Re-shaping the ‘salaryman’ image

The waning of Japan’s hegemonic male role model

Master Thesis History: Political Culture and National Identities

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Dutch newspaper *nrc.next* reported on April 13th 2015 that large Japanese companies are trying to get their employees to work shorter hours. These employees, often referred to as 'salaryman', are constantly fatigued. Long hours at work, after work drinking, and long commutes with little sleep in between workdays causes them to make more mistakes and portray diminished productivity. It will not lead to firing by the company due to the understood loyalty between employer and employee that has existed for decades. These salarymen can neither assist with housework nor with the care for children because of the grueling work hours. This issue had never been perceived as a serious problem, as their wives accepted the late night drinking sessions in return for a stable lifestyle for decades. Now that women have extended their independence through gainful employment, starting and supporting a family has become increasingly harder for both sexes. Despite these changes salarymen are still expected to make the same hours, sometimes driving them to *karoshi* – "death by overtime."[1] The 'salaryman' is viewed as the ideal representation of the typical Japanese man "by people both inside and outside Japan."[2]

This current image of the 'salaryman' is a far cry from the 'salaryman' image that arose in the 1980s with which the 'salaryman' is most often associated. The 'salaryman' was an ideal that not only Japanese men pursued and Japanese women wanted as their partners: he was seen in the West as the leading example for a loyal employee who complied willingly to and worked harmoniously in his company, ensuring a job until retirement as part of a tacit social contract. Dubbed as a 'corporate warrior', the 'salaryman''s diligent work ensured him a slow but steady rise through the ranks on the basis of age, and whose dark blue suit and leather briefcase are standard issue. All this was necessary to provide for his housewife and children, who went to the top schools and universities to follow in their father's footsteps. The worn out employee and 'corporate warrior' are both strong images on opposite sides of the ideal employee-spectrum. Yet both images are signified by the same term: the 'salaryman'.

The drastic change in the image of the 'salaryman' in this relatively short time period is striking and of main interest in this thesis. The research question of this MA thesis is: 'how did the meaning of the term 'salaryman' change over time and which differences do we observe in the secondary literature and in selected media sources?' The thesis will focus on

1 Floris van Straaten, "Ook na 17.00 uur blijft heel Japan op kantoor," *NRC.Next*, April 13th, 2015: 6.

2 J. Roberson and N. Suzuki, *Men and Masculinity in Contemporary Japan* (Abingdon: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 1.

the development of the ‘salaryman’ image from the 1980s until now, and the different functions of this image. This period is of special interest because Japanese business management and businessmen were viewed as examples for Western business in the 1980s and 1990s. Japan owed its leading role to its consistent economic growth from the mid-1950s onward, being the number two economy in the world, only outperformed by the United States in terms of GDP per capita. When the US’ economic performance dipped in the 1980s, Japan’s economy remained relatively stable. This prompted both researchers and journalists to find an explanation for Japan’s economic performance, which they found in Japan’s business sector and its salarymen.

In order to answer this research question, there are multiple political, economic and social developments that are significant factors in the image development of the ‘salaryman’. For one, how did the Japanese economy develop itself into one where the ‘salaryman’ could become the predominant role model for Japanese males? Japan had barely ventured into heavy industries or electronics before the Second World War and was mostly reliant on its agricultural villages instead of cities where power had been centralized. For the white-collar ‘salaryman’ to come up, Japan’s economic focus had to change drastically. This economic shift and its effect on Japanese labor relations will be the main focus of Chapter 2 of this thesis. An interesting development parallel to the shift of the economic focus was the changing role of women in labor. As the Japanese war effort drafted more and more men into the army, women took over their place on the farm and in the factories. How their position developed after the war will be discussed in Chapter 2 as well.

Chapter 3 will mainly cover topics that deal with what realities new salarymen must face and what it means to become a ‘salaryman’. These topics include education, the process of becoming a ‘salaryman’ within a large Japanese company, corporate culture in large Japanese companies, the ‘salaryman’’s role within the company, as well as his private life and his function as the hegemonic role model for Japanese men. It is prefaced by a short history on the origin of the term ‘salaryman’, to depict the ongoing evolution of the term instead of it being a fixed social construct.

Chapter 4 discusses the consequences of how corporate culture evolved between the 1980s and 2010s and the implications this evolution had for the ‘salaryman’’s position within the company and his image. Researchers have encountered clear differences between Western business practices and ‘Japanese management’, particularly in employment practices. Most researchers attributed this distinction to cultural and social factors seen as inherent to Japan that allowed for this specific type of business environment, which was the focus of research

on Japanese business in the 1990s. Since the bursting of the economic bubble in the mid-1990s however, research and literature on the ‘salaryman’ has taken a drastic turn. Factors first seen as the reason for success like lifetime employment, age-based wage increases, and a patriarchal company are now assessed as the reasons why Japanese businesses are lagging behind their Western competitors.

Chapter 4 concludes with the changing position of women in this period and how it affected the position and image of the ‘salaryman’. Realities for women have changed in significant ways as well. More women, for instance, choose to stay single and postpone marriage to later ages. They enjoy the freedom of their own jobs as ‘ office ladies’ (OL’s) and are less dependent on a male partner for income. Moreover, their position in the company is now better protected by laws that prevent sex discrimination on the work floor. This independency has had significant effects on institutions like marriage and family life.

The main topic of Chapter 5 is the image development of the ‘salaryman’ in popular Western media, how they shaped this image, and concludes with how the image portrayed in the media differs from that in the literature. A gap in ‘salaryman’ research is a side-by-side comparison of the image provided by scholarly research on the ‘salaryman’ on the one hand and the image provided by popular Western media on the other. These analyses will be discussed separately to critically assess ‘salaryman’ image development in both domains. This provides the reader with a comprehensive account on the ‘salaryman’ that doubles as an introductory account for those not familiar with Japanese business culture. The conclusion of chapter 5 will bring the two analyses together.

In Chapter 6, concluding remarks on the current research will be made. The chapter also deals with the question if we can still use the term ‘salaryman’ for new white-collar recruits in large Japanese companies, given the developments it has gone through in the past three decades and the function the term has today. This thesis argues that the term ‘salaryman’ is outdated in reference to new white-collar recruits in large Japanese companies. The decline in regular employment, the changing focus of seniority-based wages to merit-based wages and the waning of company union participation all indicate significant changes in ‘salaryman’ realities. As the ‘salaryman’ benefits have changed, so too have new recruits’ views on and expectations of their company and their jobs. To reflect these changes, a new term that better suits new recruits is suggested.

