

# GENDER IMAGES IN CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE SOCIETY

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## Introduction

In the recent years, Japan's rapid birth rate decline, which menaces with serious structural problems to the Japanese economy and society, has risen up the meaning of gender equality in Japan, especially in terms of employment opportunities and family roles. This has become an important topic in Japanese media. For example, in 2007 Japan SPOTLIGHT (published by Japanese Economic Foundation [JEF]) issued the series of articles providing detailed information about current trends of social gender role perception in Japan. Although the traditional views about women staying at home and men working outside are changing, the public opinion surveys show that this change is very slow: with the statement "The husband should be the breadwinner, the wife should stay at home" in 2004 agreed nearly 50% of men and about 40% of women (Public Opinion Poll on a Gender-equal Society (2004), Cabinet Office. Source: Kashiwagi 2007).

However, at the first glance we see the opposite picture in the other important aspect of gender image, namely the appearance. The recent fashion and beauty work trends among young Japanese people suggest little differentiation in gender images. Since 1990s there appeared new fashion/beauty work magazines for men (Miller 2008), and some of them are coun-

terparts of women's magazines, similar in form and contents (e.g., *Non-No* and *Men's Non-No*, *JJ* and *JJ Boys*, etc.). Likewise, many aesthetic salons (*esute*) have separate sections for men and women, but they offer almost identical beauty procedures (*TBC* and *Men's TBC*, *Miss Paris* and *Dandy House*, etc.).

Scholars making research on social roles of men and women (gender roles in family, work, politics, etc.) in Japan often focus on the study of woman's position (Iwao 1993, Sugimoto 1998, Iwahori 1999, Liddle and Nakajima 2000, Lindsay 2005), whereas recent research on gendered beauty perceptions often finds men's appearance as a new topic to focus on (Takeda 1999, Tanaka 2003, Miller 2003). My aim in this article is to examine the images of both genders in a parallel order, thus enabling a more multisided picture of current gender perceptions by Japanese youth.

In this article I try to answer the question what perceptions of masculinity and femininity lie behind the apparently unisex fashion and beauty ideals of young Japanese people. 'Gender', defining the way biological sexual characteristics of males and females are socially expressed (MacInness 1998), links very tightly the aspects of gender image through appearance and gender image as a set of cultural/social expectations (culturally assigned roles in different social spheres). Therefore, the understanding of interrelation between these two aspects as the whole of dominating gender models among Japanese youth is an important contribution to the search of means for the creation of gender-equal society.

The article consists of a brief theoretical overview about the development of gender images in Japan and the discussion of my empirical research results (research conducted in Tokyo, 2004).

### **Images of Japanese Femininity**

Historically, Japanese women's positions were subordinated to men. Especially big influence on gender construction had Confucianism, which was promoted by the shoguns of Tokugawa period (1600-1868) (Henshall 1999). Henshall cites the work *Onna Daigaku* (Great Learning for Women) from that period to illustrate the expected role of women: "The great life long duty of a woman is obedience. In her dealings with her husband, both the expression of her countenance and style of her address should be courteous, humble, and conciliatory, never peevish and intractable, never rude

and arrogant...” (Henshall 1999: 14). Certainly since that time the position of Japanese women has changed a lot, but the traditional attitudes about a woman related to domesticity, reproduction and family rather than the world of work exist in Japan until the present times (Lebra 1999; Henshall 1999; Liddle et al. 2000; Lindsay 2005).

One example of both recognition and resistance to traditional gender roles is the appearance of ‘cuteness culture’ among young Japanese people. *Kawaii* (‘cute’) style expanded rapidly since 1970’s celebrating childlike behavior and appearance (Kinsella 1999). Kinsella argues that cute style is anti-social, it is a form of resistance against growing up and having to perform traditionally prescribed social roles. Adulthood means restrictions and responsibilities to society, whereas childhood allows having freedom unattainable to adults. This means that young Japanese girls recognize the traditional woman’s role in society and in the family, because they do not really resist by trying to change this role; instead, they simply try to prolong the period until they have to take on the prescribed role. Young Japanese women’s unwillingness to marry and to have children also means the wish to extend their youth, which only postpones the moment when they would take on a traditional woman’s role, but does not prevent it.

