Acquisition of Cultural Competence through Visual Media: Perceptions of Masculinities in Japanese Society

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Abstract

Many foreign students studying in universities and colleges in Japan have a rather essentialist understanding of Japan, often derived from the media in their home countries, and sustained by a still influential "nihonjinron" discourse in which naïve approaches and materials are utilized for learning about Japanese culture. It is therefore imperative to establish methods that can improve these students' cultural competence beyond "nihonjinron" and enable them to question apparent cultural phenomena. Assuming that visual media can be used as a tool to deconstruct pre-existing perceptions and images of Japan, this paper attempts to demonstrate how film can be used effectively in Japanese culture courses, focusing on an important, yet overlooked topic — Japanese masculinity. For this purpose, the paper examines three films produced in different historical periods, each of which is associated with significant events or phenomena that reflect or affect the concept of masculinity in Japan. The findings of the analysis will provide instructors with concrete ideas on what points should be brought up for discussion to better understand Japanese masculinity.

1. Introduction

Since the 1980s and 90s, Japan has sought to promote internationalization, with increasing numbers of foreign students arriving on Japanese shores to study each year. These students often have certain preconceptions and images of Japan, its culture and people, based on such concepts as *Zen*, *bushidō*, and *otaku*. It is not until students become exposed to life in Japan that they begin to realize the limited scope of their knowledge of Japanese culture, and more importantly, to see those preconceptions as largely a product of media representations. This, coupled with an emerging recognition of the need to bridge language and culture

learning in Japan studies, means that instructors must seek out methods to enhance foreign students' understanding of Japan, without falling into stereotyping or simplifying cultural phenomena.

With regard to culture learning, Kubota (2008a) argues that among three components of culture—custom, products, and conception—conception is the most abstract element, and consequently the most difficult for students to master. Conception includes societal perceptions of certain issues or ideas, and it is sensitive to economic, social, and political changes. This suggests that understanding cultural concepts requires going beyond simple recognition of cultural characteristics; it should entail the ability to question cultural phenomena and contexts.

The questioning of cultural phenomena does not occur naturally when students' priorities are geared toward perfecting the language or mastering Japanese customs. Finding methods that effectively build this competence in students without stereotyping cultural phenomena is inevitably a challenging task in teaching Japanese culture because stereotypes of Japan are often derived from materials founded upon "nihonjinron," a theory that generalizes Japanese society and people, both essentializing them as unchangeable and neglecting their complexities.[1]

Based on these observations, this paper attempts to demonstrate how visual media, particularly films, can be used as an effective tool to teach Japanese culture to non-Japanese students. Visual media convey a more direct and powerful impact than reading, allowing instructors to explain cultural meanings of specific phenomena by referring to specific scenes and representations (Yahiro 1999). However, in the modern globalization of people and cultures, where cultural boundaries have been intensely blurred (Clifford 1988), teaching about a particular culture becomes extremely difficult. Japanese culture is no exception – as Befu (1987), Sugimoto and Mouer (1995) and others point out, materials and textbooks on Japan still tend to characterize Japanese culture in a simplistic manner, and our increasingly media-saturated world has only accelerated an

essentialist view of Japan in a way that recalls the rhetoric of "nihonjinron." Media representation is a key factor in culture learning because our recognition of cultures other than our own relies upon a selective process of "imagining and construction" (Befu 2001: 15). Examining media texts along with their specific social contexts brings students' understanding of cultural conceptions to a deeper level. They are able to learn complex processes of cultural phenomena rather than simply generalizing what they see. As a case study, this paper focuses on Japanese masculinity, a topic that has been of great interest to students, and which seems to be conceptualized considerably through the rhetoric of "nihonjinron."