To better understand the transformation the ‘salaryman’ has undergone, a short discourse analysis of the term ‘salaryman’ is in order. Scholarly research between the late 1950s and

early 1980s defined the ‘salaryman’ in a way that comes close to the image of the ‘corporate warrior’ described above. According to James C. Abegglen in 1958, “an employee commits himself on entrance to the company for the remainder of his working career. The company will not discharge him even temporarily except in the most extreme circumstances. He will not quit the company for industrial employment elsewhere. He is a member of the company in a way resembling that in which persons are members of families.”[3] In his analysis, Abegglen touches upon the lifetime employment system, though he does not use the term. More of a social obligation rather than an actual contract, companies refrain from firing their employees as long as the employee commits himself to the company. It is one of the mainstays of the ‘salaryman’, as well as the patriarchal company. The problem with this analysis is Abegglen’s inconclusiveness on which groups of employees in the company are salarymen. It suggests lifetime employment as a reality for all workers and that all regularly employed workers in all sectors are salarymen which, despite Japan’s economic growth, could never have been a reality. Nevertheless, the image of the ‘salaryman’ as Japan’s typical businessman had been constructed.

Abegglen’s definition is fine-tuned by Ezra Vogel, who writes in 1963 that the ‘salaryman’ is “a white-collar worker in a large corporation or government bureaucracy.”[4] Thomas P. Rohlen argues that these salarymen are carefully selected by companies, as they will become a part of the company for a long time. These companies do not worry about “being unable to obtain sufficient manpower, but it does worry about the quality of the people who apply.”[5] If they are not up to standards, companies are stuck with an underperforming employee who will still receive a paycheck that involves bi-annual bonuses and age-based wage raises. Salarymen are thus “encouraged to participate actively in the performance of their firm and, most notably, are urged to contribute to the growth and potential of their company through their work,”[6] according to business researchers Bradley M. Richardson and Taizo Ueda. The ways early research deals with the ‘salaryman’ emphasizes the required quality of the

3 In: Thomas P. Rohlen, *For Harmony and Strength: Japanese White-Collar Organization in Anthropological Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 62.

4 In: James E. Roberson and Nobue Suzuki, “Introduction,” 1.

5 Rohlen, *For Harmony and Strength*, 67.

6 Bradley M. Richardson and Taizo Ueda, *Business and Society in Japan: Fundamentals for Businessmen* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1981), 9.

salarymen hired, their loyalty to the company for which in return they receive benefits that offer job security for the remainder of their career, providing a strong and diligent image.

Since the economic recession of the 1990s, researchers have changed their views on the Japanese business sector and with it their image of the 'salaryman'. Instead of stressing that it is everyone's wish to become a 'salaryman', sociologist Anne Allison emphasizes that the 'salaryman' is "the white-collar worker whose position in a large company is the standard goal of youths whose parents are, or wish their next generation to become, comfortably middle-class."[7] Parents are a great influence on their children, who sometimes do not want to chase the security of 'salaryman' life but are forced into it. Allison adds that Westerners wrongfully assume that the security and status offered by big companies with the accompanying benefits is attainable by all. On the contrary, these "are by no means standard in the Japanese workplace. Lifetime employment, for example, is common only for the highest in the hierarchy of workers and only in the largest of companies."[8]

The 'salaryman' image as paragon of the Japanese middle class has started to disappear, not just because his position was more exclusive than earlier research suggested, but also due to research contended using the term 'middle-class' for the majority of the Japanese population. According to historian Kenneth B. Pyle, many Japanese perceived themselves as middle class after the Occupation, who saw high education and a good job as the highest attainable goals for which people could and should strive. In this middle class, role division between husband and wife was firm in place with most men working for their families and women took care of the family, which was seen as the center of society.[9] But this stigma of most people in Japan belonging to the middle class and their heads of households all holding 'salaryman' positions is false, argues William W. Kelly. The stress of Japanese sociologists on finding evidence there was a growing new middle class under the influence of American sociology is a misconception. Kelly contest we should speak of a 'mainstream consciousness', because objectively just a small portion of the self-perceived middle class in Japan actually belonged to what we can define as 'middle class', a fate the 'salaryman' had undergone as

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7 A. Allison, *Nightwork: Sexuality, Pleasure, and Corporate Masculinity in a Tokyo Hostess Club* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 92.

8 Ibid., 92.

9 Kenneth B. Pyle, *The Making of Modern Japan* (Lexington: D.C. Heath And Company, 1996), 256-267.

well.[10] Mari Osawa adds to that argument by saying very few families actually constituted of a salaryman and a full-time housewife with one or more children, a family set-up that had already become a minority in the mid-1980s.[11]

Recent research on the 'salaryman' image deals less with the 'salaryman''s position within the company and his socio-economic position within Japanese society, but more with the 'salaryman' as a social construct. Researchers Roberson, Suzuki and Dasgupta have all written about the 'salaryman' as a hegemonic masculine role model that is losing his dominant position in Japanese society. 'Hegemonic' is in each researchers' case used in accordance to Antonion Gramsci's view of 'hegemonic power', signifying that it is a form of social power convincing individuals in any one society to make certain social values and norms their own.[12] In this case, it is the promise of a 'salaryman' position guaranteeing one access to the much desired middle class that everyone wanted to belong to.

In this theoretical framework of hegemony, the 'salaryman' "is seen as the dominant (self-)image, model and representation of men and masculinity in Japan that indexes overlapping discourses of gender, sexuality, class and nation: the middle-class, heterosexual, married salaryman considered for and representative of 'Japan'."[13] But as Dasgupta argues, the 'salaryman' is losing territory to new masculine role models that appeal more to the youth of today. Instead of a strong masculine role model, the 'salaryman' has a stale and stagnant image that is representative of the state Japanese businesses are in.[14]

In 2013, Romit Dasgupta released *Re-reading the Salaryman in Japan*, the most recent and, arguably, most comprehensive volume on the 'salaryman'. In it, Dasgupta discusses both

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10 William W. Kelly, "At the Limits of New Middle-class Japan: Beyond "Mainstream Consciousness," in *Social Contracts Under Stress*, ed. Olivier Zunz, Leonard Schoppa, and Nobuhiro Hiwatari (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004), 232-234.

11 M. Osawa, "Twelve Million Full-Time Housewives: The Gender Consequences of Japan's Postwar Social Contract," in *Social Contracts Under Stress*, ed. Olivier Zunz, Leonard Schoppa, and Nobuhiro Hiwatari (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004), 266.