There are different forms of resistance to socially prescribed roles through *kawaii* style. An interesting case is the fashion of *gosurori* (Gothic Lolita). The girls (and boys) dressing in this fashion combine disagreeing components of gothic- (expresses fearfulness- *kowasa*) and Lolita-style (expresses sweetness- *amasa*) by juxtaposition of cute clothing form and dark colors, by taking cute fairytale rabbits, bears, etc. as main motifs and showing them as ferocious animals with glaring eyes, scars and blood stains (Onohara 2008). Inside the girlish Lolita style implying childishness and immaturity there is a scary gothic element suggesting wearer’s individuality and strength to oppose the commonly perceived realities (a sign of supposed maturity). So, it is possible to assume that these girls do not deny adulthood itself, but deny the social rules ascribed to adult women. They prefer to BE mature, but to LOOK immature. Furthermore, if we consider that wearing a traditional kimono marks young Japanese girl’s entry into adult society on their Coming-of-Age ceremony, it is interesting to note that there are several essential common points between wearing kimono and *gosurori* fashion clothes:

- *Restriction of wearer’s movements.* Goldstein-Gidoni (2008) notes that kimono can be described as restricting woman’s movements and

making her defenseless as well as rigidly disciplined. She also states that “notions of patience and endurance have been regarded as part of femininity training in Japan” (Goldstein-Gidoni 2008: 162). Thus, kimono supports the traditional idea of a calm and obedient Japanese woman. Clothes of Victorian era fashion, which are widely imitated by Gothic Lolitas and which include such underwear items as corsets, underskirts and others, restrict female body movements in a similar manner as kimonos do.

- *Wrapping in layers.* Both kimono and Victorian style dresses of *gosuro-ri* use underwear layers for the ‘correction’ of woman’s body to fit the required model of ideal female form. In the end, the wrapping of ‘ideal woman package’ is completed with binding the *obi* or ribbon.

The mentioned similarities of ‘traditional’ kimono and ‘modern’ *gosuro-ri* fashion imply that even if young Japanese girls resist the traditional form of femininity, they still maintain ‘traditional’ Japanese femininity image in their minds. They put it into a different integument, which only temporarily postpones the time to take on a traditional woman’s role.

The model of cute culture *shōjo* (an adolescent woman which did not have sex yet) also supports traditional characteristics of femininity in the images created by the mass-media. Napier’s (1999) findings imply that the common *shōjo* image in manga is that of a cute girl in cute clothes, never growing up and being essentially sexless even when erotic elements come into view. *Shōjo* heroines often behold supernatural powers, which reveal their femininity in relation to female body characteristics (relation between blood sucking of a vampire girl and female menstruation; combination of women with machines because of their reproductive abilities) and character (loving pets and children, self-sacrificing, dependant on men’s help, avoiding violence etc.).

The *shōjo* images discussed by Napier (1999) and the fact that such images represent the ideal of the ‘cute culture’ lead me to the conclusion that young Japanese women do not deny traditional perceptions of femininity, but this femininity is attractive only as long as it can be understood as girlish, immature femininity. Still, the infantile style does not mean undermining female sexuality: sexual attractiveness lies namely in a woman’s childishness, innocence and naïve behavior. Henshall (1999) argues that in Japan there are two ideal images of females from the perspective of men: a ‘mothering woman’ and a ‘*kawaii* virgin’, and the common factor in these two ideals is the avoidance of female criticism of the male. So, a Japanese man either likes to be mothered by his girlfriend or wife and to be forgi-

ven for everything, or to be an older, experienced “initiator” of a young sexy virgin. Both images relate to the important feature of Japanese society called *amae*, which stems from an intransitive verb *amaeru* that means “to depend and presume upon another’s benevolence” (Doi 1986: 121) and is generally used to describe a mother (parent)-child relationship. The popularity of cute style among young Japanese women suggests that they accept and even emphasize the image of a ‘*kawaii* virgin’, which does not require any social responsibility of them. In contrast, the image of a ‘mothering woman’ could be associated with adulthood, thus losing attractiveness among younger women.

The socially preferred image of ‘virgin’ femininity is also reflected in Japanese language which metaphorically shows women as goods to be chosen and purchased by men. A woman of a “good quality” has to be pure and innocent, otherwise she becomes a “spoiled” or “damaged” good (*kizumono*) (Hiraga 1997). Female fertility is expressed by metaphoric comparison of women with vegetables or fruits: “おいしそうな女だ” (delicious-looking woman), “あの女は食べごろだ” (that woman is in season), etc. (Hiraga 1997). Thus, women in Japanese language are portrayed as sexual objects that have to be fresh, delicious and ripe enough like vegetables or fruits to be eaten (to have sex) by men.

In conclusion, young women in contemporary Japan show resistance to traditional gender roles, but by doing that they still maintain traditionally created images about feminine appearance and character features. In other words, they seek individual freedom, but by remaining feminine, not by becoming more masculine. And because the social role a woman acquires after marriage is still restrictive in terms of gender-related attitudes, young Japanese women choose the image of an innocent, girlish femininity that allows them to prolong the period of individual freedom.

