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Published paper

Matanle, P, Ishiguro, K and Mccann, L (2014) Popular Culture and Workplace Gendering among Varieties of Capitalism: Working Women and their Representation in Japanese Manga. *Gender, Work and Organization*. Doi: 10.1111/gwao.12050

Popular Culture and Workplace Gendering among Varieties of Capitalism: Working Women and their Representation in Japanese Manga

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Female empowerment is a prerequisite for a just and sustainable developed society. Being the most developed non-western country, Japan offers an instructive window onto concerns about gender worldwide. Although overall gender equality is advancing in Japan, difficulties remain, especially in achieving equality in the workplace. We draw on theories of ontological commitment and the psychology of fiction to critically analyse the role of popular culture — in this case manga — in the reproduction of gender inequality in the Japanese workplace. We present examples of four of the most popular mainstream manga aimed at working men and women in Japan and show how women are depicted. We argue that the hyper-mediated fictional realism of representative tropes generates an ontological commitment to characters and narratives among consumers that reinforces the reproduction of a culturally exceptionalist national political economic space, one of whose essential defining characteristics is a gendered workplace. Our research suggests important implications for researching the relationship between culture, in all its forms, and spatial variation in persistent institutional biases among varieties of capitalism.

Keywords: gender inequality, popular culture, varieties of capitalism, psychology of fiction, ontological commitment

Introduction

Female empowerment is a prerequisite for a just and sustainable developed society. Overall, gender equality in the developed world is advancing, with the UN Gender Inequality Index showing an average reduction of 30.71 per cent between 1995 and 2011 (UNDP, 2011).¹ Much has been achieved in the workplace too. Gender gaps in employment participation, tenure and pay continue to narrow, and virtually all developed countries have enacted equal employment legislation (OECD, 2011a, 2011b).

Nevertheless, there is more to do. Women earn 16 per cent less than men across the OECD, progress is slowing, and many deeply hidden factors persist, such as entrenched socio-cultural attitudes to gender, work and discrimination (OECD, 2008, pp. 140–1). In East Asia, for example, females outpace males in many health and education outcomes, yet simultaneously are held back in the workplace. While South Korea has the highest ratio of female completion of secondary education in the OECD, and Japanese women maintain the world record average life-expectancy, the two top the OECD wage gap table with women receiving 38 and 33 per cent less than the male median wage

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(OECD, 2008, 2011a; UNDP, 2011).² It is an urgent matter, therefore, that as more countries develop, issues pertaining to gender inequality in the workplace are tackled.

As the world's most developed non-western country, Japan offers a valuable window onto these debates. This is particularly so among developing countries where patriarchal and nationalist factions may find common voice in conflating feminist and liberal campaigns to promote gender equality with the perceived threat of the cultural homogenization and westernization of domestic socio-economic space that inevitably accompanies industrial development and globalization. Japan has on paper made good *legislative* progress towards workplace equality, with the passage of the Equal Employment Opportunities Law (EEO) in 1985, its revisions in 1997 and 2006, and the Child Care [and Family Care] Leave Law (1991) and its revisions (1995, 2001, 2004 and 2009); however, inequalities persist *in practice*, not least the high ratio of female non-regular workers (53.3 per cent in 2009; Statistics Bureau, 2010) and the slower rate of progress towards equality when compared internationally (Matanle and Matsui, 2011). Thus, although 86.4 per cent of working women are now employed in organizations (Cabinet Office, 2008, p. 70), their advancement into core and senior positions has hardly progressed.

The Japanese government acknowledges the lack of female decision-makers in the workplace as an 'urgent' problem and declared the goal of 30 per cent female participation in management by 2020 (Cabinet Office, 2011). Japan is 121st out of 186 nations in the degree of female membership of national legislatures and only 2 per cent of management positions in central government bureaus are female (6 per cent in prefectural governments and 10 per cent in municipalities) (Cabinet Office, 2010). Numerous indicators also point to the persistent subordinate status of women in companies. Just 13.8 per cent of *kakarichō* (deputy manager), 7.2 per cent of *kachō* (manager/section chief), and 4.9 per cent of *buchō* (director/division chief) were women in 2007, and women's salaries were 79.3, 73.9 and 78.5 per cent of men's average salaries in these positions, respectively (MHLW, 2010). The UN Gender Empowerment Measure ranks Japan 54th among 109 countries,³ despite the country's good showing in the UN Human Development Index and Gender Inequality Index (14th/146 and 12th/187, respectively), and the World Economic Forum also emphasizes Japan's poor achievement with gender equality in the formal economy (94th/134) (Hausmann *et al.*, 2010). Given decades of equal opportunities legislation, why does the country lag in workplace equality? Are there any socio-cultural factors present that may contribute to maintaining gender inequality at work as a normative condition, even as equality in other spheres advances? And how do these issues inform us about the continued distinctiveness of Japanese capitalism in the 21st century?

In order to advance understanding of the socio-cultural foundations of gender inequality in the workplace, as well as broaden and deepen theory in comparative political economy — the so-called 'national varieties of capitalism' discourse (see Coates, 2000; Dore, 2000; Hall and Soskice, 2001) — we critically analyse the role of popular culture — in this case manga aimed at working men and women — in the persistence of gender inequality in the Japanese workplace. We argue that the hyper-mediated fictional realism of particular representative tropes in Japanese popular culture 'transports' (Green and Brock, 2005) consumers into developing an affective sympathy for, or 'ontological commitment' (Quine, 1953; van Inwagen, 2003) to, characters, identities and narratives — and the norms and behaviours they evince — that recursively reinforces the reproduction of a culturally exceptionalist national political-economic space, one of whose essential defining characteristics is gender inequality in the workplace and a gendered division of labour in society (see Takeda, 2004; Ueno, 2009).

Although our spatial and cultural context is distinctly Japanese, discussion of popular culture and the workplace is relevant across many analytical fields and geographical domains (Rhodes and Parker, 2008, p. 628). This is particularly because critical research increasingly emphasizes the reflexive interaction of media and work in contemporary society, arguing that workplace reproduction is discursive, retrospective and episodic (Hassard and Holliday, 1998; Lipschutz, 2010; Rhodes and Westwood, 2008; Robichaud *et al.*, 2004; Weick, 1995). Building on these and other approaches, we argue for the existence of a recursive relationship between the individual and media, the workplace, and the national political economy, which is emblematic of contemporary socio-political life

worldwide; especially when popular culture depicts elites enacting claims to power and legitimacy, suggesting that although these claims are often vigorously contested, they may remain comparatively impermeable. Japanese media is relevant here, given their capabilities to rapidly produce hyper-mediated content distributed simultaneously across multiple delivery platforms, the potential for (re)constructing a reflexive critique of western varieties of capitalist reproduction in the service of sustaining a distinctively non-western domestic regime, and the ongoing spatial diffusion of Japanese models of socio-economic and cultural development across Asia (Chang, 2007; Iwabuchi, 2002).