2. The conception of masculinity and men's studies in Japan

An increasing number of universities in Japan have introduced women's studies and gender study courses since the 1980s (Fujieda & Fujimura- Fanselow 1995). As a result, the oversimplified association of submissive and gentle qualities with Japanese "femininity" has been questioned in several disciplines including gender, media, and Japanese studies. Meanwhile, these disciplines have often dismissed men's issues, including the concept of masculinity and the constraints imposed upon men in modern society. This is largely because masculinity has been erroneously conceived as a stable concept, against which femininity is conceptualized. While in the U.S., the 1970s Women's Liberation movement inspired discussions of the male role in the late 1970s and 80s (Connell 2005), it was not until the 1990s that Japanese universities and colleges started offering men's studies programs (Ito 1996). The birth of men's studies in Japan coincides with the passing of the Showa Emperor in 1989, which symbolically demystified stable Japanese masculinity.

In Japan, as in many other societies, the concept of masculinity is complex and fluctuates according to the country's social conditions. Individual masculinities are articulated and negotiated in relation to "a carefully constructed and seemingly powerful discourse of masculinity" (Dasgupta 2000: 190), and as Dasgupta and others contend, the notion of masculinity "varies across culture and

within cultures" (ibid.).[2] Therefore, although there is conventional masculinity, which typically, and in this paper, entails physical and mental strength, and chauvinism maintained by patriarchal discourse, Japanese masculinity should not be essentialized or considered as a singular discourse. Rather, it would be more appropriate to use the term masculin*ties*.

Despite this ambiguity of the concept, foreign students in Japan often have (mis)conceptions of Japanese masculinity—evoked by images such as samurai, devoted salary-men, and male *otaku*—all of which portray fragments of Japanese masculinity devoid of the socio-historical conditions in which these images are generated. In order to avoid a simplistic or superficial understanding of Japanese masculinity, the cultural competence required here is the ability to recognize the plurality of Japanese masculinities at different times in history.

Instructors of Japanese studies therefore need to develop teaching models that highlight the complexities, multiplicity, and fluidity of masculinities. Japanese films are useful to demonstrate this point because they can explicate the historicity of Japanese masculinities, acting as a corrective to an ahistorical understanding. While conventional masculinity appears dominant in Japanese society, this paper exposes masculine identity as a contested site.

3. Text and context analyses of Japanese masculinities in three films
In order to demonstrate how instructors can address the complexity and instability of masculinity in Japan through media representations, the following sections examine texts and contexts of three Japanese films from different historical periods. The first film is *Shichinin no samurai* [Seven Samurai] (1954, Akira Kurosawa), which is still seen as an illustration of conventional Japanese masculinity more than fifty years after its making, followed by *Jingi naki tatakai* [Battle without Honor and Humanity] (1973, Kinji Fukasaku), which is a representative of the yakuza film genre. The last one is *Densha otoko* [Train Man] (2005, Shosuke Murakami), which evokes the confusion of masculinity and the

notion of "herbivorous men" that has emerged from the *otaku* culture in Japan since the 1990s.[3]

These films saliently reflect three historical periods in postwar Japan that correspond to shifts in perceptions of masculinity. The first is the 1950s, immediately after defeat in the war and the end of the U.S. Occupation. The second is the dramatic economic growth between the 1960s and the early 1970s, which was followed by the economic bubble in the 1980s along with the implementation of the equal gender employment law. The third phase takes place after the bursting of the economic bubble, from the 1990s onward. It has been accompanied by a considerable demand for female employees due to the growth of service industries, and a new type of pressure exerted on men. In fact, the 1990s are considered as the beginning of "a rough-and-tumble route for men (*dansei junan no jidai*)" (Ito 1996: 51), which has led to a dramatic change in the understanding and embodiment of gender in society.

3.1 *Shichinin no samurai* [*Seven Samurai*] (1954)

Seven Samurai, directed by Akira Kurosawa, tells the story of a poor farming village in the Warring States period. Repeatedly raided by a gang of bandits, the village council decides they must hire hungry samurai to protect them in exchange for food and lodging. The lead samurai, Kambei, represents the epitome of "bushido spirit," and in him we see the typical image of old world Japanese masculinity. Japanese Culture courses at universities often use the film to introduce this type of Japanese masculinity. However, if we examine other characters, coupled with the social context, we shall reach a more complex interpretation of Japanese masculinity.