12 Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks: Volume I*, trans. J.A. Buttigieg (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 139.

13 Roberson and Suzuki, *Men and Masculinity in Contemporary Japan*, 1.

14 Romit Dasgupta, "The "Lost Decade" of the 1990s and Shifting Masculinities in Japan," *Culture, Society and Masculinity* 1(1) (2009): 79-95.

how salarymen young and old function within large Japanese companies today and the evolution of the term ‘salaryman’ in scholarly literature since the late 1950s. How he contributes to the ‘salaryman’ image with his work will be discussed later on in this thesis. Important now is that his definition of the term ‘salaryman’ will be used for the remainder of this thesis, as it reflects all past research on the ‘salaryman’ best. Dasgupta defines the ‘salaryman’ as the “full-time, white-collar, permanent employees of organizations offering benefits such as lifetime employment guarantee, salaries and promotions tied to length of service, and an ideology of corporate paternalism characterizing relations between the (permanent, male) employee and the organization.”[15]

This thesis focuses on the type of salarymen Dasgupta describes above, with a small addition: the contractually employed men in large Japanese companies with 500 or more workers. Contractually employed men in the public sector technically fit the aforementioned definitions as well, but almost all scholarly research focuses on salarymen in Japan’s business sector. This choice is partly based on the availability of information, as Japan’s information distribution regarding governmental matters is rather inaccessible, and in part because of Western research’s interest in Japan’s successful business sector, which is seen as the crucial component in Japan’s economic prowess. The sector’s success is often linked to a particular brand of business and personnel management, as well as its corporate culture referred to as ‘Japanese management’. This ultimately leads researchers to the importance of the ‘salaryman’ within these companies. As shown above, earlier research lacks a clear description of which groups of salarymen are specifically examined. This omission complicates defining one ‘salaryman’-archetype for this thesis. The notion of middle class Japan further complicates this matter. While the strict definition provided by Dasgupta is useful for this research, it does not change the fact that a lot of Japanese employees feel part of the middle class with the ‘salaryman’ as its paragon. Although thorough research has been done, this thesis cannot guarantee that the secondary literature has always based its research on solely the large Japanese companies.

Of all Western writings on Japan, American research is at the forefront in terms of earliest works, as well as the largest number of works from one single Western country. This thesis therefore utilizes primarily American literature, supported by works from Japanese researchers. Western media sources are used as a primary source for a comparative study. The

15 Romit Dasgupta, *Re-reading The Salaryman in Japan: Crafting Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 2013), 24.

largest number of articles on the ‘salaryman’ in reputable popular media sources comes from both British weekly news magazine *The Economist* and American newspaper *The NY Times*. Both media sources offer valuable insights in the development of the ‘salaryman’’s public discourse, as their in-depth articles are both critical and seen as leading in popular opinion. It should be noted that the printed editions of *The Economist* more often than not fail to mention the author. The author will be accredited in footnotes where possible.

The ‘salaryman’ image has gone through subtly different developments in both scholarly research and the popular media sources. The media sources, for instance, emphasize the exotic facets of Japanese business and the ‘salaryman’, which has an air of Orientalism. In order for these developments to be discussed in their own rights, both research and media are discussed in separate chapters through qualitative content analysis, save from a few graphs used for clarifying the changing business environment for the ‘salaryman’. At the end of the two chapters, a comparison will be made. This comparison will show which developments in the ‘salaryman’ image are covered in both types of sources, indicating the developments that are most relevant. The subtle differences between the primary and secondary sources will be highlighted to indicate if popular media have conveyed misconceptions about the ‘salaryman’ to their readers that need amending or if the two types of sources are on the same page. First, the political and economic developments that allowed the Japanese business sector and its salarymen to come to the forefront will be discussed.

Chapter 2: Paving the way: economic and political developments in Japan, 1894-1980

This chapter discusses the political, economic and labor developments from Japan’s early industrialization period at the end of the 19th century up until the economically successful period of the 1960s and 1970s relevant to the ‘salaryman’. It provides an historical background for Chapters 3 and 4, which go into detail on the discussion of the ‘salaryman’ in the literature between the 1980s and 2014. Interest in the ‘salaryman’ peaked in the 1980s up until the early 1990s because of a booming business sector and its workers that made Japan the number two economy of the world. A broad range of topics such as the educational track of aspiring salarymen, the role of the ‘salaryman’ in Japanese business practices and corporate culture, and the social and familial life of the ‘salaryman’ received extensive and positive attention. These are the focus of Chapter 3. Writers and journalists have started to approach the Japanese business sector and the ‘salaryman’ more critically since Japan’s economic

bubble burst in the early 1990s. This results in a more negative portrayal of the 'salaryman' and the eventual demystification of Japan's corporate warrior's image in the 2000s and 2010s, portrayed in Chapters 4 and 5.

In the prewar period, Japan's economy relied heavily on agriculture and light industries requiring small numbers of white-collar workers in contrast to a situation with heavy industries at the center that require facilities run by a large body of white-collar employees. How was it possible that, in less than half a century, the 'salaryman' could become such a strong role model in the 1970s whose status was sought after by so many Japanese working males? This is primarily due to significant economic, political, and social developments in the postwar decades, such as the implementation of new and foreign technologies after the Second World War, as well as educational reforms and the increasing influence of unions. An account of Japan's prewar political and economic development is provided, which shows that the foundations for rapid technological development, as well as the basis for improving labor relations in terms of better wages and more equality among workers and management, were laid in this period.

2.1 Japan's prewar economic and political shift, 1894-1945

At the turn of the 20th century, Japan had won the war with China (1894-1895) that had started because of Chinese reluctance to "join the Japanese in forcing modernization on the Koreans."[16] This victory can be credited to the speed with which Japan had modernized its society and armed forces since the Meiji Restoration in 1868. The spoils were great, including the permission to establish factories in Shanghai and an indemnity of approximately 3 million yen, paid over seven years, that would largely cover the costs of the Sino-Japanese War. At this point, however, Europe interfered. To preserve peace in Asia, Germany, Russia, and France advised Japan to return South Manchuria to China which the Japanese had acquired in the war. The Tokyo government felt it had little choice and acquiesced.[17]

In 1898, Russo-Japanese relations worsened when Russia occupied the same territory surrendered by Japan three years earlier. Several propositions whereby Russia would be granted primacy in Manchuria were rejected. Unable to reach an agreement, the Tokyo

16 Marius B. Jansen, *The Making Of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000), 432.

17 Ibid., 433.

government began to suspect Russia of planning an invasion of North Korean. By signing the Anglo-Japanese Alliance on July 30, 1902, Japan provided itself with a powerful ally in the event of a war with Russia. The treaty promised British assistance in the event of a conflict with more than one power. Through the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, Japan simultaneously overcame its previous diplomatic isolation and became the first non-Western nation to first reach a military pact on equal terms with a Western nation. Japan, strengthened by the treaty, felt it stood strong in its negotiations with Russia, but the Russian leaders assumed Japan was bluffing. A peaceful solution was finally abandoned in 1903. In February 1904, Japan decided to go to war, which it won due to its superior naval power. In 1905, the Portsmouth Treaty of Peace was signed, signing over the Russian lease of the South Manchurian Peninsula and Railroad, and recognizing Japan's paramount interest in Korea. In this same year, though not without hesitation, Korea reached its decision on Japan's goals. These included permanent Japanese navy and army bases in Korea, supervision over Korean foreign policy and finances, and supervision over Korean economic reform.[18] Korea was now officially annexed into the Japanese Empire.