Our epistemological approach is multi-disciplinary, drawing inspiration from the humanities to develop new theoretical insights into social scientific phenomena. We make a unique contribution to theory development by delving into the psychology of fiction, deploying the philosophical concept of ontological commitment to critically analyse gender discourses in popular culture and their implications for the persistent gendering of socio-economic behaviour and political-economic institutions across time and space. Consequently, our analytical approach comes from critical discourse analysis (CDA), an interpretive mode of interdisciplinary analysis which views text and image as socio-cultural practices that recursively enact and reproduce power relations (Fairclough, 1995). CDA seeks a 'critical engagement' with the narrative by 'reading against the text' (Janks, 2002), uncovering assumptions and ideologies that may not be apparent if one were to read with it (Ingulsrud and Allen, 2009). For, alongside its role in depicting social life, fiction is *mediated* into praxis via a collaborative process of simulated 'model construction' (Oatley, 2011) between producers (authors and artists, publishers and producers, distributors and advertisers, etc.) and consumers, and with specific intentions, which 'depend(s) on shared recognition by producers and audiences of dominant images and ideas' (Hassard and Holliday, 1998, p. 2). Underpinned by a social constructionist and critical realist epistemology (Fairclough, 2005), CDA examines how texts reinforce social conditions, exerting political-economic power via their regulatory effects in asserting their narratives' values and norms as being self-evidently natural (Fairclough, 1995).

After reviewing the relevant literature on popular culture and Japanese manga, we survey the current circumstances of working women in Japan. Next, we explore the ways in which fiction may seek to legitimize, and reproduce, societal and cultural norms. We then offer four studies of the most popular mainstream manga aimed at working men and women, and explain how women are represented. The concluding analysis ties together our themes in arguing for the recursive role of popular culture in reinforcing a culturally exceptionalist and spatially impermeable national political-economic space in Japan, within which gender inequality in the workplace is an essential defining characteristic. Crucially, our research suggests important implications for researching the relationship between culture, in all its forms, and spatial variation in persistent institutional biases within and among varieties of capitalism.

Popular culture, manga and working women in Japan

Scholarly interest in how the workplace is depicted in popular culture is increasing, from novels (Phillips and Knowles, 2012), to television soap operas (Czarniawska *et al.*, 2013; Hancock, 2008), Hollywood movies (Godfrey, 2009), children's films and literature (Ingersoll and Adams, 1992; McDonald, 2009), and video and board games (Rehn, 2008). Although research acknowledges that the boundaries between representation and praxis are porous, as producers construct their own visions of and for their worlds (Godfrey, 2009), what remains lacking in the social sciences is robust theoretical understanding of how and in what forms contemporary and popular culture have purchase over socio-economic behaviour and, consequently, the institutions of the national political economy (Lipschutz, 2010). Media discourse research, in addition, has difficulty keeping pace with technological advances, and in appreciating the significance of hyper-mediated content delivered simultaneously across multiple media domains; in particular in expanding the breadth of the 'socio-cognitive interface' (van Dijk, 1993) joining producers and consumers in a hyper-consumption society, amplifying both the depth and reach of narrative reception. Hence, we bring together theory from a range

of disciplines from the humanities and social sciences to address the combinative and constitutive dynamics of individual, media, workplace, socio-cultural and political-economic interactions across time and space. Specifically, we explore the role of cultural products in recursively framing and reproducing the institutional norms (in this case gendered workplace norms) that are central to the varieties of capitalism (Hall and Soskice, 2001) or 'national business systems' (Whitley, 1999) approaches to comparative political economy.

While the literature on comparative political economy agrees that culture permeates and recursively influences the formation and reproduction of institutions and organizations, discussions focus on, for example, the role of customary or traditional cultural inputs, social capital and trust, market versus organizational orientations, and ersatz managerial cultures (Coates, 2000; Dore, 2000; Fukuyama, 1995; Hall and Soskice, 2001; Hassard *et al.*, 2009; Keizer, 2009; Matanle, 2003; Whitley, 1999, pp. 51–4). Despite the omnipresence of popular culture in contemporary lived experience, there is scant discussion of how it contributes to legitimizing and reproducing the norms and practices which undergird political-economic institutions (Lipschutz, 2010), and which may contribute to reproducing spatially distinctive regimes, or varieties of capitalism. This is particularly so with respect to countries outside of the western cultural sphere such as Japan, where popular culture outputs take markedly different forms and, arguably, media delivery techniques and technologies are more advanced.

Thus, while Estevez-Abe (2005, 2006) suggests that cross-national differences in gender segregation among advanced economies may be due in part to variations in investment in male skill regimes, explaining that the lack of progress in Japan is due to multiple institutional factors (Estevez-Abe, 2013), Mandel and Shalev (2009) argue that social class is an important explanatory variable. Neither, however, analyse the entrenched cultural influences that feed the deep-seated prejudices that might encourage subjective bias towards investment in male career advancement and which would, in turn, institutionalize gender segregation in the workplace and contribute towards its persistence. Although Rubery (2009) concedes that a broader perspective is needed from scholars working in the varieties of capitalism literature, she does not advocate examining the role of culture in reproducing spatial variability in institutional values and preferences. Indeed, Soskice (2005) acknowledges these weaknesses in comparative political economy by stating that, despite its purpose being to analyse spatial variation in political-economic institutions among capitalist regimes, the varieties of capitalism literature does not do enough to explain geographical differences in gender equality in the workplace. Consequently, in choosing Japan, popular culture, manga and workplace gendering as our discursive territory, we take up the challenge laid down by Czarniawska in this journal (2006, p. 235), who states that 'the silent actions that form the core of gendering practices in society are taken for granted to such a great extent' that empirical studies 'cannot easily be conducted by following the traditional research design' and that fiction is therefore 'one possible underexploited venue for research'. And we concur with Lipschutz, who argues for the cultural geographic analysis of comparative political economy by stating that popular culture serves recursively 'to reproduce social being and associated beliefs, contexts, and social practices since these products draw on and mirror those societies and times for which they are produced' (2010, p. 2). Popular culture, in other words, plays a substantial role in framing, legitimizing and reproducing cultural norms or institutions that are central to the varieties of capitalism and national business systems discourses in comparative political economy.

Manga is deeply implicated in the *longue duree* of the emergence of Japanese civilization as a front-rank contributor to global cultural and economic discourse. Combining iconography from pre-modern woodblock prints with modern American comic and cinematic techniques, manga achieved mass appeal in the early post-war decades, developing into its contemporary role as a core media in Japan's hyper-mediated cultural space and heavily influencing the development of derivatives such as animation, video games and merchandising, as well as television, film and literature (Saito, 2011). Customarily manga was, and is, consumed in weekly serial instalments packaged within disposable anthologies (*shūkanshi*) and sold through kiosks. *Shūkanshi* are aimed at particular market segments, such as *shōnen* or *shōjo* manga for boys or girls, or *seinen* or *josei* manga for men or women. Successful stories are repackaged as serialized graphic novels, or *tankōbon*, which since 2005 have

outsold *shūkanshi* as the predominant mode of consumption (RIP, 1994–2010). Bestsellers are then rapidly hyper-mediated into websites, video games, anime, feature films and television dramas, and licensed for merchandising, advertising and public relations.