### **Images of Japanese Masculinity**

One of masculinity images still strongly rooted in Japanese society is that of the so-called ‘salaryman’. This term has emerged in Japan after the First World War and it refers to a salaried white-collar male employee of private sector organizations, typically characterized by life-time employment, seniority-based salary and promotions, required loyalty to organization and so on (Dasgupta 2003). Because originally salarymen were supposed to commit themselves to a company and to the country, they initially held the

image of the corporate warrior or latter-day samurai, thus embodying the notion of the Japanese male as hardworking, nationalistic, loyal to the company, but also devoted to his family as an archetypal heterosexual husband/father and producer/provider (Henshall 1999; Dasgupta 2003).

However, young men in contemporary Japan do not seem to be eager to adopt the salaryman masculinity model. Just like young Japanese women, many young Japanese men also joined the cute fashion and started looking girlish and soft. Several reasons can be found to explain the phenomenon of Japanese young men wanting to look 'feminine':

- Envy of women for their social position (Tanaka 2003; Kinsella 1999; Salomon 1986);
- Demographic shifts making men objects to be chosen by women (Tanaka 2003; Henshall 1999);
- Requirement of women that men understand them (Tanaka 2003; Henshall 1999);
- Historically positive views about *bishōnen* ('beautiful young man') (McLelland 2003; Henshall 1999; Takeda 1999).

The first reason derives from the fact that young unmarried Japanese women have more social freedom than young unmarried men who are expected to work in companies, but do not have a high status yet (Kinsella 1999). So, just as for women a childish 'cute' style 'prolongs' their freedom from social responsibilities until marriage, for young men such a style means a prolonged escape from their social responsibilities even before marriage. And because the cute fashion was initiated by women, men follow women's style.

The second reason for men to become 'feminized' may be the problem to find a marriage partner, because according to the data from Japan's Statistics Bureau by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (2009), men of marriageable age make a demographic majority over marriageable women (as men generally tend to marry younger women, every year declining birthrates make the number of women available for men as marriage partners even smaller). The shortage of marriageable women is also a result of contemporary women's attitude towards marrying: they either do not want to marry at all or put very high requirements on their male partners (Tanaka 2003).

The expectations of women from men are that they have to be generous, good friends, good listeners and they have to make them feel good about themselves (Henshall 1999). For meeting these expectations men have to

understand women better, to know what they want, and this need is emphasized by young men-targeted magazines that take the role of 'advisers' in those matters (Tanaka 2003).

Women make requirements not only about a male partner's character, but also about his physical appearance. Many Japanese women want men to have smooth, 'civilized' bodies, which leads Japanese men to esthetic salons or wider consumption of beauty care products, initially being thought of as 'feminine' like eyebrow brushes, scissors and pencils, facial scrubs and packs, various hair care products etc. (Miller 2003). Men's need for beauty work information is reflected in young men's style magazines, such as *Bidan*, *Fine Boys*, *Men's Non- No*, and others. Recently, there have appeared new lifestyle magazines for mature men as well, which also include articles about fashion and leisure (Miller 2008), thus implying a new shift in a rigid *salaryman* image, which serves as a symbol of a mature Japanese man.

The increasing men's concern about their appearance is not unique to Japan. Similar trends exist also in European and American cultures. There are notions of a 'new man' (Beynon 2002) and 'metrosexual' (Simpson 2002), which define the new trend for Western men to be overly interested in fashion, cosmetics, cosmetic surgery, etc. Both in the West and in Japan such men's behavior may evoke an image of 'gay', but in Japan the connotations of 'gay' are not that negative as in the West. Also, being 'a beautiful boy' historically does not imply being 'feminine'. According to Takeda (1999), "proximity to feminine aesthetic ideals, to be "beautiful like a woman", was an integral condition for male beauty in Heian aristocratic society" (Takeda 1999: 191). Also, *bishōnen* was considered to be a higher ideal than the *kōha* man ('hard school' male or samurai), because he was both esthetically attractive (young, pure and beautiful) and displayed 'manly' attributes such as decisiveness, fortitude and a selfless devotion (Henshall 1999). Furthermore, *bishōnen* could be an object of sexual desire both for women and for men without any negative connotations being attached to this coexistence of homo- and heterosexuality (Takeda 1999). Because of his purity he could be even a more preferable sexual partner for a samurai than a woman (Henshall 1999).

Homosexual or androgynous men in Japan also seem to be attractive to women in that they can be their best friends as it is implied by Japanese drama and movies where fantasy relationships between gay men and straight women are idealized (McLelland 2003). So, a traditionally 'masculine' man in present Japan is less able to satisfy women's expectations than a 'femini-

zed' man, and this can be one of the reasons why recent images of Japanese masculinity include 'feminine' features.

In conclusion, there are two major types of masculinity images in present Japan: one is a still remaining image of a salaryman, and the other is that of a cute, beautiful boy. The salaryman image is associated with restrictive social responsibilities and lack of individual freedom, and therefore the young generation protests against this kind of masculinity by following an originally women's cute fashion that resists growing up. The image of a cute girlish boy does not have negative connotations and does not threaten a man's maleness or masculinity, because Japan has long traditions of 'gender blurring'.