3.1.1 Naïve villagers – emasculation and re-masculinization

The film underscores the gendered construct of national identity. The 1950s were difficult times for Japan; the nation had lost pride and direction, and in symbolic terms, the emperor's surrender to the U.S. indicated the collapse of the strong

"father" figure of the nation. There was fear that Japan would be feminized, but the situation was rather complex. The outbreak of the Korean War, the resulting re-militarization implemented by the U.S., and the establishment of Self-Defense Forces pointed simultaneously to a "re-masculinization" of Japan.

In the beginning of the film, we witness villagers too terrified and scared of bandits to take any action except to huddle in fear. This characterization of the villagers as an indiscernible mob, as Sato Tadao (1986) suggests, makes a clear contrast with the samurai, portrayed as unique individuals – the epitome of "manliness" with a strong dose of stoicism. The earlier scenes of the film accentuate the helplessness of the wimpy villagers, who are associated visually with "insects" (Sato 1986: 239).

Kurosawa's contrasting depictions of the villagers and the samurai presents certain implications for Japan's national identity. D.P. Martinez (2007) points out that the helplessness of the villagers is an historical inaccuracy, as a village in that period would have been more defensively self-reliant. This concurs with the idea that the process of selecting and reconstructing historical incidents in filmmaking reveals more about filmmakers and the socio-historical contexts in which the film was made than the original incidents (Standish 2000). Thus, Kurosawa's deliberate choice to depict the villagers in this way could be to evoke the sense of loss and humiliation experienced by Japanese citizens after WWII. Taking a different perspective, the helpless villagers may also indicate Kurosawa's vision of the crushed Japanese who would urgently need a plan of militarization to help them become masculine again.[4]

3.1.2 Protest masculinity and masculinized masculinity

Japan's national identity formation is reflected through the characterization of the samurai figures who signify two types of masculinities. The first type is "protest masculinity," which is defined as a form of over-compensation "arising from the childhood experience of powerlessness," and resulting in "a pressured exaggeration of masculine conventions" (Connell 1995: 111). In *Seven Samurai*,

Kikuchiyo, a samurai wanna-be who was born into a farmer's family and abandoned, manages to join the samurai group by faking his identity. He fits the description of this type of masculinity, occupying a marginalized position both in village society and in the samurai group. Feeling insecure in the group, he acts boisterously and bluffs in order to conceal his "inferiority." His aggressiveness or hyper-masculinity is a compensation for real power, thus it is a manifestation of "protest masculinity."

The second type identified in the film is "masculinized masculinity," which is taken from Jason Karlin's (2002) description of a form of nationalism in Meiji Japan that arose in response to concerns about feminization of the country brought about by consuming Western values. "Masculinized masculinity" refers to a vigorous masculinity that "extol[s] notions of primitivism, national spirit, and imperialism" (41). The concept is founded upon a condemnation of a genteel form of masculinity encouraged by Meiji government officials who imitated European decadence as a model of sophistication. Faced with the Western influences, the nationalism associated with "masculinized masculinity" is characterized by militarism and aggression as a symbol of an "authentically" masculine nation (Karlin 2002: 56). This primitive spirit and male romanticism are likened to the seven masterless samurai in the film, all of whom are associated to different degrees with stoic sincerity, frugality, and preservation of pre-modern national values.

"Masculinized masculinity" also indicates the paradigmatic shift and struggles over old and new in articulating national identity. This phenomenon is parallel to the time of the film's production. The postwar period saw a drastic change as Japan shifted from an imperial power to a position subordinate to the West, a change that provoked the Japanese people's desire to regain national dignity. In this circumstance, "masculine masculinity" projected through the film could offer the audience the pleasure of a narcissistic identification with the samurai heroes, figures who embody power and control. In particular, Kambei's composed characterization would appeal to audiences as the model for the "more

perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego" (Neale 1993: 12), thus enhancing the element of pleasure for the audience of a male genre such as the "masterless samurai." Kambei's stoicism and will to preserve traditional virtues, which is, according to Sato (1996), shared among heroes in male genres in the 1960s, reflects the values of Japanese citizens at the time.