Manga is one of the most widely consumed media in Japan, generating greater revenues than the Japanese film industry, for example (Kinsella, 2000), and its presence within Japanese socio-cultural and political life is pervasive. Beyond entertainment, it is understood as social commentary, an information source and guide to behaviour, a teaching tool, a subversive critique and even a vehicle for government policy (Dasgupta, 2000; Gaens, 2010; Kinsella, 2000; McCurry, 2009; Yamamoto *et al.*, 2009). Moreover, its influence is not trivial; yakuza crime syndicate members have used manga as inspiration (Ito, 2005), it has initiated international political disputes (Clifford, 2004; Rosenbaum, 2006), and is instrumental in building a shared, and contested, regional cultural space in East Asia (Iwabuchi, 2002).

Scholarly attention to manga in English emerged with Skinner's (1979) survey of salaryman manga, and Schodt's (1983) overview, but it was Kinsella (2000) who brought manga into mainstream socio-cultural analysis of contemporary Japan. Crucially, identity and ontology are at the heart of many stories (Dasgupta, 2000; Matanle *et al.*, 2008), with manga also being implicated in the construction of gender relations under the male gaze (Allison, 2000). This attention to manga complements emerging interest in western comics, with Gerde and Foster (2008, p. 245) noting that they provide narrative traction for presenting the 'complexities and social context of specific topics, from critiques of capitalism to faulty products or discrimination at the workplace'.

As a sub-genre, salaryman manga — as well as its more recent 'sister' genre aimed at working women — combines detail and realism on Japanese working life with iconographic motifs, and this juxtaposition is important in evoking a deeper commitment to character identities and narrative ontologies (Saito, 2011). Our research sharpens understanding of the relationship between fiction and the workplace by moving beyond simple critiques of representation towards a deeper acknowledgement of how and in what forms culture contributes to reproducing the spatially distinctive institutional components of contemporary political-economic regimes; the latter being a central concern of the varieties of capitalism and national business systems discourses. We propose that manga aimed at working people, through its 'transportation' of and 'collaboration' with the reader (see Green and Brock, 2005; Oatley, 2011) generates an 'ontological commitment' (see Quine, 1953; van Inwagen, 2003) to character identities and narrative tropes that conflate stereotypical assumptions about working people with defensive exceptionalist critiques of western modes of capitalist organization. The outcome of this is a recursive reinforcement of patriarchal and nationalist attitudes, identities and behaviours, and the further entrenchment of gender inequality as a normative condition within a sharply delineated national political economic space. Although this coexists alongside a knowing and ironic critique of organizational power, we argue that this remains peripheral to hyper-mediated mainstream narratives that defend, even advocate, gender inequality as an essential, even desirable, characteristic of a distinctively Japanese regime of political economy.

Women working in Japanese organizations

Every national political economy creates ideal representations of itself via text and image, whose transcendence depends on both the maintenance of a hegemonic system of institutions and people's willingness to substantiate their place within them. Hence, institutional norms and organizational structures are necessarily rooted in the construction of a hegemonic culture of the standard citizen and worker (Foucault, 1991; see also Dasgupta, 2013), to which individuals are expected to conform. Alongside its role in representing social life, popular culture is therefore pivotal in mediating the institutions and cultures of capitalism into praxis; for, an inevitable corollary of the pervasive pressure to become a standard citizen and worker is public demand for narratives and images — and their normative rationales — that feed those concerns and prejudices.

Here we describe the depth of gender inequality that permeates Japan's political economy, its foundation in the common assumption that men and women are self-evidently *unequal* and,

therefore, that a gendered employment system is natural, even desirable. We present four manga and explain how their portrayal of the standard Japanese female form and, crucially, its American Other, reinforce the narrative reproduction of a distinctive and gendered political-economic space.

Although the existence of gendered employment conditions is being questioned in many countries as increasing numbers of women reach the highest positions in their national political economies, in contrast to its achievements in other spheres, Japan has achieved slower progress in advancing gender equality in the workplace. A distinctive feature of the Japanese political economy is the depth and extent of gender embeddedness, where seemingly independent domains of discrimination aggregate and correlate, intensifying inequality and contributing to its persistence. Gender segregation exists at all stages of employment, from hiring to placement, training, career development, promotion, working hours and pay (JIWE, 2002; Kimoto, 2005, pp. 67–8; Nemoto, 2013; Takeishi, 2006, p. 47). Also implicated is gender bias in task allocation (Kimoto, 2003), and in supervisors' guidance, evaluation and motivation of employees (JIL, 1997). Even mandatory retirement ages were different in many companies before the EEOL (Takeishi, 2006, p. 21).

Indeed, throughout Japan's modern development, the Japanese management system has excluded women from core positions. Whereas economic historians argue for the early institutionalization of gendered employment in Meiji industry (Hunter, 2003), its postwar entrenchment (Macnaughtan, 2006), and spread to service occupations (Komagawa, 2007), industrial relations experts identify historically and culturally rooted personnel management practices as the origin of a paternalistic employment system (Koike, 1988). Rather than improving equality, as was the stated intention of the EEOL, the law also reinforces the pervasive belief that gender inequality is self-evidently natural, and that gender segregation in the workplace is worthy and beneficial. Hence, we differ from Estevez-Abe (2006), who states that cross-national differences in gender segregation in the workplace are an unintended consequence of employment protection and vocational training regimes. The notorious dual-track employment system, introduced by companies in response to the EEOL (Kimoto, 2003, p. 40), intended from the outset to establish separate career paths and outcomes for men and women according to firm requirements such as employee transfers, overtime and job tasks. Indeed, the gendering of career paths has become so entrenched that, even today, after decades of equal opportunities legislation and pro-feminist discourse in Japan, personnel officers and female applicants usually assume that the '*sōgō-shoku*' career track is onerous when balancing with applicants' anticipated domestic duties, and most women either specifically apply for, or are paternalistically steered into, the '*ippan-shoku*' clerical track, becoming 'office ladies' (OLs). Although foreign-owned corporations have been viewed as a 'relief route' for career-minded women, even there women's circumstances are more nuanced and varied than is commonly understood (Bozkurt, 2012; Olcott and Oliver, 2014). Furthermore, Japanese organizations' repeated restructuring measures are continuously narrowing and reducing opportunities for regular employment overall, and women are being differentially affected (Keizer, 2009; Matanle and Matsui, 2011; Meyer-Ohle, 2009; Pudelko, 2009). The focus on male employees and the closeness of enterprise unions to management are also associated with weak union support for equal employment (Broadbent, 2003).