## Research Methodology

In the present research, two methods were used: a non-formal personal interview and a written questionnaire. This research limits itself to the Tokyo area, thus the insights it provides about gender related attitudes are to be understood as the attitudes characteristic to Japan's metropolitan youth only.

### Interviews

I interviewed 12 unmarried people (seven males and five females) aged from 18 to 25 in spring 2004. The interviewees were selected both by using a snowball method and by simply looking for people in the street. Among them there are under-graduate students, graduate students, working people and 'free-timers'. The following table presents the basic information about the interviewees.

All interviews took place in various coffee shops in a relaxed atmosphere and lasted from one to two hours. Each interview started with a discussion of female and male images in randomly selected advertisements from popular style magazines: women's magazine *JJ* (2004:3) and men's magazines *HDP* (2003:12) and *Men's Non-No* (2003:12). Looking and discussing various gender images presented visually in beauty care ads, we talked about the main attributes of femininity/masculinity both in appearance and in character, as well as gender roles in marriage.

Table 1. Background information about interview informants

Inter- viewee	Sex	Age	Education	Occupation	Interview date
A	F	25	University graduate	Unemployed	2004/02/24
B	F	22	Unfinished university	University student	2004/02/24
C	M	22	Unfinished university	University student	2004/03/13
D	M	24	Technical college graduate	Restaurant manager	2004/03/16
E	M	24	High school player	Former sumo wrestler, unem- ployed at the time of interview	2004/03/21
F	M	22	High school graduate	Unemployed	2004/03/27
G	M	18	High school graduate	Unemployed	2004/03/27
H	F	19	High school graduate	Hostess	2004/03/29
I	M	21	High school graduate	Civil servant	2004/03/29
J	F	19	Unfinished university	University student	2004/04/13
K	M	19	Unfinished university	University student	2004/04/20
L	F	23	University graduate	Graduate school student	2004/04/27

### Questionnaire

80 questionnaires were distributed to young Japanese people aged from 17 to 27 years old in the parks of Tokyo and university campuses. The questionnaire aimed to reveal male and female attitudes toward beauty work, as well as answer the questions whether the images of masculinity and femininity held by respondents coincided with the popular male and female images among the opposite sex, and whether they strived themselves to attain the masculine/feminine image they described.

### Research Findings

#### Feminine Attributes and Their Attractiveness

The female images described as the most feminine ones do not differ among male and female informants. However, female informants distinguished between two types of femininity rather than between 'femininity' and 'non-femininity', while males were straightforward in judging whether

an image looked feminine or not. The femininity types recognized by girls correspond to Barthel's (1988) distinction of two main female images in advertisements: The Fair Maiden (innocent, soft, moist, fragrant) and The Dark Lady (mysterious, self-confident, sophisticated). Male respondents recognized only Fair Maiden type as feminine. The Fair Maiden image corresponds with the 'Kawaii virgin' type mentioned by Henshall (1999) as one of the favorite feminine images among males in Japan. The girls I interviewed were conscious of the fact that a certain kind of femininity would not be popular among men, namely if a woman looks "too cool...can do too much by herself, too much on her own" (H), "...doesn't seem to be in need for protection" (J).

Both male and female informants mentioned the same exterior attributes of femininity:

- long hair (*"She doesn't look feminine. There is something in her face that is man-like, I don't know exactly what... Maybe her short hair? Usually when you think of a woman, you imagine long hair."* (C), *"After all, her long hair makes her look feminine. Yes, it's her long hair basically..."* (I))
- big eyes (*"I don't really like her, because her make-up is too bright, doesn't look feminine. Her eyes look too deep. ... Eyes have to be big"* (E))
- pink, pastel and spring-like soft colors (*"Makes a very feminine impression. Maybe because of pink color?"* (J))
- wet/glossy lips (emphasized by male informants: *"Her make-up is terrible! But still, her wet lips and small nose look beautiful and feminine"* (G))
- white color and white skin (emphasized by female informants, who indicate a feminine face as "transparent", "pink cheeks", "white", "nice")

Usually the above characteristics were applicable to Japanese models, and the images that both male and female informants chose as the most feminine ones, were all of Japanese girls.

Caucasian models mostly represent The Dark Lady type of femininity, which was usually perceived as unfeminine, especially by male respondents. Although these models had white skin and big eyes, they "lost" their feminine look because of a "too self-confident", "strong" or "sharp" gaze and because of often being portrayed in a bluish background which was considered to be masculine: *"she looks somehow strong and self-confident. I think this light blue would suit more to a Japanese girl. This one [a Caucasian woman- author's note] I associate with darker blue"* (K)).