Although most Japanese celebrated these years of war and the accompanying economic gains, the costs and ever expanding military and navy strained the industrialization and urbanization. Instead of sharing the spoils, the government and bureaucracy failed to return the benefits of victory to the Japanese citizen. The situation worsened when World War I broke out. While it was an enormous boost for Japanese industries such as textile, it also meant a large shortage of labor in the factories. Companies increased wages significantly to attract workers, and alongside it prices for food rose as well. The absurd prices became only affordable for well-off families, which led to the 1918 Rice Riots. The Rice Riots were a few of the largest riots in the period between 1905 and 1918: they lasted for four days, were nationwide (as opposed to most riots in the same period, that mainly stayed local), large amounts of rice were seized, multiple stores in various cities were smashed, and led to 578 arrests. Causes for other riots varied, such as resentment against tax increases in 1908 and against naval corruption in 1914. These riots had mixed results, but all led to a feeling of discontent among the inhabitants of growing cities such as Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto and Kobe.[19]

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18 Pyle, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 139-143.

19 Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 131-135.

During this same period, the economy was gradually shifting its focus. Japan went from an agricultural and light industries based economy to an industrializing nation whose center of power increasingly gravitated to the cities. Heavy industry and importing raw materials became the focal point of economic policy. The light industries, such as textiles, suffered from these changes. Yet Jansen rightfully states that "Japan was shifting to an area in which its need for imports placed it at a comparative disadvantage. The decline of Japanese exports and the worsening of the trade balance, together with the inflation this spawned, began to reduce real wages."[20] Japan's worsened trade relations in the 1930's hindered the import of raw materials, inhibiting the growth of the heavy industries. The increasing inflation forced Japan to leave the gold standard to regain its financial health. Getting wind of the Japanese government's intent to leave the standard, banks bought massive amounts of dollars. The banks bought yens back from American banks at a much lower rate, reducing the real value of the yen, boosting inflation once more.[21]

Authors like James Abegglen and Thomas Rohlen have suggested that Japan has always been a harmonious society, where all members worked for the good of the group and not for the individual.[22] This group feeling was not omnipresent in the wartime period. In the 1930's and first part of the 1940's, factory workers had little education, no job security, low wages, long hours and a lack of food. Labor organization in those years had been thwarted by the militaristic political leaders of the 1930's[23], preventing the workers to unite and pursue their collective interests. Considering the interest of the group and maintaining harmony within the company were not prevalent when workers' priorities were their individual gains to feed their families.[24]

Japan's aggressive political direction in the prewar decades took its toll as well. "Japanese aggression in China, the political fallout of the early 1930's, the murderous vendettas of army factionalism, and agitation for a "Showa Restoration" all took place during the years of the

20 Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 608.

21 Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, 183.

22 James Abegglen, *The Japanese factory* (1958), Thomas Rohlen, *For Harmony and Strength* (1974)

23 Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 683

24 Earl H. Kinmonth, *The Self-Made Man in Meiji Japanese Thought: from Samurai to Salaryman* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 3.

world depression [Great Depression of 1929, red.],"[25] Japan historian Marius B. Jansen explains. These political decisions led to trade embargos by various European countries, leading to the collapse of Japan's silk market. This collapse "devastated thousands of Japanese villages, and also handicapped the country's need for export earnings with which to finance the import of raw materials."[26] Some families in rural areas had to sell their daughters to become either geisha's or prostitutes, as they saw no other options to make money.[27] Others sold their daughters to silk manufacturers with contracts that bound these girls for multiple years. If their daughters left before the contractual obligations had been fulfilled, parents would be forced to pay back the hefty sum they received in advance.[28]

The war efforts in China and the Pacific War left great marks on Japan's economic policies. Historian Kenneth B. Pyle notes that "the portions of the gross national product (GNP) devoted to the wartime effort increased from 31 percent in 1942 to 42 percent in 1943 and then to 51 percent in 1944."[29] The industrial shift and national budget allocation had dramatic consequences for the agricultural industry. Pyle states that "agricultural production was curtailed by the shortage of chemical fertilizers and by the loss of farm labor to war-related industries."[30] The economic upheaval of the interwar period, where war had been the main contributor to the Japanese economy through its ventures into heavy industries, was a distant memory. War was now the main reason for Japan's economic and political downfall.

2.2 Changes under the American Occupation of Japan, 1945-1956

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25 Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 605.

26 Ibid., 605.

27 Thomas R. Havens, *Farm and Nation in Modern Japan: Agrarian Nationalism, 1870-1940* (London: Princeton University Press, 1974), 138.

28 Mikiso Hane, *Peasants, Rebels and Outcasts: The Underside of Modern Japan* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 175-176.