Government labour policy is also ineffective in enabling the uptake of women into core positions, promoting their use as a low-cost non-regular subordinate employment buffer to protect male regular employment (Yokoyama, 2002), because there is little provision for relieving women of domestic tasks (Kawaguchi, 2008, pp. 251–4). In contrast with elsewhere, where continuous employment is the norm, in Japan the infamous M-shaped labour participation curve still demonstrates that many women in regular employment withdraw from the labour force after marriage and childbirth (Macnaughtan, 2006), to be re-employed in non-regular jobs once children begin education.

Beyond employment, other institutions remain persistently gendered. Disadvantages brought about by childbirth outside of wedlock, the waiting period required for remarriage, inequalities in pensions and taxation, and gender bias in education, are also recognized as hindering women's advancement in the workplace (Nakanishi, 1998; Yokoyama, 2002). Recently media and political controversies have focused on the contention that women continue to be evaluated by society according to their achievements in marriage, and childbearing and rearing, rather than their work

accomplishments (e.g., Ogura, 2003). Sakai Junko's *Makeinu no Tōboe* (Howl of the Losing Dog, 2003) became a lightning rod by arguing that Japanese women's ultimate goal is still to become a wife; that no matter how much career success she has achieved, a woman is just a loser if she remains unmarried. Indeed, such norms are deeply embedded into the fabric of Japanese modernity. According to Dasgupta (2013), the

emerging discourse of gender and sexuality was inextricably linked to the industrial-capitalist and military-nationalist enterprise — the Empire needed pliant, productive workers and soldiers of its male citizens and 'Good Wives, Wise Mothers' (*ryōsai kenbo*) of its female citizens [...] Thus official and popular discourse [...] and official and semi-official popular culture media, worked to inculcate and reinforce these hegemonic ideals of masculinity and femininity ... popular culture representations also served an important prescriptive and reinforcing function — how to 'correctly' perform salaryman masculinity in terms of work, consumer habits, deportment, and lifestyle patterns (p. 28).

We argue that, *ipso facto*, the inverse is also true for women as homemakers or office ladies.

Working women are thus often described as not being committed to their careers, for example spending time looking for marriage partners (McLendon, 1983), or in resistance against male colleagues (Ogasawara, 1998). Through these texts, and the media attention they garner, the impression is conveyed not only that Japanese women's primary concern lies in love and marriage, but that they *ought* to be 'working' towards becoming a full-time housewife. According to such logic, women are paternalistically seen as either being too delicate to be exposed to the full rigours of 'male' employment, or deserve not to be promoted to management due to their 'female' attitudes and behaviours. Hence, Kumazawa (1993) maintains that Japanese women are caught in a discrimination trap, that those who adopt short-termist work orientations are simply responding to the poor understanding of women's situations by predominantly male employers; but they end up encouraging the very accusation that they despise, going on to be labelled irresponsible and unworthy of promotion, and even as 'parasites' (see Yamada, 1999). Managers observe this, noticing the media attention it receives, and substantiate prejudiced assessments of female employees by further entrenching gender discrimination within organizations, thereby encouraging women to adopt short-termist work orientations.

Accordingly, Japanese women's socio-economic circumstances must be seen within the broader context of a gendered political economy, and a gendered culture, which themselves recursively interact to institutionalize gendered workplace norms as an essential attribute of Japan's variety of capitalism. Before weaving our four manga into the article's theoretical schema, we need to explain the role that fiction plays in the reproduction of social life.

The psychology of fiction

Fiction is a simulation of identities, themes and events of psychological and emotional importance to the consumer, but its relation to praxis remains largely unacknowledged and, therefore, unexplored by the social sciences because of its assumed lack of empirical existence (Gerrig, 1998; Oatley, 1999, 2002, 2011; Rhodes and Westwood, 2008). Yet fiction maintains a powerful instructive presence throughout everyone's lives; from folk tales warning children not to talk with strangers, to soap operas featuring contemporary moral panics, to films dealing with the vicissitudes of ageing and death. Some argue that fiction's influence may be more pervasive than non-fiction (Czarniawska, 2006; Oatley, 1999). Here's how.

Fiction 'transports' readers into an imaginative realm where the internal coherence of the text complements perceived experiences (memory) and desires (aspiration) (Gerrig, 1998; Green and Brock, 2005; Oatley, 1999, 2011). In the process, the Self experiences transformation via a collaborative process of simulated mental model construction at the cognitive interface between text/image (producers) and experience/knowledge/aspiration (consumers) (Green and Brock, 2005; Oatley, 2011). As fictional characters have names, personalities, physical characteristics, and participate in coherent

narratives, they do not lack empirical existence. It is not 'just fiction'. Characters have a real-world existence (Quine, 1953; van Inwagen, 2003), if not as humans then as notional characters with an identifiable set of values expressed via credible and persuasive behavioural norms, and which draw consumers into an ontological commitment to their personalities, identities and perspectives. It is the uncluttered cleanness of that coherence within the spiral of values, aspirations, behaviours, experiences and memories, which is lacking in a more chaotic and 'dirty' real world, which induces the consumer to commit to character ontologies, and which gives fiction its special traction over praxis. Indeed, we suggest that, because the Japanese worldview tends towards viewing imagination and experience together as a singularity — that it lacks a Platonic radical separation of reality and its ideal — it is more 'realistic' than the sharp — but false — western dualism of fiction and non-fiction. Japanese consumers are therefore perhaps more inclined to treat text and image as a 'real' presence in their lives that rivals, complements and interacts with 'actual' experience. Hence, also, the centrality of manga as a simultaneously graphic and textual cultural output in Japan (see Saito, 2011).

Notwithstanding, popular culture is not received passively; consumers engage with it according to the attitudes, values and experiences they bring to it (Hall, 2001). Social reproduction includes a process of communication and reception between producers and consumers of culture via speech, text and image. Popular culture also challenges the consumer to reconsider the world, how it is ordered, to consider alternatives and to act. This process is integral to cultural consumption, which is why storytelling has such a deep resonance with human subjectivity and its social realization. Thus, irony is present in the manga that we analyse, via caricature and exaggeration and, despite its predominantly male orientation, within the stories there is a subversive account which invites readers to reassess their workplaces. Manga aimed at working men and women, through its depictions of power and gender relations in the workplace, similarly may prompt critique of the reader's life-world and encourage reconsideration of his or her own actions and the ways in which gender is 'performed' through everyday reproductions of agency (Hall *et al.*, 2007; Matanle *et al.*, 2008; Pullen and Knights, 2007).

While we acknowledge the social construction of gender and hence the potentially fluid 'performing' and 'undoing' of gender through action and media-cultural subversion (Butler, 2004; Hall *et al.*, 2007; Hancock and Tyler, 2007; Phillips and Knowles, 2012; Pullen and Knights, 2007), we nevertheless point also to the reinforcing role of salaryman manga as regards gender roles through the ontological commitment it aims to generate among its overwhelmingly male audience. This effect holds also in the manga aimed at women, as we shall see, but in a slightly different way. Thus, despite legitimizing female work roles beyond those of the office lady, the socially unsanctioned female performance of masculine roles and hence the 'undoing' of gender (Butler, 2004; Pullen and Knights 2007) ultimately results in stereotypical outcomes. Although all media products can be received and interpreted in various ways by consumers, we suggest that the recursive reinforcement effects of these media are particularly relevant given the overtly *prescriptive* role embedded into many Japanese popular cultural outputs, with manga being prominent among these (Dasgupta, 2013).

