

Re-reading the Salaryman in Japan: Crafting Masculinities. Romit Dasgupta. 2012. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge. xii, 210 pp., notes, bibliography, index. Hardcover, £85.00.

OVER THE PAST TEN to fifteen years, a growing number of scholars and writers have focused their attention on critical understandings of the gendered-ness of masculine ideologies, identities, experiences, and practices in Japan. Much of this work has attempted to deconstruct or dislocate ahistorical, essentializing, and unproblematized assumptions about and representations of men and masculinities in Japan. However, until very recently most of this work has been published as individual journal articles or book chapters, has been collected in edited volumes or has been either broadly historical or cultural and queer studies-based analyses. In *Re-reading the Salaryman in Japan*, Romit Dasgupta, who has made important prior contributions to this literature, offers one of the currently very few full-length monographs based on ethnographic fieldwork that examine the gendered constructions, or craftings, of modern Japanese men's identities and lives.

Using extensive ethnographic interviews conducted in 1998 and 1999 with some forty young male employees of two companies, the large enterprise Northern Energy and medium-sized Northern Print, Dasgupta provides sensitive yet critical readings of the microlevel individual craftings of masculine salaryman identities and life-paths as complexly articulated in macrolevel politico-economic and ideological contexts. Thus, while focusing on ostensible representatives of the ideologically hegemonic white-collar, middle-class, heterosexual salaryman, Dasgupta combines ethnographic data and text analysis with historical contextualization and gender-based theorization to “dislocate” the salaryman from within, as it were.

The book is organized into eight chapters. Two beginning chapters and one concluding chapter provide the necessary macrotheoretical

framework and historical contexts with which to understand the lived craftings of masculinity among Dasgupta's young informants. Here, Dasgupta introduces the key theoretical dynamic between "hegemonic masculinity" and the "crafting" of masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity refers to the ideologically most powerful, ascendant or dominant construct of masculinity vis-à-vis both femininity and, importantly, other forms of masculinity. Though with prewar antecedents, the salaryman-ideal—typically heterosexual, urban, middle-class, white-collar employees of (large) stable enterprises—emerged as the hegemonic form of masculinity in Japan especially in the postwar years. This hegemony, Dasgupta explains, is an ongoing process "crafted" at both societal and personal levels. It is historically contingent and shifting, and despite recent challenges, is at present still powerful; and, it is an embodied process involving individual negotiations, ambiguities, and slippages.

The heart of the book is composed of five ethnographic chapters that describe the microindividually gendered projects and processes of becoming, being, and crafting salarymen masculinities in post-Bubble, late 1990s Japan. Each chapter is introduced with theoretical and ethnographic discussions that more specifically frame and contextualize the detailed descriptions of Dasgupta's informants' experiences. Together, these chapters show the life-path-related craftings of masculine identities and relationships. Thus, Chapter 3 describes the young men's reflections on becoming boys, emotionally, physically, and sexually. The next chapter focuses on the important school-to-work transition, when the school/college boys (are) transform(ed) into becoming responsible working social adults, *shakaijin*. The centrality of work in crafting salaryman corporate masculinity in these men's lives and identities is further explored in Chapter 5. Another key component of salaryman masculinity, regulated heterosexuality, is explored in discussions of expectations and experiences of marriage and fatherhood—importantly qualified by the inclusion of one homosexual man's case. Finally, Chapter 7 describes the significance, shifts, tensions and potential desires related to homosocial relationships, *tsukiai* and friendships, among salarymen.

Throughout, the strength of Dasgupta's work is in "re-reading" the salaryman and hegemonic salaryman ideology and discourses not as stereotypes or doxic ideals but as "crafted," negotiated, and sometimes internally conflicted and contested ongoing accomplishments that are the processual outcomes of the rather complex articulations of individually embodied practices, experiences, and identities with historically contingent ideological and politico-economic structures. Dasgupta allows and requires us to understand salarymen as gendered individuals crafting and re-crafting themselves across historically contexted life-paths. Furthermore, Dasgupta accomplishes this by combining an impressive array of Japanese and English language resources and data—detailed ethnography, popular cultural texts, historical analysis—with theoretically informed analysis. To do this in readily readable fashion is no small task.

I have elsewhere and often criticized the continuing representational bias, in both scholarly and popular writing, of discussions of middle-class, white-collar salarymen, and I might otherwise fault Dasgupta for this choice. However, as noted above, Dasgupta critically and sensitively portrays his salaryman informants, working to provide them with agency and humanity and thus working to deconstruct (perhaps my own) overly simplistic notions of hegemonic salarymen and salaryman corporate masculinities.

I do hope, however, that Dasgupta will in fact take up his own suggestion at the end of the book to conduct new fieldwork and interviews with his informants, now fifteen or so years later, to explore how they have continued their salaryman craftsmanship across the yet unrelenting Heisei recession and into their early middle-ages. And, more ideally perhaps, it is my hope that Dasgupta's work will inspire others to pursue similar ethnographically based, intertextual, and theoretically informed research among nonhegemonic men and masculinities in Japan.

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