics.\(^\text{265}\) In a similar fashion, this idea of the western “other”, to which the “traditional” Japanese character has often been placed in contrast, also informs Japanese marriage paradigms. Among Nemoto’s interviewees, one male subject expressed a level of pride in adopting the “American” notion of gender equality in a marriage.\(^\text{266}\) Nemoto asserts, “Japanese men’s association of themselves or their partners with ‘American’ cultural and economic values served as a moral imperative to strive to be more egalitarian”.\(^\text{267}\) Once again, the “egalitarian” men do not seek to simply be “American”, but instead, it is the meanings behind the commonly conceived “American” or “western” practices that they have sought to adopt into a “reformed” Japanese paradigm of gender. Therefore, as Iida argues, this process of de-nationalization is less a desire for imitation and more a desire for variation.\(^\text{268}\) Just as the “correct” Japanese appearance has expanded in certain ways, so too have existing gender paradigms come to include a language of de-nationalization. As such, the older generation’s fears of Japanese youth disowning their ethnic identity are repurposed by the younger generations out of received hostility into a position of initiating change.

\(^{265}\) Iida, "Beyond the 'feminization of masculinity'," 67.
\(^{266}\) Nemoto, “Reasons Why Men Don’t Marry,” 30.
\(^{267}\) Ibid., 31.
\(^{268}\) Iida, "Beyond the 'feminization of masculinity'," 67.
Moving from the sōshokukei danshi’s precedent of agency to the ways that they currently exhibit mastery of their “herbivorous” identity, I will examine the vehicles of expression that evince this character. One indicator of Japanese masculinities and men on the whole being afforded a more prominent conceptual and enacted role in public discourses is the establishment of many danseigaku (男性学) or “Masculinity Studies” departments in universities.

According to Dasgupta, the increase in attention to masculinity within academic circles enabled the “crystallizing of a distinct men’s/masculinity studies area”. I would argue that this movement is similar to the boundary-forming process of “naming” the sōshokukei danshi, in that it serves to “formalize” the idea of masculinity and legitimize studies related to it, except that in the context of academia, the deviant and marginalized is what often brought to the forefront, rather than hidden, and even the dominant masculinity becomes vulnerable to the probing, questioning nature of new scholarship. In addition, the development of other public resources, such as the formation of the Menzu Ribukencyukai (Men’s Liberation Research Association) in 1991 and the Men’s Center in the city of Osaka in 1995, have encouraged the visibility of men who intentionally engage in the continuous reevaluation of masculinity.

It is also important to note that although the vast majority of sōshokukei danshi belong to the generation currently in their 20’s and 30’s, some individuals, such as author Masahiro Morioka (b. 1958), are of the “older generation” demographic described in Chapter 3, yet position themselves as representatives of sōshokukei danshi masculinity. Morioka is a self-professed “herbivorous” male who claims that he has always been a sōshokukei danshi, but in his

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269 Dasgupta, “THE ‘LOST DECADE’,” 89.
270 Ibid.
271 Ibid., 87-88.
272 Morioka and Ushikubo, 「ひょっとしてアナタも!?注目される新人種「草食系男子」が増えてるってホント!?」.
younger days, there was much more social pressure to conform to “manly” masculinity, and he
grew to hide that side of himself. Morioka also authored the book Sôshokukei danshi no
renaigaku 『草食系男子の恋愛学』 (Romance Studies for Herbivorous Men), which offers
advice for sôshokukei danshi who struggle to navigate the dating scene. Morioka explains that
his motivations for writing the book stemmed from his own experiences of being rejected by the
women he pursued and out of a desire to serve as a resource for other sôshokukei danshi who are
discouraged by the challenges of romantic relationships. He also seeks to refute the idea that a
man who is seemingly incompetent at romance embodies a substandard or incomplete form of
masculinity.