In discussions of *Seven Samurai*, it is important to stress that throughout the film, Kurosawa hints at the resurrection of earlier beaten masculinity; villagers actually fight and win the war, a key qualifier of masculinity. This leads up to the last scene with the villagers, back on their feet, starting to plant rice—the epitome of "Japaneseness." *Seven Samurai* suggests the strength of the Japanese spirit and people, who may regain their dignity, military, and thereafter conventional masculinity.

3.2 *Jingi naki tatakai* [Battles without Honor and Humanity] (1973)

Set just after WWII (the late 1940s) in Hiroshima, relationships between the protagonist, former soldier Shōzō Hirono, and other yakuza members in *Jingi naki tatakai* show disillusionment with the notion of pre-war and wartime national solidarity, traditional virtues of male homosocial bonding, and vertical structure. These virtues, which are usually embodied in the relationship between a yakuza boss (*oyabun*) and his followers (*kobun*), are undermined in the film by the former betraying the latter. The film depicts yakuza members as mean, backstabbing gangsters who will turn on their closest allies for power or profit. The story follows the violent exploits of Hirono as he joins a yakuza gang in post-bomb Hiroshima. He endures a brutal series of events, including jail terms and pulling off hits on rival gang members on his journey through the ranks.

3.2.1 Yakuza: the modern form of samurai or a new masculine identity

Historian Mikito Ujiie (2007), referring to American journalists David Kaplan and Alec Dubro's characterization of yakuza as proud inheritors of Japanese traditions and values (e.g. samurai spirit), introduces yakuza as the embodiment of

jingi (humanity and justice). Granting that this image of yakuza is somewhat glorified, yakuza, in principle, have aspired to *jingi* and loyalty, and they have willingly fought for the socially weak. In this respect, yakuza can be seen to symbolize chivalry, physical and mental strength, and therefore conventional masculinity.

Yakuza films began to be mass-produced in the 1960s, largely by the Toei Company. Until the end of the 1960s, against the background of the anti- 1970-Anpo movement, *ninkyō eiga* ("humanity and justice" films in which a yakuza hero fights for justice against the authorities) were popular. Films in this style demonstrate strong male bonding, loyalty, and protection of the weak against capitalists and bureaucrats. The heroism and stoicism of yakuza fighters depicted in these films are even seen to have inspired the fighting spirit of anti-Anpo activists (Shiba & Aoyama 1998).

However, once the anti-Anpo spirit drastically cooled down in the 1970s, previously passionate activists were overwhelmed by weariness and aimlessness, which led Japan to a *shirake* (apathetic) phase. In this circumstance, *jitsuroku* (docudrama) yakuza films, popularized by films such as *Jingi naki tatakai*, emerged. These films, unlike those in the *ninkyō* style, depict yakuza not as the honorable heirs to the chivalry code, but as ruthless, disloyal street gangsters. *Jitsuroku* yakuza films are meaningful for the way in which they invalidate the yakuza principle of humanity and justice. This shift reflects the struggle over masculine identity, and responses to conventional masculinity in Japanese society.

3.2.2 Reflection of masculinity in the economic miracle

As the phrase "without honor and humanity" indicates, the film hints at the collapse of one of Japan's traditional virtues—a vertical structure (*tate shakai*) of human relationships, including a leader-follower bond among gangsters. Trouble in conventional masculinity is signified by the film's setting— Japan's defeat and a loss of dignity under the U.S. Occupation—and also by scenes such as the bare

Hiroshima Atomic Dome, a Japanese girl raped by U.S. servicemen, and Japanese women consorting with U.S. servicemen.