29 Kenneth B. Pyle, *The Making Of Modern Japan* (Lexington: D.C. Heath And Company, 1996), 207-208.

30 Ibid., 208.

Japan's defeat in the Pacific War resulted in a complete overhaul of its political system. On September 2nd 1945, Japan surrendered to the Allied Forces. The Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces (SCAP), Douglas MacArthur, was appointed to dismantle the old institutions of the Japanese state and write up a new constitution. Despite initial hesitations of conservative Japanese leaders, the document passed both the House of Representatives and the House of Councillors in Japan's National Diet in 1946. The following year, the 1947 Constitution became law.[31] Major changes were brought to the Japanese political system: demilitarization, removal of all military state cliques, the emperor's role was reduced from a formal decision making one to a symbolic role, and, most importantly, loss of state sovereignty to the foreign final authority of the United States.[32]

The occupiers were perceived as a threat to Japanese society and its sovereignty, but the occupation was only one of Japan's problems. Post war Japanese society had to deal with "even more critical shortages of food, fuel, and shelter for urban Japanese"[33] than it had during the war. Inflation skyrocketed: the wholesale price index in 1946 was 16 times higher than in the period 1934-1936. In 1951, this index was a staggering 240 times higher.[34] American policy makers set out to reinvigorate the Japanese struggling economy. Changes were implemented "through the existing Japanese bureaucracy," because the occupiers "simply did not have sufficient personnel or language ability to staff a full government to put the vast changes into practice."[35] The American shadow government did not possess total authority. Instead, a shadow government of smaller offices, the SCAP General Headquarters, set up guidelines and passed orders to their Japanese counterparts through a liaison office staffed by bilingual Japanese officials instead. This structure offered Japanese government officials room to maneuver within policies, granting them the ability to resist or reshape occupation directives. The occupier was just another factor to take into account in shaping the modern Japanese institutions and society, next to the aforementioned socio-economic conflicts

31 Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 666-667.

32 Ibid., 670-674.

33 Ibid., 678.

34 Kozo Yamamura, *The Economic Emergence of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1997), 165.

35 Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, 234.

that the Japanese population had had with the Japanese government in the prewar and wartime periods.[36]

During the first years of the U.S. Occupation, further industrialization and centralization of power came to a halt. American planners started making arrangements for the relocation of Japanese industrial plants to countries that had suffered during the war by Japan, as a means of wartime reparations. Drastic reductions in steel capacity, aircraft capacity and any other strategic materials were proposed. Other plans included the separation of the *zaibatsu* houses (large business conglomerates which enjoyed monopoly positions in Japanese business) from the network of enterprises each group controlled, further deconcentration of these networks by dismantling some 1,200 industrial groups into their constituent parts, reselling stock shares and implementing laws controlling monopoly to prevent the *zaibatsu* from reforming.[37] Which enterprises would be targeted was unsure, to which Japanese managers responded by delaying plans to resume production to prevent risking loss of company capital to reparations. The Japanese economy, which had come to rely on the production power of the *zaibatsu*, stagnated once again.

Educational reform, like the planned economic policy changes, was not received without apprehension. In the spring of 1946, a group of twenty-seven educators called the U.S. Education Mission went on a tour through Japan. They recommended what "proved tantamount to wholesale adoption of the U.S. education system and its philosophy."[38] One of the first tasks recommended by the mission was decentralizing the Ministry of Education, which was too influential in the opinion of the group. Secondary education would be "superseded by popularly elected boards of education on a local level, which were given control of staff, curriculum, and choosing textbooks."[39] Further plans included a single-track coeducational plan with six years of elementary school, three years of junior high school and three years of senior high school, and the differentiation between postsecondary schools among technical schools, normal schools and imperial universities was to disappear in favor of a reorganization towards creating four-year universities. Although Pyle says that this

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36 Ibid., 234.

37 Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 686-687.

38 Pyle, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 223.

39 Ibid., 223.

system "became deeply enmeshed" in politics in 1948[40], Gordon argues that the 1948 reform for the elected school boards was delayed by the government, which insinuates the system did not find a steady foothold as fast as Pyle suggests. After the Occupation, however, the Japanese government instated a revised law that replaced appointed with elected school boards, thus taking away the Ministry of Education's direct influence in local education boards.

The Japanese government allowed a few of these measures to pass despite its initial hesitations towards changing its educational system at all, taking the first step toward a revised educational system. It eventually evolved into a system with more importance appointed to secondary and postsecondary education. As the economy grew, more people could afford such educations and companies were looking for more well-educated workers that could oversee the increasing number of automatized factory processes. From the end of the 1950s through the 1960s, high school entrance figures soared. From 50 percent in 1955, it reached 82 percent of the total potential entrants in 1975 and up to 94 percent by 1980. Large proportions of high school graduates went to two- or four-year colleges afterwards: by 1975, 35 percent of these graduates entered university each year.[41] Access to higher education became more egalitarian among different socio-economic strata. In the 1960s, children of poor families were able to enter university by winning admission "in precise proportion to their numbers in the overall population,"[42] providing a merit-based system instead of wealthy parents buying their children entrance through donations.

Implementing the 1947 Constitution with its accompanying policies was ultimately received so negatively that the SCAP had to reroute its course. Both Japanese government bureaus whose expertise to guide stock sales was required, and critics in the United States showed their discontent about the SCAP's plans. The head of the Policy Planning Staff, George F. Kennan, observed that "the Occupation weighed heavily on the Japanese economy and consumed one-third of the annual budget for the support of its 35,000 civilians and the troops," which were over 80,000 in number. As Jansen fittingly describes, "it seemed high time to change priorities from reform to reconstruction,"[43] meaning that Japan's economic reconstruction should be the focus and not political reform.

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40 Ibid., 223.

41 Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, 255.

42 Ibid., 255.

Despite hesitations about an incurring opposition, MacArthur affirmed that the Occupation's policies had been successful enough up until that point that it would be possible to relax the schedule for deconcentration of Japan's industry. Instead of breaking up the 1,200 firms targeted earlier, the plans targeted only 325 firms and, in the end, only 28 were broken up. The *zaibatsu*-type of concentration of smaller factories under one company could not reappear due to the anti-monopoly laws. In its place, the *keiretsu* appeared: umbrella enterprises that contained a set of companies with interlocking business relationships and shared stocks under a central bank.[44]

2.3 Japanese labor relations revised, 1947-1979

In addition to economic policy struggling to build up a new and viable system for Japan's postwar industries, company managers dealt with changing labor relations inside the company. Orii Hyuuga was a labor manager for more than twenty years at the Nippon Koukan steel mill in Kawasaki. He said that "in the confusion after the war's end, all of us were groping in the dark to figure out what labor management was supposed to be. Before and during the war, labor management was authoritarian in character. It relied on coercive power from above to force obedience regardless of circumstances."[45]

The ideals of authoritarian management started waning in this new business environment. The Economic and Scientific Section of the SCAP had its chiefs cooperate with Japanese reform bureaucrats to implement the Trade Union Law. This law was implemented a mere three months after the Occupation had started, which allowed Japanese workers to start up and become members of unions. It also gave them the rights to bargain collectively and strike. The influence of these unions gradually grew in the years after the American occupation, when Japanese companies were allowed to pursue their own policies.

Company unions gained considerable power. Their efforts would not only impact a company's management style, but decisions on financial policies and ventures into new

43 Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 687.