Morioka’s work gains greater significance in light of his self-professed sôshokukei danshi
identity and intentional alignment with marginalized masculinities. Because Morioka is of the
older generation, his active association with the sôshokukei danshi simultaneously highlights the
emancipation of marginalized masculinities that may be lying dormant within participants in the
older generation, as well as the potential agency that younger generation sôshokukei danshi can
continue to lay claim to. The very publication of Morioka’s book is a means of owning the
process of identity formation and the internal ascription of meanings to the sôshokukei danshi
existence. Because the author is a self-professed sôshokukei danshi, not only is the love advice
contained in the book written from the perspective of a fellow “sufferer”, but the goals of the
book are also markedly different from the reformist paradigm of other sources of “self-help,”
such as some of the media outlets outlined in Chapter 4. Therefore, it is through the same

273 Ibid.
274 Masahiro Morioka, 『草食系男子の恋愛学』, (Japan: Media Factory Ltd., 2008), accessed
275 Ibid.
276 Ibid.
vehicles that both critics and self-professed sōshokuei danshi achieve their aims. The very participation of Morioka’s work within the larger discourse of “herbivorous” masculinity also hints at the potential for an informal “network” of self-professed sōshokuei danshi that is internally oriented and inclusive in nature, as opposed to the largely exclusive nature of the relationship between dominant masculinity and the sōshokuei danshi. Whereas other voices of “advice” and criticism have sought to devalue the sōshokuei danshi, Morioka seeks to build up their agency and reclamation of their identity as a social group. Morioka’s personal progression from hidden “herbivorousness” to outspoken advocate and ally of the sōshokuei danshi is allegorical for the agency that the sōshokuei danshi demonstrate: they have moved from a position of being suppressed to a position of agency in casting off those forces of suppression.

Online media outlets have also provided a framework for sōshokuei danshi self-expression and indeed, self-definition. The online blog, Sōshokuei danshi no jittai 草食系男子の実態 (The True Condition of the Herbivorous Man) is written by a self-professed sōshokuei danshi who seeks to demystify his social group.277 Born in 1978, married, and of a “gentle” personality, the author of the site remains nameless yet thoroughly candid regarding his experiences as a sōshokuei danshi.278 His writing style is lightheartedly informal and thus accessible, and his goals seem to be of open explanation and elucidation for readers who are not sōshokuei danshi. His posts are organized into various headings, including “Basic Information About Sōshokuei Danshi”, “Sōshokuei Danshi in the Company”, “Sōshokuei Danshi in Romance”, “Sōshokuei Danshi in the Home”, “How to Capture [Romantically] a Sōshokuei Danshi”, “Characteristics of the Sōshokuei Danshi”, “Background of the Birth of the Sōshokuei Danshi”, “Current Categories of Men”, “Carnivorous Women”, and “Carnivorous

277 「草食系男子の実態」.
278 Ibid.
Men for Romance, Herbivorous Men for Marriage”. Thus, through the production of such a blog, the author effectively reclaims both his personal sense of masculinity and the ability to define the sōshokukei danshi identity. He also provides a “checklist” for readers to assess their own “level of herbivorous-ness”. The list of character traits is extensive, a few of which are “No interest in job promotions”, “Holds family dear and sends birthday presents”, “Practices skincare”, “Even if sleeping next to a woman, does not make a move”, “Can handle all household chores”, and “Enjoys spending time indoors more than outdoors”. Once again, the author creates a new and internally composed depiction of sōshokukei danshi masculinity, and thus demonstrates agency in taking his “herbivorous” selfhood into his own hands. He also seeks to dispel inaccurate myths about the sōshokukei danshi and to affirm proudly the facets of truth. In doing so, the author uses the platform of the sōshokukei danshi phenomenon and its widely acknowledged space in popular and formal discourses of masculinity for his own purposes. Even the use of the “sōshokukei danshi” label and “herbivorous”/“carnivorous” vocabulary indicates a certain level of reclaiming the devaluing language practices that had been imposed on the sōshokukei danshi since the initial coinage of the name. This leads me to return to a discussion on not only the effect of coded language, but also its recipients’ ability to reciprocally affect the significance of that language. Therefore, while I have sought thus far to emphasize the potentially divisive nature of language and naming, the expropriation of such a practice can lead to both the symbolic and actual reclamation of agency in self-identification. In other words, by becoming a self-professed sōshokukei danshi, these individuals may seem to simply succumb to the pervasive hegemonic discourse, when in fact, they are able to assign new,

279 Ibid.
280 Ibid.
281 Ibid.
282 Ibid.
internally formulated meanings to the previously negatively encoded label of “sôshokukei danshi”.  