In this regard, it is intriguing to see the parallel between the film's production year and its setting year. The 1970s, the decade in which the film was produced, was a period of rapid economic growth that coincided with the abovementioned apathetic (*shirake*) mode in Japan. On the one hand, the country had succeeded in its postwar reconstruction and urbanization; on the other hand, the rapid growth made salary men, who spent long hours at work, felt rather alienated. In the midst of this economic growth, when society's main concerns were profit and self-interest, men devoted themselves to their companies and families, and struggled to maintain conventional masculine norms. This underscores the idea that the hegemonic masculinity in society is a "cultural ideal" (Dasgupta 2000: 191) that most men cannot achieve. The anxiety felt among men is effectively projected through the setting of the late 1940s, the time of Japan's intense struggle over the deprivation of (especially male) dignity.

The corrupt leader of the gang in *Jingi naki tatakai*, who betrays his loyal followers and violates their bond of brotherhood, symbolizes the collapse of traditional social collectivity and solidarity. The fundamental appeal of the film, as Sato (1996) and Standish (2000: 199) suggest, derives from nostalgia for collective sentiment, and from criticism of American influences such as individualism, capitalism and the resulting loss of human relationships in the 1970s.

Moreover, a sense of powerlessness and constraint is reflected in scenes where yakuza members are strictly repressed by prison guards who in turn represent the epitome of social pressure and the "legitimate authority" of GHQ. Similarly, violence wielded by yakuza members in the film is not an exhibition of Japanese manliness, but rather an outcry of the "tragic hero" (and Japan as the defeated nation) experiencing an identity crisis. This style of aggression evokes the concept of "protest masculinity" discussed above. *Jingi naki tatakai* implies that yakuza principles (and conventional masculinity), such as loyalty and

chivalry, perhaps no longer exist. The film thus emphasizes the complexity and plurality of masculinity as it responds to major social events.

3.3 *Densha otoko* [Train Man] (2005)

Densha otoko was collaboratively created on a free web forum for single men in 2004. It was compiled from a 57-day online conversation, became an Internet book, and was later turned into a film.[5] The story begins after a shy 22-year old, given the nickname "Train Man" on the second day of the discussion, protects a woman from a drunk on a train in Tokyo. The woman later sends Train Man expensive Hermes brand teacups as a token of her gratitude. Train Man, who self-identifies as an "*Akiba-kei otaku*," has never had a girlfriend, and he asks for advice from his supporters—subscribers of the website—on how to invite the woman, nicknamed "Hermes," on a date and to further his romance. As the story develops, Train Man gains confidence, changing his clothing and hairstyle, and ends up going steady with Hermes by the film's conclusion.

3.3.1 The late 1990s and 2000s Japan: troubled masculinity

A survey conducted by the Cabinet Office in 2002 reported that 47% of Japanese people agreed that "husbands should work outside while wives stay at home," representing more than a 10% drop from 1990.[6] New laws to empower women have been implemented over the last two decades, and accordingly, social perceptions of gender in Japan have been gradually moving away from those associated with conventional patriarchal society.

Nonetheless, the discrepancy between the legal sphere and the actual mentality of people has remained salient. This discrepancy, coupled with uneasiness among men toward social change, has brought about another shift in Japanese masculinity. The late 1990s and 2000s witnessed extended economic stagnation accompanied by corporate restructuring and drastic lay-offs of salary men. This clearly threatened patriarchal systems in Japanese society. Kimio Ito (1993) describes this condition as "the crisis of masculinity (*danseisei no kiki*)"

(173), in which men feel an anxiety toward letting go of the traditional patriarchal mindset even while recognizing its problems. Ito notes, among many symptoms, a dramatic increase in suicides among middle-age men, rapes and kidnappings of high-school girls, and abductions of small girls. Simultaneously, there was a seemingly conflicting phenomenon called "*oyaji-gari*" (sugar-daddy trap) in the 1990s.[7] These phenomena are indicative of troubled masculinity, which has become more prominent over the last two decades.