Working women in Japanese manga

Here we present four contemporary manga that feature Japanese working life as the context for character development and narrative construction. We chose these because all have been national number one bestsellers in their genre and been hyper-mediated into anime, live action drama, feature film, public relations and other derivatives. The first two, *Shima Kōsaku* (Hirokane, 1984–Present; 62 volumes) and *Salaryman Kintarō* (Motomiya, 1994–Present; 42 volumes) are the most popular salaryman manga of the past three decades, while the others, *Kimi wa Petto* (Ogawa, 2000–2005; 14 volumes) and *Hataraki-man* (Anno, 2006–2010; 4 volumes), are mostly aimed at working women. Following these, we focus on two particularly iconographic female characters featured in *Salaryman Kintarō*, before proffering some analysis and conclusions.

We chose our manga also because their characters and narratives neatly encapsulate important changes that have, and have not, taken place in Japan and the Japanese workplace over the three

decades since the publication of the first volume of *Shima Kōsaku*. The first two manga, aimed at a predominantly male readership, began publication in the 1980s (*Shima Kōsaku*), as Japan went through its apogee of the 'Bubble Economy', and then the subsequent 'Lost Decade' of the 1990s (*Salaryman Kintarō*). As such, they emerged from different sets of circumstances, which is reflected in their early content, with debonair Shima Kōsaku representing the 'invincible' Japanese corporate manager on a mission to expand his company's national and, then, global presence. Raw and indefatigable underdog Yajima Kintarō, on the other hand, emerges in the 1990s, just as concerns began to appear about the sustainability of the Japanese model of political economy. In this series he battles against corrupt and vainglorious domestic enemies. A decade later Kintarō finds himself embroiled with external threats in the form of a globalizing American bank seeking to impose neoliberal values and practices onto the Japanese capitalist order. Although these two manga reflect changes occurring in Japan through the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, what is conspicuous is, first, the lack of change in their portrayals of Japanese women and, second, the somewhat over-wrought comparison in *Salaryman Kintarō* between the embodiment of Japanese femininity Suenaga Misuzu in series one, and the 'typical' American female Other, Janet Taylor, in series two. We argue that Taylor's appearance came at a time of grave national self-doubt in the face of a globalizing neoliberal American capitalism and, accompanied by pro-equality government legislation, the emergence of a more self-confident Japanese feminism. Concurrently we also see the emergence of manga featuring working women, and we present two here: *Kimi wa Petto* and *Hataraki-man*. Ostensibly feminist representations, these two ultimately fail to convince that a new era has dawned in the Japanese workplace, falling back as they do on portraying their protagonists' yearnings for love and marriage (*Kimi wa Petto*), or stereotypical depictions of radically different male and female work styles (*Hataraki-man*). Below we present key episodes from the manga, concentrating later on the especially striking depictions of the female Self and Other (Suenaga Misuzu and Janet Taylor) in *Salaryman Kintarō*.

First published in 1983 in Kōdansha's *Shūkan Morning*, *Shima Kōsaku* begins with the protagonist as section chief (*kachō*) at electric appliance manufacturer Hatsushiba Electric. The series has been hyper-mediated into three feature films⁴ and several television dramas, converted into anime and video-game versions,⁵ and its protagonist has featured in advertising and public relations campaigns, recently in collaboration with Bandai and Sharp for merchandising of electronic calculators (Mainichi Daily News, 2011). Corporate rebel, debonair international manager and workaholic salaryman, Shima rises through the ranks to become President in June 2008 through gritty application of the salaryman values of hard work, loyalty, teamwork and self-sacrifice. Informed by author Hirokane's experience of working for Matsushita Electric, *Shima Kōsaku* offers a conventional portrayal of salaryman masculinity and gender relations, as Shima's dedication to his company and career is balanced by being divorced for ignoring his wife and family, having an affair with a younger subordinate, and fathering a child out of wedlock. Indeed, early on, Shima visits New York where he encounters an American woman while returning to his hotel, and sleeps with her after asking for directions; only to discover next morning that she works for the company with which he is negotiating.

Although the manga has been described as accurately depicting Japanese organizational life (Gaens, 2010), it also offers an escapist portrait, what with Shima's managerial charisma, sexual magnetism and cosmopolitan outlook! Like most popular cultural outputs in Japan that feature the workplace, *Shima Kōsaku* places Japanese women in subordinate positions, either as potential conquests or as dependent care-givers. Where female regular employees are shown, they are young OLs and peripheral to plot and character development. Significantly, in the most recent series of *Shachō Shima Kōsaku* published in 2008–12 (Hirokane, 1983–Present; 7 (1–7)), we do not encounter any female managers.

Salaryman Kintarō was first published in 1994 in *Shūeisha's* weekly anthology *Young Jump*. It mixes fantasy with realism to play to younger Japanese sensibilities in the 1990s and 2000s workplace. Yajima Kintarō is a former hooligan bike-gang leader turned fisherman and dutiful husband, who fulfils late-wife Akemi's wish for him to raise their son Ryūta in a stable environment when he is offered employment as a salaryman in return for saving the life of the chairman of a major construction company. The first series (1994–2002) has Kintarō battling against corruption and *amakudari*⁶ in

the nefarious world of Japan's 1990s construction industry, while the second, *Money Wars* (2006–09), features Kintarō at the Tokyo subsidiary of American investment bank INB, fighting the globalization of neoliberal financial capital (see Matanle *et al.*, 2008). A third series (*Shin-Salaryman Kintarō*, 2010–Present), has recently begun and has Kintarō working at a media organization.

Whereas *Shima Kōsaku* targets managers, *Salaryman Kintarō* evokes sympathy for ordinary salarymen. While the two ran concurrently, *Salaryman Kintarō* achieved greater popularity, selling 24 million *tankōbon* between 1997 and 2002, maintaining the number one position for *Young Jump* among *seinen shūkanshi* (1997 weekly circulation 1.97 million) (RIP, 1994–2010). *Salaryman Kintarō* has been rendered into anime, four live-action television dramas, two feature films, an iPhone/iPad web series, and featured in advertising, merchandising and public relations campaigns. Unlike the sophisticated, cosmopolitan, but devious Kōsaku, Kintarō is earnestly naive in his quest for justice, and devoted to his family. Like *Shima Kōsaku*, women feature as subordinates within the workplace and care-givers outside. Single women are young, biddable, naive and looking for a partner. Though present, non-conformist challenges to these stereotypes are depicted at the very least as unfeminine, such as in the comparison between Suenaga Misuzu and Janet Taylor in *Salaryman Kintarō*, which we will now examine.