44 Etsuo Abe and Robert Fitzgerald, "Japanese Economic Success: Timing, Culture, and Organisational Capability," *Business History* 37(2)(1995), 22.

45 Theodore De Bary, Carol Gluck and Arthur E. Tiedemann, *Sources of Japanese Tradition Part 2, Volume 2: 1868-2000* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 410.

sectors as well. As opposed to labor unions in the United States, which are primarily divided per labor sector, these Japanese unions were incorporated within each separate company. To avoid confusion, these will be referred to as 'company unions' from now on. In their early years, company unions were less effective than their members initially had hoped. Most members came from different political strata, whose ideologies influenced their opinions on what the company union should primarily be fighting for. Communist members wanted more equal distribution of a company's wealth, while labor party members wanted to fight for better working conditions. These discussions amongst its members rendered unions ineffective in their early years. It soon became clear to the union members that, to achieve their goals of equality, steady wage growth and job security, the union needed to truly unify both white-collar and blue-collar workers.[46] The evolution of unions and labor relations within the company is explained in Gordon's book *The Wages of Affluence* (1998). He sees the steel industry as the best example of how industries and their accompanying unions evolved. This is agreed upon by other researchers such as Abe and Fitzgerald, who add to this with their argument that the steel industry became the focal point of the Japanese government in industrial development.[47]

Steel companies were one of few types of companies in Japan that were able to provide their employees with benefits like lifetime employment and bi-annual wage increases in the 1950s. The companies' financial stability, achieved through economic prowess and governmental support, made these benefits affordable. Such benefits came in place to ensure worker satisfaction. Companies allowed the union and its members to partake in collective bargaining with the company's managers, to further entrench the bond between employer and employee. Not only had unions acquired the rights to organize and collectively bargain, but also to strike.

Strikes were an important part of company union activity from their inception in 1946 until the mid-1950s. Before collectively bargaining in a civil manner became the standard among company unions, union leaders and their members fought fiercely for better labor relations. This was highly prioritized at the time of the company unions' inception in 1946, when its membership went from zero to five million members in the timespan of a year. By early 1949, the number of Japanese workers that were union members had grown to 6.7

46 Gordon, *The Wages of Affluence*.

47 Etsuo Abe and Robert Fitzgerald, "Japanese Economic Success: Timing, Culture, and Organisational Capability," *Business History* 37(2)(1995), 6-8.

million, accounting for 55.8 percent of the industrial labor force. Due to wages lagging behind on inflation, the unions were more than eager to go on strike.[48] Although the number of strikes in 1948 was not much larger than in 1946 (744 as opposed to 702), the amount of workers involved had more than quadrupled. Whereas in 1946 571,000 workers had gone on strikes, in 1948 over 2.3 million workers went on strikes.[49]

According to Japan historians Patrick Heenan and William M. Tsutsui, company unions quickly realized that their aggressive tactics would not help their collective bargaining position in the difficult political and economic environment. These unions "either moderated their policies, or were replaced by more cooperative unions,"[50] the latter of which were instigated by management and who were often led by white-collar employees. Relations calmed between labor and management at a steady pace from the 1950s onward. Strikes have become an anomaly since the 1990s. In 1985 there had been 627 strikes in which 123,000 workers were involved. By 1990, this number had drastically decreased to 283 strikes in which 84,000 workers had been involved.[51]

The American Occupation had slowly transformed from being a burden to Japanese society to being a breeding ground for new possibilities. Japan could resume its development in heavy industries at the start of the 1950s after McArthur's decision to focus on economic revival instead of reform. This decision relieved both the industrial and agricultural sectors. Adopting new economic policies with American influences led to a production-based economy and tightened the bonds between Japan's political and business sectors. This resulted in an economic surge in 1955 that started three decades of almost uninterrupted high economic growth.[52] This fast development into a sustained economic power is often referred to as the 'Japanese miracle'.[53] But one can hardly call it a 'miracle' when taking Japan's pre- and post-war developments into account. The latter include venturing into new industries,

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48 Dae Yong Jeong and Ruth V. Aguilera, "The Evolution of Enterprise Unionism in Japan: A Socio-Political Perspective," *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 48(1)(2008), 114-115.

49 C. Weathers, "Chapter Thirteen: The Postwar Transformation of the Labor Force," In *The Japan Handbook* (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1998), 195.

50 Ibid., 184.

51 Ibid., 195.

52 Ibid., 389.

adopting new governmental policies and increased cooperation between governmental and business sectors. The dramatic state of Japan's economy in the first few postwar years also shaped the cautious and frugal attitude that dominated Japan's economic policies until the 1990s.

In 1956, the government released a White Paper on the Economy. This document was "simultaneously positive in its view of past achievements and cautionary for the future."[54] It also stated that Japan's economy was "shifting from an era of easy gain through simple "recovery" to a time when investment in costly new technologies would be the engine of growth."[55] Technology alone, as the steel companies had already realized, will not run a successful business. Sustained economic growth could only be possible if Japanese workers would dedicate themselves to work hard for their companies. In return for this dedication, they fought hard to improve their own working conditions, wages and fringe benefits through labor unions.

Reports of the Japanese Statistics Bureau regarding employment underpin the shifting economic trends described above.[56] The total number of workers in textile stayed more or less the same, but the number of workers in iron and steel industries skyrocketed from the 1920's onward. In the 1940's this number had doubled, and by the 1970s it tripled. Machinery companies and factories were the biggest winners between the 1930's and 1940's, with a rise of 500 percent of its workforce. They remained at the 1940's level until the 1970s. The electronics industry saw a similar rise between the 1930's and 1940's, though slightly lower than the machinery industry. Yet their number had quadrupled by the 1970s. Agriculture remained stable in absolute numbers, with a small peak in the 1940's and 1950s. But ever since the 1960s, the agricultural sector's labor numbers have been falling with millions each decade.[57]

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53 Gordon, Forsberg.