One of the most distinctive gender-related phenomena in Japanese society in the late 1990s and 2000s is the *otaku* phenomenon, or the proliferation of *otaku* communities in which avid users of new media and technologies inhabit virtual realities. Influenced by such phenomena, visual media in the 2000s have projected a new notion of masculinity and a new type of hero in Japan. *Otaku* should not be viewed simply as a sign of femininization of Japanese men, but as a manifestation of complex gender identity in Japanese society, and it can be explicated by examining *Densha otoko*. This section discusses the third transitional period of Japanese masculinity, which reflects the phenomenon of "*moe-otaku*" and their activities.

3.3.2 *Moe-otaku* masculinity: transgression of gender boundaries

The world of "*moe-otaku*," which the protagonist of *Densha otoko* inhabits, must be explained because the film plays with the accepted image of *moe-otaku* to deconstruct the conventional notion of Japanese masculinity. Although there are both male and female *moe-otaku* in reality, this paper focuses on male "*moe-otaku*" since the film presents mainly male *moe-otaku*. "*Moe*ru" (the verb form of "*moe*") literally means "to bud," and it is also homophonous with "to burn." The word is associated with a burning passion for two-dimensional images of cute and innocent anime/manga girls. In this respect, the *moe* movement is considered as a challenge to the "capitalism of love" (*ren'ai shihon shugi*) that prevailed in the 1980s and the 90s, when the success of romance necessitated money and conformity to the dominant idea of good looks. In other words, *moe* represents

"pure love" because, by embracing affection toward fantasy girls instead of "real-world relational interaction" (Galbraith 2009), it allows men to escape performing masculinity conditioned by patriarchal norms. Moreover, *moe*-men's "pure love" for girls in fantasy is devoid of reproduction, yet another challenge to conventional gender/sexual roles. In this sense, *moe*-men demonstrate a transgressive gender identity, a mix of "femininity" and "masculinity." Accordingly, *moe*-men, such as Train Man, embody a new type of masculinity, which I would call "transgressive-masculinity."

This behavior of "*moe*-man" is reminiscent of a feature of Masuko Honda's definition of the *shōjo*, namely that girls who are distant from mainstream society entertain themselves through interactions within their own community. "*Moe*-men," while they often go to work, confine themselves to *otaku* communities, and in turn dissociate themselves from the conventional perception of masculinity and its enduring patriarchal systems. In this respect, the characteristics of *moe*-men reveal a feminized or "*shōjo*-ized" version of Japanese masculinity. The emergence of this new form of masculinity does not mean that Japanese masculinity is disappearing, but that the instability of the conventional or dominant masculinity has become more evident. This trend suggests a decline of *conventional* masculinity.

More specifically, the new type of masculinity invented by *moe*-men represents a mix of conventional femininity and masculinity, a combination that many Japanese males had seemed to be longing for since the late 1990s. On the one hand, *moe*-men express aggressiveness by gazing upon girls in fantasy worlds (e.g. "dating simulation games") as objects of desire—a typical masculine attribute. On the other, *moe*-men are associated with maternity, in that their platonic love for fantasy girls is materialized in "nurturing simulation games" (Galbraith 2009) in which they care for and nurture fantasy girl characters. *Moe* activities, as Toru Honda (2005) suggests, offer men feminine experiences that would be otherwise impossible under current social norms.

The protagonist, Train Man, is characterized as one of these *moe*-men who challenges gender conventions imposed by mainstream society. However, his success in romance with Hermes and the resulting "hero" status ironically suggests the importance of conformity to the conventional notion of masculinity and patriarchal norms. It is his socially appreciated styles of clothes, hairstyle, and dating activities that lead Train Man to success. Also, his persistent showing of initiative during dating—a sign of conventional masculinity—impresses Hermes and gives him confidence in himself. This may hint at an underlying base of conventional masculinity, or perhaps the desire to stabilize gender norms, a response to the fear that the nation might become feminized due to the influence of popular culture. Another message that the ending of the film may convey is the encouragement of hetero-normativity so that Japan, struggling with a recent low birthrate, starts reproducing and strengthening the nation again. The duality in *moe*-men's gender articulation and Train Man's adherence to conventional masculine norms reflect the multi-faceted complexity of the concept of masculinity in contemporary Japan.