The feminine self and other in Salaryman Kintarō

Suenaga Misuzu emerges in series one of *Salaryman Kintarō* as the seductive owner of a hostess bar in Tokyo's upscale Ginza district. Well-connected, she is the former lover to the late Prime Minister. At work Misuzu wears a stylish kimono and displays an alluring demeanour while catering to her male clientele. She is confident, beguiling and exploits her sexuality with a gentle charm. Misuzu is the quintessential Japanese female Self, presenting a sophisticated but conventionally feminine disposition throughout.

Kintarō is introduced to Misuzu by Mita Zenkichi, a mentor to them both. Misuzu laments her loneliness to Mita, who is certain they will fall in love. That evening Kintarō and Misuzu share a limousine and the driver asks if they should proceed to her apartment, to which she agrees. Later, Akemi appears in Kintarō's dream, releasing him and encouraging him to move on. Waking, Kintarō finds Misuzu in the kitchen wearing an apron and preparing breakfast. She hands him a newspaper and, as if already married, he grunts responses to her questions.

Unsurprisingly, Misuzu and Kintarō fall in love and he proposes marriage, on condition that she quit her business. Misuzu's transformation to supportive housewife is completed when, honeymooning in Hawaii, she submits, saying 'I will become an ordinary woman if it means I can be with you' (Motomiya, 1994–Present, 1 (13), pp. 40–1). Through these courtship scenes, Misuzu exchanges her independence to provide loving domestic support for her husband's career; a role which henceforth she pursues assiduously.

The leading female character of series two of *Salaryman Kintarō*, *Money Wars*, is American investment banker Janet Taylor. Like Misuzu, she is beautiful, independent and self-confident, but is the antithesis of Misuzu's soft Japanese allure. Unlike Misuzu, Janet lacks humility, charm, playfulness and humour; instead, she is ruthlessly devious and hard-edged. Her early appearance in *Money Wars* has her standing in the trading floor lecturing Kintarō on the cruelty of the global financial system, who turns towards the reader to say, 'So that's a typical American woman' (Motomiya, 1994–Present, 2 (Prologue)).

Despite the near decade separation between publication of these scenes, author Motomiya self-consciously deploys virtually identical iconographic motifs in a repeat of Kintarō's first encounter with Misuzu, which has Janet suggest that they take a taxi to her hotel and have dinner. However, Janet is brutally abrupt, leaning across the back seat of the taxi to command, 'I have never been with a Japanese man before. Sleep with me tonight!' Kintarō is shocked, as Janet states that she would never forgive a refusal. Later, she out-manoeuvres him by winning a bet to regain money lost by Kintarō's line manager, Takimoto. Gloating, she stares coldly down at Kintarō performing the forfeit

of licking her high-heeled shoes, growling, 'Yajima Kintarō, by prostrating yourself you throw away your pride as a Japanese salaryman'.⁷

In this way, the story delivers a confrontational relationship between Kintarō, pure-hearted, loyal and indefatigable Japanese salaryman fighting for justice, and the cold, manipulative and overbearing American female Other, Janet Taylor. Predictably, Janet subordinates herself to Kintarō, growing to respect and admire him, when later he saves the bank from implosion.

Working women in Kimi wa Petto and Hataraki-man

Published in Kōdansha's bi-monthly *josei* manga *Kiss* (250,000 weekly circulation) from 2000 to 2005, *Kimi wa Petto* (You're my pet) entered the bestseller lists in 2003, selling 3.7 million *tankōbon* by 2005 (RIP, 1994–2010). It follows Iwaya Sumire, a needy and anxiety-driven journalist and Tokyo University graduate, and begins with her being dumped by her boyfriend and demoted at work, encountering a young homeless man in a cardboard box on her way home, and offering him a room if he agrees to be her pet, all on the same day. She gives him a female nickname 'Momo' (Peach), after her childhood dog, saying that, as he is short and poor, he is unsuitable as a potential husband, as she wants the conventionally perfect man — tall, with a high salary and prestigious education. Later, she bumps into tall, well-educated and rich Hasumi, a past admirer. The story explores the tension between her platonic adoration of Momo, her awkward relationship with Hasumi and her difficulties getting due recognition at work.

Despite its early depiction of an intelligent and career-driven female journalist, the story disappointingly metamorphoses into the classic Japanese fairytale romance of a decidedly mismatched couple discovering through their platonic companionship that they are developing deep feelings for one another. It is noticeable, for example, that depictions of Sumire at work become less frequent as the narrative develops, and relationship scenes come to predominate, with Sumire becoming more submissive to Momo and Hasumi as the narrative develops. The climax involves a series of emotionally charged scenes as it dawns on Sumire and Momo that each might be the love that they have both been searching for.

In the second manga aimed at women, 29-year-old Matsukata Hiroko is the straightforwardly competitive and work-driven main character of *Hataraki-man* (Workaholic-man). Appearing from 2004 to 2007 in *Shūkan Morning*, *Hataraki-man* achieved popularity among men and women, selling 3.3 million *tankōbon* by 2007 (RIP, 1994–2010). Devoted to her work for the weekly magazine *Shūkan JIDAI*, Matsukata is allergic to being outdone by her colleagues and laments her disappointing love life, repeatedly being stood up by her equally work obsessed boyfriend. Her colleagues nickname her '*hataraki-man*', for her freakish ability to switch into 'male hyper-work mode' (Figure 1) and get any job done.

Significantly, Matsukata will do anything to get a date, including sacrificing her work by leaving early. Moreover, despite being notable for its varied portrayals of males and females, delving into their career motivations and obsessions — Chief Editor Umemiya is an old-school paternalistic boss; sexist towards his female subordinates, he nevertheless takes responsibility when problems arise — author Anno has the exaggeratedly demure Nogawa Yumi using her feminine wiles to get the scoop on a baseball star that Matsukata had failed to land by using straightforward — read masculine — journalism. However, working woman Matsukata is defined throughout the manga, not as an independent and strong *female*, but by her nickname and her 'special' ability to *work like a man*. Like the other women described herein, Matsukata is also subordinated; this time to Nogawa, her preparedness to take shouted orders from her boss, and her frustrated inability to progress romantically with her boyfriend.