For example, some “herbivorous” Twitter users have utilized the sôshokukei danshi identity to draw attention to their internally constructed masculine identities and individual agency. One such Twitter member tweeted at 9:29 AM on 3/24/12, “Hello, I am a pure sôshokukei danshi”. By introducing himself as a sôshokukei danshi, the author reclaims this strain of language as a projection of the self rather than a diagnosis of the “other”. Another similar tweet posted on 3/21/12 at 2:41 PM asks, “I am a sôshokukei danshi, [so does anyone] have any questions?”. Again, by voluntarily claiming the title of “sôshokukei danshi”, the author of this tweet negates the passivity and lack of control implied in “being named”. In addition, the individual establishes a space of frank and open dialogue, which seeks to dispel the enigmatic haziness that many of his peers seem to attribute to the sôshokukei danshi existence, and in essence, he is able to move the discussion of sôshokukei danshi masculinity onto “his own turf”. Thus, the term “sôshokukei danshi” and the “herbivorous-ness” of their masculinity are ultimately redeemed for their benefit.

Another Twitter user posted on 3/23/12 at 6:08 PM a tweet that states, “I, who is happier being told [I am] cute rather than being told [I am] attractive/cool, am a sôshokukei danshi”. On the surface, this statement seems to be concordant with the “feminized” caricature of the sôshokukei danshi; however, in actuality, the speaker actively self-identifies with “herbivorous” masculinity and also superimposes his own preferences and desires onto the largely externally constructed image of the sôshokukei danshi. The conveyance of a positive emotion, happiness,

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283 @kou_kakesoba, Twitter post, March 24, 2012, 9:29 p.m., https://twitter.com/#!/kou_kakesoba.
284 @bnsrobot, Twitter post, March 21, 2012, 2:41 p.m., https://twitter.com/#!/bnsrobot.
serves to underscore the dignity afforded by his agency. Thus, the various meanings attributed to “herbivorous-ness” are revised, appended, and reworked by the sōshokukei danshi themselves.

Finally, other sōshokukei danshi on Twitter have used the site as a means of expressing their dissatisfaction with the denigration of their masculinity and their recoupment of the privilege of self-identification. A prime example of such a tweet was posted on 3/22/12 at 4:52 PM and read, “Who detestably thought to coin a word like sōshokukei danshi… I would like to request women to not say, “You’re herbivorous, aren’t you?” and decide arbitrarily of your own judgment. It’s absolutely extremely annoying”.

In this tweet, the author expresses feelings of resentment toward the social environment he participates in, which belies a character that is remarkably different from the supposed meekness and passivity that others often look scornfully on the sōshokukei danshi for. In criticizing his critics, he also seeks to problematize the existence of the “herbivorous” name and category. The author refuses women the capacity to make “arbitrary” judgments about his masculinity, and thereby reserves the right to do so for himself. It is unclear whether or not this particular individual self-identifies as a sōshokukei danshi; however, it is clear that he supports the reclaiming of the Japanese male’s basic prerogative to self-identify his masculinity. Just as the overall formulation of a “taxonomy” of gender often falls short of the ideal goal of tidy classification, the categories of masculinity and femininity also fall into the same divide between principle and experienced reality. Ishii-Kuntz argues, “While the creation of a framework of masculinities centered on what is ‘dominant’ simultaneously constitutes marginalized or feminized ‘others’, this does not presuppose that these marginalized groups are unable to define themselves as masculine”. Thus, the “docile” sōshokukei danshi is capable of, and is often found to be, expressing such sentiments of

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286 @schwarze2, Twitter post, March 22, 2012, 4:52 p.m., https://twitter.com/#!/schwarze2.
indignation and pointed riposte at attempted forcible “othering”, indeed, broadcasting it to the world.