Both male and female respondents indicated similar character featu-

res, typical for a 'feminine' and 'unfeminine' woman. A feminine woman is described as soft, cute, dependent, attentive and kind ("*soft, cute and spring-like, [...] seems to be especially popular among men*" (H)). An unfeminine woman is strong, independent and self-confident ("*a strong woman who does not give way to a man and does what she wants.*" (B)). The interviewees of both sexes chose the first 'feminine' type as more attractive, and the girls indicated they would like to be more feminine if they didn't feel so at the moment. For example, (J) described herself as a not really feminine girl, because she thought she was sloppy, rough and not attentive, when it "... should be the opposite: a girl has to be attentive and notice things". She did not feel bad about that, but she said she would like to be a more attentive person.

Although the girls chose different images in ads that they liked best, all these images reflected what they thought it was feminine. For the images girls liked best they used the following descriptions: "so transparent..."; "looks most adult and mature" (A) [she chose a Caucasian model- my note], "cute", "Japanese" (B), "it is so spring-like and I like this pink color" (H), "nice skin", "healthy", "soft", "arms look soft, not too many muscles" (L).

The boys chose very similar female images as the ones they liked best. They described them as "beautiful woman" (C), "most feminine from all, she looks soft, especially her lips" (D), "not showy", "feminine atmosphere" (E), "Japanese", "big eyes", "feminine", "cute", "spring-like" (G), "soft facial features" (F), "feminine, because she makes an impression of kindness" (I), "feminine lips, because they are glossy" (K).

In conclusion, although the interviewed girls recognized that there were different kinds of femininity, the image they wanted to achieve themselves was the 'soft and cute' kind of femininity that was considered to be most popular among both males and females. Young men chose the same type of feminine image as the favorite one and the only one to be called 'feminine'.

The questionnaire results also support the fact that young Japanese girls prefer the 'feminine' image as an ideal for themselves. However, there are differences in male and female understanding of what 'a feminine woman' and 'a girl popular among guys' is, as is illustrated in table 2.

Table 2 shows that female respondents associate 'femininity' with 'domesticity': being good at cooking is the most frequent association with 'feminine' image among girls. But a 'popular girl' does not have to be domestic. Instead, her appearance is more accentuated: she has to be pretty, cute, fashionable etc. From male respondents' answers it is clear that woman's appearance and

Table 2. Femininity images by young Japanese people

Topic	Female respondents	Male respondents
<b>Girl popular among guys</b>	1) cute; 2) pretty; 3) kind; 4) feminine, good sense of fashion; 5) light feeling	1) cute; 2) good character; 3) beautiful, nice face; 4) good style, kind, pretty; 5) attentive
<b>Feminine woman</b>	1) good at cooking, kind; 2) soft, weak; 3) long hair, gentle, cute, pretty, elegant, domestic, attentive, looks good in kimono, good listener	1) graceful, elegant; 2) gentle; 3) good at cooking; 4) delicate; 5) good listener, cute, big breasts, caring, long hair, domestic, wears skirt, has her own opinion
<b>Ideal image for oneself (females)</b>	<i>Character:</i> kind, attentive, independent, strong, interesting, cool, good character, warm, reliable, honest, broad-minded, educated, rich, generous, self-confident, have strong opinion, not telling lies, respectful, pleasant to be with etc. <i>Appearance:</i> neat, sexy, adult, cute, pretty, smiling	

kind character are both important attributes of 'femininity' and 'popularity'. Domesticity is still more a requirement for 'femininity' rather than for popularity. So, among young Japanese people domesticity is still associated with femininity, but it seems to be more a tradition rather than contemporary understanding, because cooking or taking care of home is neither a criterion for being attractive to men nor a goal to achieve for girls themselves. They want to be feminine (kind, attentive, cute, pretty), but they also seek 'unpopular' Dark Lady's features like independency, self-confidence and strong opinion. Interview and questionnaire findings suggest that young Japanese girls accept both a 'soft' femininity and a 'strong' femininity, but the 'soft' type is often more preferable because it assures popularity among others.

### **Masculine Attributes and Their Attractiveness**

Appearance and character features considered to be 'masculine' were very similarly understood by both male and female informants, but unlike in the case of 'feminine' attributes, 'masculine' attributes were not thought of as attractive. Especially girls often claimed that not masculine guys in the ads looked more attractive to them than the ones they could call 'masculine'. Male informants had different opinions about which male image was more attractive, but those who found 'masculine' images attractive, they

also recognized that those images would not be popular among girls, so if a guy did not want to be rejected by girls, he had to consider that fact.

For all the informants, the most important signs of masculine appearance were facial and body hair, as well as black short hair on man's head. When showing a typical masculine (and not attractive) image, informants chose *Shiseido* ad for *GERAID* hair wax, which shows a sitting man with black short hair, small beard and moustache, his shirt is unbuttoned displaying his naked chest with some black hair on it, and behind him there is a woman's leg and arm seen as if she were sitting on his shoulder. A man in this ad was commented as "frowning", "naked chest", "dense eye-brows", "short black hair", "wild", "come and follow me", "looks like he hates animals", "in this beauty era he can't be popular", etc.