Popular culture in Japan's gendered capitalism

Popular culture is replete with stereotypical images that feed prejudiced assumptions (Lipschutz, 2010); with a recurrent motif being the deserved subordination of the deviant 'other' and

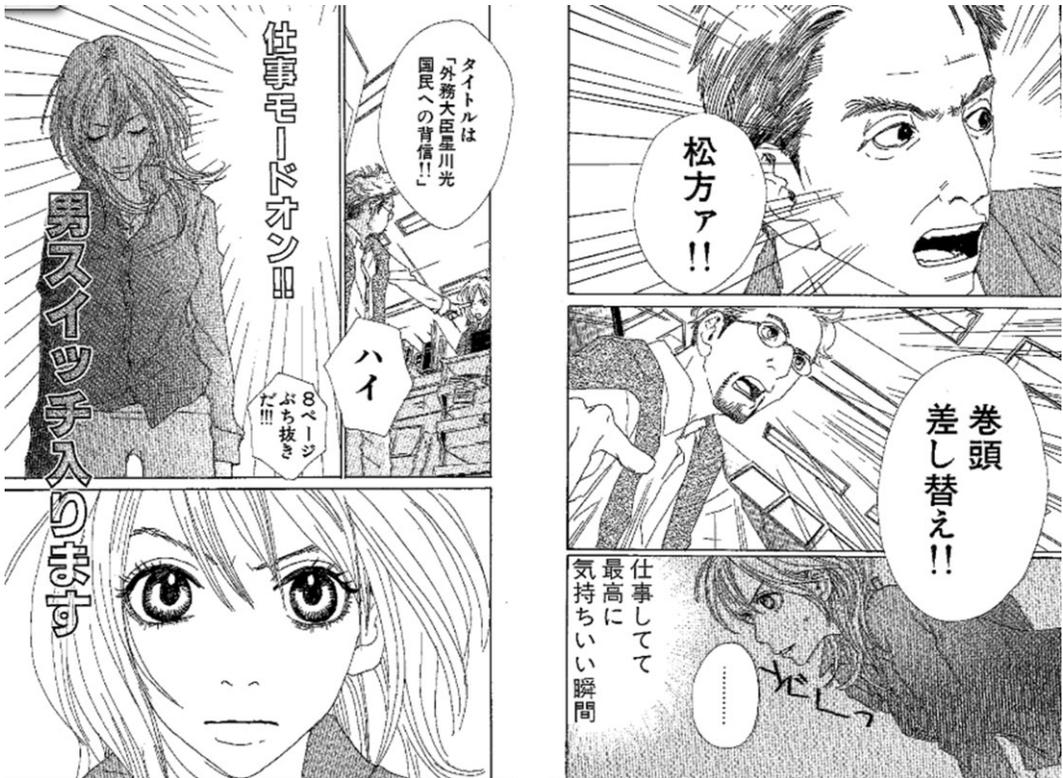


Figure 1: Matsukata Hiroko receives her shouted orders from Desk Editor Narita Kimio, and switches into 'male work mode' © Anno Moyoco/Cork Inc. Reproduced with kind permission.

Source: Anno, 2004–2010, 1 (1): no page no.

The dialogue proceeds as follows.

NK: MATSUKATAAAA! Replace the preface!!

MH: I get the biggest buzz from working ...

NK: The title is Foreign Minister Hoshikawa Hikaru Betrays the Nation!!

MH: OK. WORK MODE ON!! 8 pages coming up!!!!

NK: MAN SWITCH TURNED ON.

re-establishment of normative social relations. In salaryman manga, women most commonly feature as dependent support for men, either as office ladies or in nurturing roles; the former reflecting the dual-track employment system and the latter the conventional norm that assumes women's self-realization is and should be through love, marriage, childbirth and labour force withdrawal. Younger single women may play a romantic or sexually provocative role, which usually includes a headstrong demeanour, meeting the main character, falling in love, experiencing frustrations as the relationship develops, and a crisis event culminating in romantic submission, or rejection and exit from the story. Even on the very rare occasions when women are portrayed as career track employees, they are usually employed in personnel departments nurturing their male colleagues' career development, such as in the first volume of *Salaryman Kintarō*. None of the manga that we studied had Japanese females occupying executive positions in their workplaces.

Despite ostensibly presenting a feminist appeal to younger working women, both *Kimi wa Petto* and *Hataraki-man* also ultimately conform to traditional tropes, and neither challenge the assumption

that men are self-evidently more suited to being managers. Of these, only *Hataraki-man* asserts that prioritizing one's work, even temporarily, might be an acceptable life choice — though the female protagonist is portrayed as *unnatural* for her 'special' ability to work 'like a man'. Indeed, their portrayal as depressive and neurotic (Iwaya), or freakishly competitive (Matsukata), mark both as unsuited to management, in that although traditional gender roles are partially 'undone' (Butler, 2004; Pullen and Knights, 2007), the 'undoing' produces unsustainable outcomes. Neither do the four manga provide examples of women who balance success in work with family life, indicating that a choice needs to be made and that, for women, the latter is the appropriate one.

The self-conscious juxtaposition in *Salaryman Kintarō* of Suenaga Misuzu and Janet Taylor provides the most visually compelling scenes in the four manga under study. Misuzu becomes *more* submissive as her relationship with Kintarō develops, as does Janet. When we first encounter her in 1994, Misuzu is independent, self-confident, self-reliant and single. By 2004 she has become a submissive, dependent and supportive housewife and borne Kintarō a child. In this she displays the appropriate choices that Japanese society expects women to make on becoming *shakaijin*, or a responsible adult, by successfully deploying her femininity in finding a husband, bearing children, withdrawing from the labour force, supporting him in his career, and maintaining a comfortable and stable home. Cold and ruthless predator Janet, however, is the inappropriate American 'Other' — her blunt and uncompromising behaviours at odds with the smoothly efficient gendered hierarchy of the prototypical Japanese workplace. Throughout, Janet finds neither love nor gives birth to a child, presenting an instructional contrast with Misuzu in the outcomes that women 'deserve' according to their behavioural choices. Crucial, therefore, is the fact that *Salaryman Kintarō* is not aimed at women, but at the younger men who will one day make the personnel decisions within Japanese companies; and who will send socialization signals to the workforce as to what is appropriate for their gender, workplace and nation.

The ritualistic subordination of the strong female in the service of male 'work' and the national political economy has deep cultural roots in Japan, as elsewhere, and features in other forms of storytelling that manga sits alongside, exerting tremendous imaginative purchase on gender relations. Janet Taylor-type characters are not uncommon in Japanese media outputs. *Money Wars*, for example, bears an uncanny resemblance to a 1998 year-end docudrama, *Risutora Dansu* (Restructuring Dance), which also features the takeover of a Japanese bank by an American multinational, and the struggle over the imposition of the values and norms of American financial capitalism within the Japanese business milieu. The docudrama is almost certainly an instructional warning against allowing US investors to take rich pickings among Japan's, at that time vulnerable, financial institutions, and which came to pass in the deeply unpopular real-life takeover of the Long-Term Credit Bank and its rebranding as Shinsei Bank by the US private equity group Ripplewood Holdings in 2000 (see Tett, 2004; Yorozu *et al.*, 2013). A particularly iconographic clip from *Risutora Dansu* was re-broadcast by the BBC (2000) in a documentary on Japan's 'Lost Decade'. Following is a transcript:

Voiceover: The foreign invasion has become a nationalist scare story. It's been taken up in a TV drama about an American takeover of an ailing Japanese bank. Employees quake as the manager from hell moves in. The new boss is not only American, she's a woman.

Sarah Stanton: (To employees) Your eyes are lifeless.