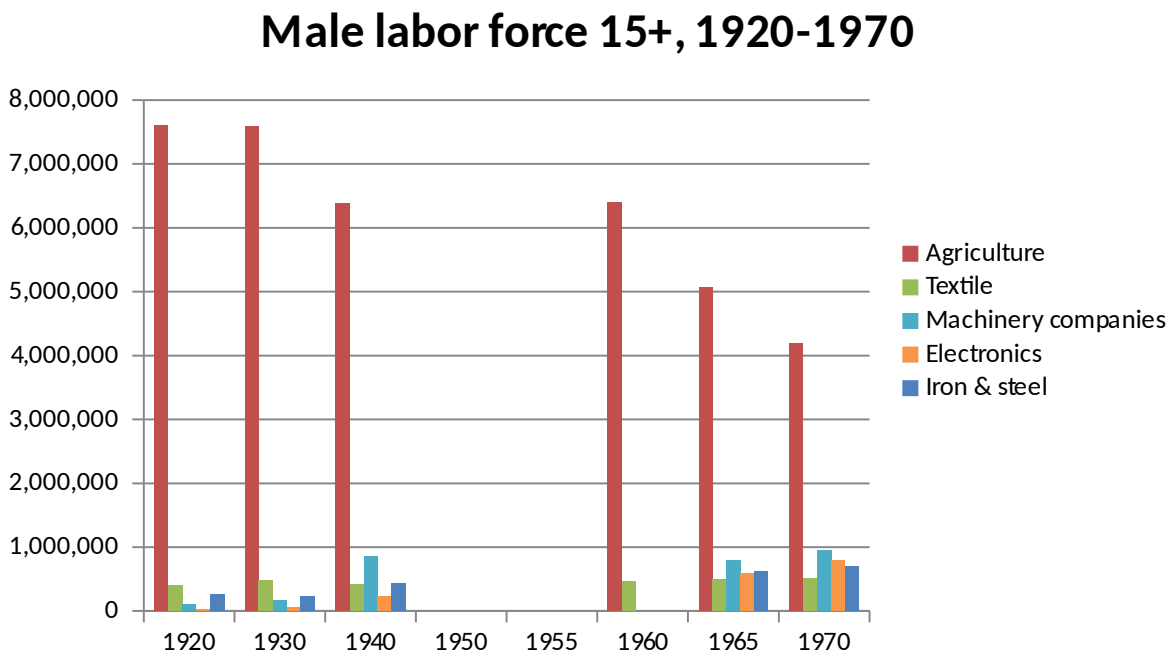
54 De Bary, Gluck and Tiedemann, *Sources of Japanese Tradition Part 2, Volume 2: 1868-2000*, 389.

55 Ibid, 390.

56 Table 1.1; Table 1.2.

57 Japanese Statistics Bureau, "19-9-a Employed Persons 15 Years Old and Over, by Industry (Minor Groups) and Sex (1920--1970)," 2014.

Graph 1: Male labor force per sector, 1920-1970.[58]



2.4 Peak and subsequent low in women's labor market participation, 1931-1980

Remarkable is the lack of coverage on women's labor market participation. Before the Pacific War, women were drafted to work in the silk factories instead of their husbands and sons, who were to fight on the front line. These wartime shortages had thus required women's cooperation. Prominent leaders in women's efforts saw this as an opportunity for women to claim their place in labor and society. In 1931, "the Greater Japan Federation of Women's Associations represented the first step in the rationalization and unification that the war years would bring to other sectors of society. With the China War of 1937, calls for more effective

58 Ibid.

mobilization led to the Women's Patriotic Association, as women played their part in urging conformity."[59]

After the war had ended, government and business leaders devised new plans to once more lay the focus on a patriarch-centered family. Men would be the breadwinners and the head of the family and women were to return to their prewar role of *ryosai kenbo* ('good wife, wise mother'), a principle written up in the Meiji period (1868-1912). The principle's intended purpose was to educate and train women to become good wives and wise mothers for their husbands and children, not independent individuals.[60] This meant that women "were exhorted to contribute to the nation through efficient management of the household, responsible upbringing of children, frugality, and hard work."[61] Women were forced back into their homes instead of their labor participation further developing.

At the forefront for this renewed role division between husband and wife was the New Life Movement (NLM). The NLM was part of the new *kigyo shakai* ('enterprise society'), "in which meeting the needs of the company is understood to be common sense and to be congruent with meeting the needs of all society's inhabitants." [62] The NLM was initiated as a life-improvement movement that was mainly found at corporations. Lessons included topics as family planning, life planning and reconstruction at home. The program shifted its aim to learning women how to manage the household, so their husbands had to only worry about his work at the company.[63]

One would expect a backlash from the aforementioned women's groups to a program that has women stay at home and be fulltime housewives. The contrary is true. The National Coordinating Committee of Regional Women's Groups were active supporters of the program, which was seen as a democratization of the home.[64] Women were alleviated of all kinds of chores by modern household appliances, leaving more room for them to attend reform

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59 Jansen, *The Making Of Modern Japan*, 646.

60 De Bary, Gluck & Tiedemann, *Sources of Japanese Tradition Part 2, Volume 2: 1868-2000*, 115.

61 Pyle, *The Making Of Modern Japan*, 172.

62 Andrew Gordon, "Managing the Japanese Household," *Social Politics*, *Summer 1997* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 247.

63 Hiroko Takeda, *The Political Economy of Reproduction in Japan: Between Nation-state and Everyday Life* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005), 132-133.

activities in the 1950s. Wives of employees received, among others, company-sponsored education on how to run a good and healthy household, childrearing and courses on knitting, sewing and flower arranging.[65]

The lack of need to work as a woman married to a 'salaryman' is reflected in a women's labor participation census analyzed by Ochiai Emiko, who has written extensively on Japan's family system and the woman's role in it. She shows in a graph that the labor participation for women in Japan after the 1940's drops significantly at the time of marriage (from 71 percent at ages 20-24 to 42 percent at ages 25-29), but picks up after their children are more independent (back to 49 percent at ages 30-34 and to 60 percent at ages 35-39). This process results in a so-called M-curve. The M-curve also shows that women who got to a marital age in the 1960s and 1970s were the most likely to leave the work force permanently. This possibility was granted to women by the shift of the male breadwinner model from one making ends meet as a farmer or a small shop owner to the regular wage, white-collar company employee.[66]

Further research shows, however, that leaving the workforce was not always voluntary nor readily accepted by women. They did voice their opinion, but were often not heard. Women who work in large companies, performing clerical tasks that support the salarymen are called 'office ladies' (OL's). These OL's are theoretically equal to men on the Japanese work floor in terms of their tasks and ranking. This did not withhold companies from creating inequalities in structural relations, guaranteeing the sexual division of labor in practice by putting the office ladies in a serving role of salarymen. Much alike the role division in the household that was stress in the NLM.[67] One would assume that OL's would unite to fight against inequalities that have women do the same low level clerical jobs despite their different educational levels and ages. Company policies, however have prevented such solidarity. Herein lies sociologist Yuko Ogasawara's biggest critique. Not only from a bottom-up perspective (OL - employer) are these thoughts of dissatisfaction not shared, but these thoughts are not discussed amongst

64 Gordon, "Managing the Japanese Household," 251.

65 Ibid., 258; 263.

66 Emiko Ochiai, *The Japanese Family System in Transition: A Sociological Analysis of Family Change in Postwar Japan* (Tokyo: LTCB International Library Foundation, 1997), 11-16.