Ironically, though the patriarchal lens of their fathers’ generation previously sought to maintain hegemony through the forced isolation and condemnation of the sōshokukei danshi, it is through their placement in such an abject space that they are able to challenge the dominant masculinity even more successfully. The concept of the “space of abjection” was first established by Bulgarian scholar Julia Kristeva (b. 1941).\(^{288}\) The “abjection” of a group or individual refers to the rejection, discarding, and “othering” of a marginalized group and their subsequent existence in the “space of abjection” outside the boundaries of accepted and “normal” societal categories.\(^{289}\) Thus, on many levels, the dominant Japanese masculinity strives to condemn the sōshokukei danshi to an abject space belonging to neither masculinity nor femininity through the use of naming practices, criticism of deviance, and the rigid guidelines of corporate culture. As discussed in Chapter 3, older generation males who subscribe to dominant discourses of masculinity often seek to maintain the assumed superiority of masculinity over femininity, and as such, women and femininity have become the permanent “other” and are supposedly valuable only in relation to masculinity. If masculinity is the defacto “self” and femininity is the defacto “other”, the “othering” of the sōshokukei danshi results in a “doubly othered” existence. This results in confusion and anxiety, especially on the part of the masculine “self”, as it becomes even more difficult to place the sōshokukei danshi within conventional gender paradigms and binaries. As such, the sōshokukei danshi have no “defacto space” and are therefore relegated to the “abject space” that formlessly exists somewhere outside the largely


\(^{289}\) Ibid.
inflexible boundaries of the already *formed* masculine and feminine spheres. However, it is within that abject space that the *sōshokukei danshi* have been best able to construct new models of masculinity for themselves. Additionally, the dominant masculinity is far from invulnerable to the effects of these new models. Iida asserts the fluidity of both dominant and non-dominant masculinities: “the existing order is not natural or consented to, but open to contestations and possible negotiations”.\(^{290}\) Indeed, it is the forcible “othering” performed by the dominant discourse of masculinity as well as the *sōshokukei danshi*’s willingness to be “othered” that has allowed for the dynamic “push” and “pull” of Japanese masculinity. As Iida argues, members of non-dominant masculinities are able to “explore” new gender practices *because* they stand outside the bounds of dominant masculinity: “By holding an ambiguous gender position, they relocate their practice to the de-gendered space where alternative identities can be constructed in negotiation with the historical and discursive contexts”.\(^{291}\) Thus, the “otherness” of the *sōshokukei danshi* is precisely what *enables* their agency.

In the area of beauty, the supposedly “feminine” act of crafting a stylized appearance serves to not only psychologically and socially establish distance between the *sōshokukei danshi* and dominant masculinity, but to also do so physically. This distance forms a constructive “abject” space that furthers the ability of the *sōshokukei danshi* to play an active role in their identity formation: “these young [aesthetically conscious] men strategically distance themselves from conventional masculinity by artificially standing in the position of the ‘feminine’, where they can more freely engage in the creation of alternative gender identities”.\(^{292}\) Thus, the deeper significance of *chapatsu*, or brown dyed hair, hair removal, and groomed eyebrows is evidenced

\(^{290}\) Iida, "Beyond the 'feminization of masculinity',” 61.
\(^{291}\) Ibid., 63.
\(^{292}\) Ibid., 56.
in the intentional space of aesthetic abjection that results. Furthermore, by participating in conventionally “feminine” practices, the sôshokukei danshi are often thought of as undermining the “natural superiority” that is “irreversibly” tethered to maleness; however, it is also crucial to consider the substantial agency required in the conscious relinquishing of, if not biologically, socially constructed dominance.