Cuts to five Japanese standing inside the door and facing Stanton. Two middle aged men, two younger men, and one younger woman at the far end.

Stanton: I've checked you all out. You're nothing but a burden to this bank.

Oldest Man: On what grounds do you say that? (More emotion in voice) We've been working hard in our own way. We're proud of our ways. And look at the state of the country ...

Stanton: Results! Results are everything! It's nothing to do with the state of Japan's economy. (Rising to confront the Japanese employees) From today, I'm the boss. (Turning away and walking to the window to look across town) If you're not happy, you can leave.

Taylor's and Stanton's caricatures of the cold and overbearing American female manager resonate across society, politics and culture in Japan, where positive attributes in men, such as independence

and assertiveness, are in women exaggerated into flaws that become the source of a character's deserved subordination. Textual and iconographic references to nation, custom and culture accentuate normative elements in the narrative construction of workplace cultures of Self and Other, legitimizing and reinforcing their institutionalization in the national political economy. The opening sequence of *Money Wars*, for example, has a double-page colour spread of Kintarō entering the interview room at the American bank, declaring 'I am *Japanese* Salaryman Yajima Kintarō!' (author emphasis).

Similar to Hollywood in the United States, manga is important because of its role in Japan as *the* national popular cultural artefact, out of which hyper-mediated derivatives are rapidly distributed, and because of its marked difference to conventional western popular cultural outputs. The Japanese government frequently endorses manga as a unique national cultural resource, stressing normative values and behaviours by its deployment of selected images and narratives from mainstream texts. Kintarō has appeared at least twice in government public relations campaigns, once as an example to wayward youth to end their defiance of conventional society by joining the Self-Defence Forces (SDF), suggesting that the SDF could 'offer the opportunity for a similarly radical transformation' of personal circumstances to recruits (Fruhstuck, 2007, p. 63), and in a Ministry of Finance poster which municipal governments nationwide were urged to display in public reception areas. Ostensibly promoting disaster insurance, the poster carries three images combining into a government-endorsed vision for conventional family dynamics, with Kintarō depicted as the strong and masculine protector and Misuzu as supportive and nurturing but dependent housewife and mother (YHPC, 2006).⁸ In both cases popular culture producers (artists, publishers, advertisers, etc.) collaborated intentionally with a national government ministry to leverage manga as a method of inducing changes in personal behaviour among the general public towards compliance with conventional national(ist) workplace and family norms and, thereby, in recursively embedding popular cultural motifs into the institutional arrangements of the national political economy.

Conclusion

Everyone has experienced being lost in a novel, play or film and been moved to act. Why else would the study of literature and culture be such an integral part of educating younger people into participation in social, economic and political life? Yet, fiction remains under-acknowledged by social scientists and, consequently, is under-researched as a variable in the production and reproduction of the contemporary political economy. Perhaps, as Czarniawska (2006) perceptively notes, it is the very real difficulty of empirically measuring such phenomena that discourages social scientists from acknowledging, and possibly even appreciating, the rootedness of social agency in the human imagination. In this article we combine theory from the study of literature and philosophy, sociology and psychology, and human geography and comparative political economy, to provide impetus for filling this void.

It is a truism that people experience fiction in ways that authors do not intend. Although our four manga suggest rival accounts, mainstream manga is not normally read with concentration, but quickly while riding a train or quietly sipping coffee during a break in the day. Consumers tend to read 'with' the text, which is why scholars should read 'against' it (Green and Brock, 2005; Janks, 2002). Moreover, manga is ubiquitous in Japan, whose narratives and tropes are delivered via a range of media outputs in an increasingly hyper-mediated, hyper-consumption society. To be sure, there are manga that seek to empower women by celebrating female self-confidence and independence but, as we have seen, even they may subvert gender equality ideals by depicting a workplace managed by men and staffed by women.

It is easy to trivialize popular culture, and conclude that it has no purchase on political-economic behaviours (Rhodes and Westwood, 2008); yet it is omnipresent in everyone's lives in a developed society. It is also insufficient to understand it as merely representing social life. Many characters are intentionally not representative, but exaggerated apocryphal instructional tropes, demonstrating

conventionally appropriate behaviours according to conflated textual and iconographic stereotypes. In the case of our manga they enable men to crudely compartmentalize female behaviour and develop and maintain prejudiced managerial responses to assumed female 'types' among employees or colleagues.

Mainstream manga aimed at working men and women presents a culturally exceptionalist vision of and for Japan's national political economy; one that intentionally defines itself in part through depictions of gender inequality, and thereby contributes to the institutionalization of gender norms in the workplace. Gendered employment segregation on the basis of conventional gender norms is portrayed as a self-evidently natural, essential and worthy attribute of Japan's political economy, and is set against stereotypically nationalist representations of the foreign (American) Other. This conflation of gender inequality with national identity construction is perhaps why, in part, and despite Japan's success in reducing gender inequality overall, gendered workplace segregation remains so deeply entrenched. Furthermore, it is perhaps why Japan is able to exhibit itself as the definitive example of a successfully developed non-western advanced economy, with a distinctive national variety of capitalism whose modes of cultural and economic development can be so readily spatially diffused to the rest of East and Southeast Asia.

Despite their reflection of changes to the Japanese political economy over three decades of publication, and the attempt by women's manga to depict ambivalence among working women about traditional gender norms, the four manga reinforce a male-dominated workplace where conventional female life choices still lie in love, marriage, family and support for male work. By pulling together a multi-disciplinary approach that theorizes how deeply hidden cultural biases contribute to the persistent gendering of the Japanese workplace, our research both broadens the scope of the varieties of capitalism discourse as well as suggesting implications for future theoretical and empirical research into the relationship between culture, in all its forms, and the contemporary workplace worldwide.

Notes

1. Calculations were done by the authors by combining the 1995 Human Development Index and 2011 Gender Inequality Index (GII). All developed countries with rankings on both indices in 1995 and 2011 were included (41 out of 47).
2. The OECD average gender wage gap was 22 per cent in 1996 (OECD, 2008).
3. The most recent available Gender Empowerment Measure rankings are from 2007/8.
4. The Internet Movie Database (<http://www.imdb.com/>) lists three Shima Kōsaku films, the first made for cinema release, and the latter two made for television. They are: *Kachō Shima Kōsaku*, Dir. Kichitaro Negishi (1992), *Kachō Shima Kōsaku*, Dir. Tatsu Sugimoto (2008), and *Kachō Shima Kōsaku 2: Hon Kon no Yūwaku*, Dir. Kyōji Ohtsuka (2008).
5. Super Famicom in 1993 and Nintendo DS in 2008.
6. Literally: 'Descent from heaven', where senior corporate executives and government officials parachute into lucrative post-retirement positions in subsidiaries and related organizations.
7. Reproductions of the manga frames for these scenes can be found in Matanle *et al.* (2008).
8. An electronic image of this poster can be found at: <http://www.yhp.co.jp/2006/10/post-15.php>.

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