Although the man's beard and chest were admitted as the most important sign of his masculinity, most of girls and young men made negative comments about these attributes of his appearance. I was told by a few girls that they liked foreign men better as they looked cooler than Japanese men, so I asked what they thought about Western men's chest hair which was usually even denser than that of Japanese. The answer I received was that "...the hair they have is of a nicer color: brown or yellow" (J). Similarly, when I asked why young men dyed their hair brown or yellow if the image of masculinity was black hair, I was answered that "black in general looks masculine, because black suits and black hair remind of 'salaryman', but this is not cool. Brown hair reminds of foreigners and looks cool." (K). So, in men's case, even though 'masculine appearance' in general is understood as having Japanese body characteristics such as black hair on head and body, more attractive is the unnatural smoothness of body and imitation of Western men's hair color.

The key word for the description of a non-masculine appearance was "cute". However, all girls asserted me that non-masculine looks did not mean a guy was not cool. Also more than a half of male informants had positive opinions about non-masculine images. For instance, the image of the guy in a *La Parler* ad (showing a facial care procedure at the *esute* salon and its result: a smooth and soft face of a guy) received such positive comments as: "He looks cool. Maybe his face is not so masculine, but he looks cute, like he could and would want to protect a girl" (H), "cool and cute" (A). *Success* hair dye ad (showing a guy with a soft featured face holding a rabbit in his hand and wearing a shirt with a rabbit application) received similar comments as well.

In general, men going to esthetic salons was said to be not masculine, although both young men and girls agreed it was OK to go to such salons if a guy had problems with his skin or wanted to reduce hair on his face (a beard). The epilation issue evoked different reactions among male informants, but men correcting eye-brow form was a positively accepted beauty work by both males and females. According to the informants, correcting eye-brows does not menace the image of masculinity at all, because it makes men's faces look sharper, and therefore even more masculine! The questionnaire results also support the fact that eyebrow correction is the most popular beauty work among men (50% of male respondents do that). Other beauty work men do is face and body skin care (27%) and epilation (11%). In general, the questionnaire results also show that despite of active advertising, only a few men visit *esute* salons. High price was the most often indicated reason, but also there were answers like "have no interest", "it is not necessary" or "coz I'm a man". Girls, on the other hand, also rarely visit salons because of a high price, but they do a variety of beauty work themselves.

In terms of appearance, it is possible to conclude that the preferred Japanese masculinity from the viewpoint of female respondents is that which they actually call 'non-masculinity'. Just as male respondents accept only 'the fair maiden' type of femininity, so female respondents only accept the type of a rough, hairy and 'Japanese' man as masculine, but the difference is that men also find this 'soft' femininity attractive, whereas women usually do not like a typical masculine man. Male informants, on the other hand, have different opinions about the attractiveness of a 'hard' type masculinity and 'soft' type masculinity.

The character features ascribed to a 'masculine' and a 'non-masculine', but 'popular' man, are best seen in the results of the questionnaire.

From table 3 we can see that the images of 'masculine' man and 'popular' man are very different. Whereas both male and female informants indicate a 'masculine' man being muscular, strong, sporty and with a solid body, a popular man does not need any of such attributes. His character, abilities (for good education and financial stance) and sense of fashion are more important than his physical appearance. The keyword for a popular man is 'kind', while the keyword for a popular girl was 'cute'. This result confirms interview findings that preferred types of 'femininity' and 'masculinity' among young Japanese people are the 'soft' ones: soft femininity and soft masculinity.

Ideal features for themselves chosen by most men correspond to 'po-

Table 3. Masculinity images by young Japanese people

Topic	Female respondents	Male respondents
<b>Guy popular among girls</b>	1) kind; 2) cool; 3) rich; 4) well educated, interesting; 5) reliable, good talker, good character	1) kind; 2) cool; 3) interesting; 4) gentle, a good talker, rich; 5) good sense of fashion, good character
<b>Masculine man</b>	1) strong; 2) muscular; 3) likes sports; 4) 'macho'; reliable 5) "rely on me" type, short hair, supportive, massive body, cool, kind	1) muscular; 2) strong; 3) reliable, kind; 4) stubborn, tall, sporty, strict, samurai
<b>Ideal image for one-self (males)</b>	<i>Character:</i> kind, smart, good at work, reliable, cool, independent, gentleman, understanding, tolerant, interesting, not making excuses, humorous, self confident, strong will etc. <i>Appearance:</i> tall, nice skin, slender, athletic, good looking etc.	

pular guy's' features: kind, cool, nice skin, etc. However, they join the 'soft' kindness and 'soft' appearance with 'strength' of being reliable, self confident and independent. So, the present ideal for masculinity resembles the ideal of a *bishōnen* from the past times greatly: possessing the beauty and softness of a woman, as well as the strong will of a man.