The ikujimen similarly elect to be placed in the space of abjection by openly prioritizing their childcare duties over their corporate responsibilities. Ishii-Kuntz refers to such men in the workplace as having “willingly marginalized himself socially”. This act in itself is reflective of the agency of the ikujimen and the similarly family-oriented sôshokukei danshi, who, again, may be conceived of as “nephews” of the ikujimen. Moving beyond their externally demonstrated agency, their internal agency and autonomy also becomes visible, because although masculinity or femininity is ascribed to an individual, this dynamic does not necessarily indicate that his “personal sense of masculinity” is equally “marginalized”. In fact, many of Ishii-Kuntz’s interviewees indicated that their decisions to become involved fathers also stemmed from a desire to not only justify their “personal” masculinity to themselves, but also to justify their ningenrashisa, or “humanity”. Thus, their ikujimen nature is neither “masculine” nor “feminine”, but rather “a process of constructing their humanity”.

Thus, we must view Japanese masculinity as a dialogue, a “back-and-forth” between dominant and non-dominant models of masculinity. Within the context of such a conversation, it would be inaccurate to depict one party as mute. The sôshokukei danshi, through various subversive gender practices, have refashioned the space of abjection that they had originally been

294 Ibid.
295 Ibid., 212.
296 Ibid., 213.
relegated to by the “skeleton” of dominant masculinity. They have repurposed that space into a means of reclaiming their agency and of intentionally distancing themselves from the shadow of the “body” of dominant masculinity. Such a shadow is largely an imagined one, as the shadow of a skeleton is inevitably riddled with holes and never as “full” as that of a healthy body. The shadow that Japanese society sees is thus a conjured image of what has become an assumed “reality” within the collective consciousness. Ultimately, such a skeleton is invariably ineffective at blocking light. The sôshokukei danshi allegedly stand in the presumed “shadow” of patriarchal discourses of masculinity, yet the “light” of hegemony, of agency, and indeed, of self-identification is only imaginarily obstructed by the non-existent “body” of their oppressor. Thus, the sôshokukei danshi cannot simply be classified as victims of the dominant masculinity. Indeed, their emergence stems from the legacy that their fathers leave behind, and their existence is tinged with the criticism that has been graffitied across their perceived identity. In contrast, the dominant masculinity is assumed to be unrivaled and impenetrable. Indeed, the lasting effects of their anxiety-driven masculinity of the 90s and the anxiety that spurs their distaste for deviance props up a convincing tale of “ruler” and “ruled”. Ultimately, however, the sôshokukei danshi, in owning their specific space of abjection outside of the socially constructed gender binary, have effectively created a space that also stands independent of the assumed power binary.
Chapter 6

Conclusion

From the historical foundations of the emergence of the sôshokukei danshi, to the criticism they face from older generation males and their peers, to the agency that they exhibit in the reclamation of the privilege of identity formation, I have sought to dissect the “problem” of the sôshokukei danshi on a number of different axes. Generationally, the sôshokukei danshi represent a departure from the domineering or uninvolved work-centered masculine models of their fathers’ heyday. As members of families, this dynamic is reflected in the sôshokukei danshi’s preference for maternal over paternal relationships and for childcare duties over company loyalty. Often pegged as evidence of the “feminization of masculinity”, the sôshokukei danshi navigate a border of masculinity that simultaneously marginalizes the feminine sphere, as well as maintains the power and purported impenetrability of the “superior” masculine sphere. As a result, the sôshokukei danshi are often pushed outside of accepted gender roles and into a “space of abjection” that intends to denigrate their social existence. Linguistically, the web of coded language surrounding the sôshokukei danshi sheds light on the significant interface between naming practices and the supposed legitimization of the deeper meanings produced. Economically and politically, the sôshokukei danshi have been employed as a scapegoat in areas of dissatisfaction in contemporary Japanese society, which has led to the external imposition of various economic and progenitive responsibilities onto the sôshokukei danshi on both individual and collective levels. The sôshokukei danshi also straddle a nationally imagined boundary
between “Japaneseness” that is “correct” and “Japaneseness” that is “polluted” by western influences. Aesthetically, the sôshokukei danshi embody a visually expressed axis that distances the sôshokukei danshi from men of older generations, while also highlighting the fluid and performative nature of gender.