4. Conclusion

This paper attempts to propose a model for teaching an important aspect of Japanese culture—shifting conceptions of Japanese masculinities—without relying on a naïve "nihonjinron" perspective. The model highlights the dynamic nature of culture and the discursive construction of culture.[8] The three films examined project different forms of masculinities that reflect socio-historical contexts and different responses to conventional masculinity, demonstrating masculine identity as a contested site.

Seven Samurai manifests Japan's feeling of inferiority toward the West (the U.S. in particular), signaling feminization of the nation and the collapse of the patriarchal authority. At the same time, the film implies potential re-masculinization and the need for stable hetero-normativity, depicted by the villagers' victory in battle and the final scene of rice planting. These

characteristics highlight the resilience of traditional masculinity after the country's wartime defeat.

By highlighting the anti-hero and the collapse of samurai code or Japan's traditional male world of humanity and justice, *Jingi naki tatakai* exhibits males' struggle over the fear of losing their dignity and isolation against the background of radical economic growth. The film also stresses that the dominant image of the links between the male world with humanity and justice, as well as the willingness to protect the social weak, is a myth.

Representations of shōjo-ized *moe*-men reflect the struggle of men in the 1990s and 2000s who want to be free from masculine norms, yet have a hard time letting them go. Like *Seven Samurai*, *Densha otoko* depicts the persistence of masculine norms and their resilience in the face of the feminization of the country. All three films together are useful for uncovering a complex reaction to a fear of national feminization, and may help lead us to a deeper understanding of gender-related phenomena in Japan. The (seemingly unnecessary) violence in *Jingi naki tatakai* and the (transgressive) masculinity of Train Man may seem inscrutable to international students, but once they understand the socio-historical context, these phenomena should be more easily grasped.

Below the surface of these cultural phenomena are the complexities of gender identities. Therefore, it is vital for instructors to encourage students to go beyond just the recognition of gender-related phenomena in Japan, and to push them to understand these phenomena in specific socio-historical contexts. Through these films, students will come to see the dynamic and contested elements of (Japanese) cultural conceptions, and they will be able to comprehend Japanese society at a deeper level, particularly in regard to topics such as gender identity.

Notes

1. Nihonjinron is still very influential to learners of Japanese culture. See Kubota (2008a: 19).
2. The same point is mentioned by Connell (2005: 36).
3. The term "herbivorous males" refers to men who choose to engage in traditionally

female pursuits; they are friendly, home-oriented, and uninterested in sex. They are passive toward women and dating them.

4. This sentence implies the possibility of Kurosawa's affirmation (or encouragement) of Japan's re-militarization, or at least the inevitable establishment of military forces in Japan to revitalize the country.

5. Train Man's story was collaboratively created on an Internet board for single men in 2004 and became an Internet book, a film, a primetime TV show, four manga series and an erotic video.

6. This survey was conducted by the Gender Equality Bureau of the Cabinet Office. The number of those who agreed with the statement ("Husbands should work outside and wives stay at home") dropped from 57.8% in 1997 to 47% in 2002. The percentage of those who disagreed with this statement increased from 37.8% in 1997 to 47% in 2002. (naikakufu 2004)

7. "*Oyaji-gari*" refers to young (often high school) girls' aggressive act of mugging salary men. This phenomenon became prevalent after the "telephone-sex club incident" in 1994, when a group of high school girls and boys assaulted a club member to steal money from him.

8. Kubota (2008b: 163-4) also refers to this point.

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