### Images About the Life After Marriage

Interestingly, male informants, who prefer a more traditional type of femininity in terms of exterior appearance, do not also expect traditional gender roles in the family after they marry. All interview informants without exception said they did not mind their wives working and that they intended to share housework with them. The only thing that caused some hesitation was the possibility that the wife could receive a higher salary than themselves. My informants said that in such a case they would not say anything to their wives, but themselves they would feel as if they were weak and thus start trying harder to "catch up" with their wife. This result supports Taga's (2001, 2003) qualitative research findings showing that until present times job is one of the main criteria for "becoming a man" in Japanese society.

Taga (2003) claims that mother's employment and father's participation in housework affect a child's attitude towards gendered division of labor. The

results from my interviews support this argument, but I found some differences in how family atmosphere affects young men and women. Among my interviewees, girls seem to choose the gender role pattern which would be different from what they see at home (different from their parents). In contrast to Taga's (2003) findings, girls I interviewed have more traditional attitudes towards their roles after marriage than young men. Further, I will give a few examples of how young Japanese men and women imagine their life after the marriage.

**Case 1. Informant J, a female undergraduate student, 19 years old.**

The ideal marriage partner for J would be a strong and kind man, who does not pay attention to trifle things, does not get angry and is reliable. She would prefer a traditional 'masculine' man for marriage, because then it would be easier to raise children: "If children see their father as masculine and are afraid of him, probably they will not do bad things, but if father is a weak and tremulous man, maybe he'd raise children in a cute way, but then children would think "Ah, whatever I do, nothing will happen"".

After graduating from university J would like to work and not hurry with the marriage. Also after marriage she would like to continue working. In her family her father works at the company and travels abroad a lot, and her mother teaches English only a few times a week. So, J says, as she sees her mother being very bored at home all the time, she would not like to choose the same lifestyle for herself. Besides, she does not like housework and thinks she would not be a good housewife, so she would like to find a man who would help her with housework and cooking.

J says she likes her current boyfriend, because he has masculine appearance (has muscles and beard), but he is not so masculine in his character (he is attentive and sensitive to her problems).

**Case 2. Informant H, a female, works as a hostess, 19 years old**

In H's family both of her parents work, but her mother is also responsible for cooking, cleaning and so on. Seeing her mother's example, H thinks that it is better for a woman to choose either work or home, and she would choose home. Therefore she would like to find a man who would be able to support and protect her. He should be also a kind person. According to H, appearance is closely related to a person's character, so she would look for a man who looks kind from appearance. It does not mean he would be not masculine, because only not masculine man "...is not kind and inclined to violence".

From the above examples we can see that whether a girl wants to work after the marriage or not, she wants security from a man's side, which means that as a marriage partner a more traditionally masculine man is preferred: he has to be strong and reliable. However, he must be kind as well. In the first case, the girl likes her boyfriend's "feminine" character, but she says she wants a "masculine" father for her children, so it seems that she associates life after marriage with a different step in her life, where she would have to think not only about her own interest, but also her children's and her family's interests in general. The second example also shows that the girl prefers a kind-looking man, but at the same time he has to perform the traditional role of a man to support his wife and his family. So, an ideal partner for women is the one who is kind like a cute-type boy, but strong and reliable like a hard-type man.

**Case 4. Informant D, male, 24 years old, works as a restaurant manager**

D's hobby is surfing, so he likes girls who look soft and feminine, but who also like sports or at least have some muscles on their body in order not to look weak. He says that from looks an ideal girl has to be soft and tender, but her character should not be really feminine: "It is easier to talk with such a girl". D disagrees that after marriage there should be different roles for a husband and a wife. He thinks women do not have less skills for any work if compared to men. Only work that requires a lot of physical strength is more suitable for men. So, at home also there are no 'feminine' or 'masculine' tasks, only when it is necessary to carry something heavy it becomes a man's work. In D's family both parents are working people and they also share housework, except that cooking is mother's responsibility. But D says that when he saw other families where the situation was different, he decided that cooking also should be shared by both. So now, as he lives together with his parents, he helps his mother in cooking and intends to help his wife too.

In case his wife received a higher salary, D says he would feel like being swept away or not strong enough: "There is this image that a man must be strong, isn't there? So I'd feel I don't put enough efforts".