It is along these axes of tension I have approached a thematic analysis of the sôshokukei danshi within the context of contemporary Japanese masculinity. From a chronological perspective, I have traced the impetuses that fueled a shift towards the “herbivorous”, paying particular attention to the social and economic processes of crisis and rebirth that occurred after the collapse of the “Bubble Economy” in the 90s. I have argued that the turbulence of the 90s initiated the weakening and eventual paralysis of the salaryman model of masculinity, which then awakened the possibility of forging new masculinities, like that of the sôshokukei danshi. This period of gestation and emergence was followed by an almost reflexive response of appraisal, if not of open criticism. The sôshokukei danshi’s deviance from conventional masculine ideals has garnered fiery disapproval from older generation males who criticize the sôshokukei danshi out of a fear of losing the crown of hegemony that their dominant model of masculinity has long enjoyed. I have argued that the older generation critics of the sôshokukei danshi approach deviant masculinities from the opinion that the prescriptive salaryman masculinity they once dedicated themselves to is inherently threatened by the supposed “intrusion” of the “feminine other”, which is believed to be represented by the “feminized” masculinity of the sôshokukei danshi. At the same time, peers of the sôshokukei danshi voice a more diverse spectrum of opinions that range from condemnation to mocking trivialization to approval to confusion, and which often come from both male and female participants. Finally, at present, the sôshokukei danshi continue to receive considerable criticism for their departure from
masculine norms. However, I have argued that the sōshokukei danshi have also demonstrated considerable agency in the reclaiming of the “othered”, marginalized, and stigmatized space that they were initially forced into. Ironically, the tools that the sōshokukei danshi utilize in doing so, such as language practices and popular media outlets, are often the very same vehicles by which they are criticized. Thus, the sōshokukei danshi succeed in actively refashioning their position outside the socially constructed binaries of masculine versus feminine and oppressor versus oppressed. Looking toward the future of the sōshokukei danshi, the dialectical pattern of Japanese masculinity that I have proposed will become ever more pertinent as the sōshokukei danshi generation moves towards marriage and fatherhood. The question then becomes: How will the sōshokukei danshi choose to raise their own sons? What will the sōshokukei danshi inspire or provoke in future generations of Japanese males?

Through a thorough study of existing scholarship related to Japanese masculinity as well as primary sources that reflect the raw opinions of individuals, I have sought to argue that the masculinity that the sōshokukei danshi embody is multidimensional and owned by the sōshokukei danshi themselves. At the same time, the dominant masculinity, often framed within the salaryman model, is equally subject to the ebb and flow of societal conditions and to the uncontainable active participation of the masculinities they attempt to suppress. Thus, whether acknowledged or not, the relationship between the sōshokukei danshi and the dominant masculinity is a mutual, two-way dialogue that reflects the broader movements and deep, guttural rumblings lying beneath the surface of Japanese masculinity. Indeed, as I have examined the sōshokukei danshi from both thematic and chronological angles, it has become clear that no singular component or axis of sōshokukei danshi masculinity, nor any one period of time within the sequential narrative of the sōshokukei danshi would offer a sufficiently complete
or accurate representation of not only the sōshokukei danshi, but also of the larger movements at work within Japanese masculinity as a whole. It is in understanding these “tectonic shifts” that the development of predictions for the future of masculinity in Japan, and indeed, for points of potential eruption, becomes a significant, valid, and authentic endeavor.
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「マスコミ業男はどうして草食系男子をがんがん売り込んでいるの？」

「草食系男子だけどこか質問ある？」

「私もそろそろ婚活の年齢かな…草食系男子って一体何者？w wでも動物の草食系ってすごい肉食なイメージw w矛盾□」

「♪草食系男子のための付き合い方マニュアル♪ infotop.jp/click.php?aid=…」

「どうも純真無垢な草食系男子です」

「かっこいって言われるより可愛いって言われた方が嬉しい俺は草食系男子」

「@OOKUBONBON うち草食系男子大好き(@^o^@)」

「女の涙に騙されるのはいつも草食系男子なんです。 ＢＹ 深山美咲」

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