**Case 3. Informant C, male undergraduate student, 22 years old**

In C's family his mother is a housewife. C's older brother, younger sister and himself are helping her with house chores, but usually the boys help with work that requires physical strength and the girl helps with cooking. So, C also thinks

that there exist certain differences in men's and women's roles after marriage: "Somehow I think that if there is a possibility to work only for one person, this person should be a man. Cooking is a woman's work, but things like taking out garbage or cleaning bathroom are for both. Only cooking I somehow associate with women. It does not mean I wouldn't be willing to help, but... I'd like to find food prepared for me on weekends..."

The ideal type of a woman for D is the one who looks feminine, but has a little bit boyish character, because it is easier to communicate with a not entirely feminine girl.

From the examples about men's views on life after marriage we can see that first of all, they prefer feminine looks, but not really feminine character. Still, a wife cannot be 'stronger': she is not expected to perform tasks that require physical strength and she cannot earn more money than a man. Cooking has special associations with women, and even if a man said he was willing to help with cooking, still nobody said that men should cook alone or all the time. Besides, the fact that they mentioned cooking as a separate part of housework and emphasized the need to help with it to women implies that cooking still has a strong relation with the image of femininity.

In general, it is possible to say that although neither young men nor women entirely agree with traditional gender roles like a man going to work and a woman taking care of home, women still imagine themselves as the ones to be supported and the men imagine their role as being women's supporters. Only girls see 'kindness' of a man as a sign of his willingness to protect a woman, and a non-masculine appearance can be a sign of kindness, therefore a man does not necessarily have to look 'masculine' in a traditional sense. On the contrary, young men expect girls to look feminine, but at the same time to be a little boyish (not man-like!) in character for an easier communication. However, like one informant (I) explained, an ideal woman for marriage is the one who "...can support herself in general, but who can also depend in cases when she cannot do something being a woman". So, women are still expected to not exceed men in work and not to reject being dependent.

## Conclusions

According to the results of my interviews and questionnaire survey, young Japanese people understand masculinity and femininity in traditional terms, but do not follow those traditional images, because "pure"

masculinity and “pure” femininity are not held as attractive. Young people prefer soft, cute appearance and kind, attentive character for both men and women, but the traditional understanding that a woman is weaker and dependent on a man is still present. Only the power of a man is not to be displayed in any way, so even if his appearance is “feminine”, it does not menace his masculinity.

The positively perceived image of femininity among both young men and women is that of a cute, soft, kind girl, associated with lightness and spring. Domestic nature of a woman and subtle, elegant style are recognized as feminine features, but they are not considered to be characteristics to be aimed for or criteria for a woman’s popularity among men. However, the image of an independent and strong woman is also recognized as another alternative of femininity among Japanese girls (not men!).

There is a significant difference between a ‘masculine’ man’s image and the attractive image of a man. Neither young Japanese men nor women (especially women) have positive attitudes about a ‘masculine’ man, who is associated with roughness, untidiness and hairy body. A man has to be kind (smooth face and soft appearance serve as a sign of man’s kindness), but in contrast to women, a man’s kindness implies his superiority, because he has to be kind to a weaker person (a woman) whom he supports and who can rely on him. So, a man has to present himself as desirable to women by taking care of his appearance and showing his kind nature (Tanaka 2003; Miller 2003), but at the same time he has to play a traditional role of a man as a provider or defender of a woman.

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### Abstract

Despite of seemingly unisex fashion and beauty requirements for men and women in contemporary Japan, the change of traditional views about gender roles in family and society progresses slowly. This article aims to examine the perceptions of masculinity and femininity among young Japanese people by covering two aspects of gender image: appearance and cultural/social expectations. The article is based on empirical research, which includes results of 12 in-depth interviews and 80 questionnaires aimed at young Tokyo people (18-25 years old). The research contributes to further academic study of gender image development in Japan, as well as to the deeper understanding about the aspects of contemporary Japanese gender role perception that hinders the progress in achieving egalitarian society.

**Santrauka**

Nors iš pirmo žvilgsnio šiuolaikinėje Japonijoje vyrauja vienodos grožio ir mados tendencijos tiek vyrams, tiek moterims, tradicinis požiūris į lyčių vaidmenis šeimoje ir visuomenėje keičiasi lėtai. Šiame straipsnyje tyrinėjamas japonų jaunimo požiūris į vyriškumą ir moteriškumą bei šių sąvokų samprata. Apžvelgiami du lyties įvaizdžio aspektai: išvaizda ir kultūriniai bei socialiniai lūkesčiai. Straipsnis pagrįstas empirinio tyrimo rezultatais (atlikta 12 individualių interviu ir 80 anketų apklausa, kurios respondentai – 18–25 metų amžiaus Tokijo vaikinai ir merginos). Šis tyrimas naujais aspektais papildo studijas apie lyties įvaizdžio formavimąsi Japonijoje ir skatina giliau pažvelgti į šiuolaikinėje Japonijoje paplitusį lyčių vaidmenų suvokimą, stabdantį egalitarinės visuomenės kūrimą(si).