67 Mayumi Sakai and Sharon Sievers, *The Office Ladies in Contemporary Japan* (ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, 2009), 32-33.

OL's themselves as well. This lack of solidarity lies mainly in the large differences in educational level of women who are all hired for the same work, an emphasis on early retirement which causes feelings of loneliness and a lack of need for better labor relations, and the complexity in OL interpersonal relationships.[68] Each of these factors will be briefly discussed below.

This complexity stems from the hierarchical division, which has its source in company policy. OL's from the same year of entry are each other's *doki*, whom they can be familiar with in conversation. When someone has a higher tenure than you, they are your *senpai* (senior) and should be offered respect. Those who arrived after your tenure started are your *kohai* (juniors), whom you can be indifferent to in speech.[69] Osagawara gives a good example from a bank she researched: there are two OL's, one of which is a 24-year old junior college graduate who has been at the company for four years. The other is a 25-year old university graduate whose tenure spans three years. Even though the latter is both older and has a higher education, she still needs to acknowledge the younger OL as her *senpai*. This can create a tense atmosphere, in which the intellectual superior of the two can feel frustrated to take orders from a junior college graduate. The *senpai* in turn can be frustrated by the fact that her *kohai* does not pay her proper deference.[70]

To this day, the so-called 'marriage retirement' causes a lot of OL's to enjoy their time at the office as long as it lasts. Women are still expected to leave the workforce as soon as they get married and start a family.[71] Those who are not yet married often lived with their parents and do not pay any living expenses. They could spend all their earnings on luxuries like traveling abroad, going out, and buy expensive clothes and accessories.[72] Even though older OL's are paid more deference, it is seen as more desirable to be a young OL. Companies do not want "women to lose their change of marriage," thus urging them to marry young with a

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68 Yuko Ogasawara, *Office Ladies and Salaried Men: Power, Gender, and Work in Japanese Companies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 47.

69 Ibid., 48-49.

70 Ibid., 50-51.

71 Sakai and Sievers, *The Office Ladies in Contemporary Japan*, 31.

72 Ogasawara, *Office Ladies and Salaried Men*, 56-57.

salaryman while they are still desirable.[73] Women that marry late or do not quit are "often labeled as either social failures who could not marry or social inferiors married to husbands who could not support their family."[74] Here, in a sense, OL's compete against each other in the "race for marriage,"[75] further undermining solidarity amongst OL's. Even though women's rights have come a long way since the Occupation, social acceptance requires most women to marry a husband who can provide for a family.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with the evolution of the Japanese political system, economy and social structure, with the wartime period as the crucial factor in transitioning from an agricultural to an industrialized society. The American Occupation was the cause of a political overhaul. The large companies stayed mostly intact, though in a different form. The *zaibatsu* lost their monopolies and made place for the *keiretsu*: business conglomerates of large companies with a large bank at the center that controls the cross-shareholding between these firms. The introduction of new technologies gave companies the ability to excel in new fields of production and enter the international markets. Pyle claims that "the dominant theme of modern Japanese history was the national determination to overtake the advanced industrial countries. By adopting Western science, technology, institutions, and knowledge, Japan set out to preserve its sovereignty and catch up with those Western countries that in the middle of the nineteenth century had opened Japan and subjected it to semi colonial restrictions. By the 1980s the achievement of this heroic goal was proclaimed."[76] Japan successfully modernized in a relatively short period, caught up with other advanced industrial societies, and achieved its status as a great economic power in the world.[77] Japan achieved this through its emphasis on the collective capitalism among *keiretsu*, where cooperative long-term relationships and an

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73 Sakai and Sievers, *The Office Ladies in Contemporary Japan*, 44.

74 Ogasawara, *Office Ladies and Salaried Men*, 68.

75 Ibid., 60.

76 Pyle, *The Making Of Modern Japan*, vii.

77 Ibid., x; 243.

economy directed by relational markets are key. These relational markets helped create a cooperative atmosphere among companies, who were involved in each other by cross-shareholding and therefore had an interest in the other companies' performances.

The implementation of new policies in Japanese companies under American rule was a major part of achieving this status. The Trade Union Law allowed the democratization of the workplace through unions to enhance labor relations. Employees, both white- and blue-collar, were now able to voice their opinions and were involved in the decision-making process of their respective companies. The unions did not reach their maximum potential until the 1960s. In the period thereafter, unions had a great influence on decision making regarding wages and job security. Management could not operate without the consent of union leaders, creating the harmonious labor environment with secondary benefits such as the lifetime employment system that was praised by many business scholars in the 1980s such as Makoto Ohtsu, Tomio Imanari and Philip Anderson.

The stress on the man's role as the head of the household with the woman as the manager of the household, as portrayed in the NLM, set back the emancipation of women started in the interwar period to a pre-war standard. The security of his job position was an attraction factor for a lot of women and allowed for them to stay at home, not having to work to add to the household budget. As women stayed at home, they were automatically pushed into the role of housewife that took care of the house work and child raising. Not having to worry about the home situation, the 'salaryman' could fully focus on his job and the relationship with his colleagues and company. With the emphasis on women taking on this role, it allowed for the 'salaryman' to become not only the male hegemonic role model, but for women as their ideal partner as well.

Japan maintained a steady growth from the Occupation onward, though not without accompanying struggles in labor relations. The results of a stable home life, labor security through corporate unionism, and steady promotion and wage raises based on seniority ensured worker satisfaction, loyalty to the company, and hard-working employees. Their dedication to their company is seen as a major factor Japan's economy, despite a decrease in growth, outperformed those of most other nations after the Oil Crisis in 1973[78] and caught international attention in the 1980s. Both scholarly works, popular economic magazines and newspapers that write about the 'Japanese miracle', Japan's management system and the

78 Arjan B. Keizer, *Changes in Japanese Employment Practices: Beyond the Japanese model* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 2.

Japanese corporate warrior: the ‘salaryman’. The next section of this chapter will deal with the scholarly body of work, with a focus on the ‘salaryman’ image construct and his rise to male hegemony. This will be categorized in different important facets of a ‘salaryman’’s life: his education and entrance to the company, business culture and business management inside the company, and the changing role of women in salarymen’s lives.

Chapter 3: Realities of becoming a ‘salaryman’, 1980 – 1992

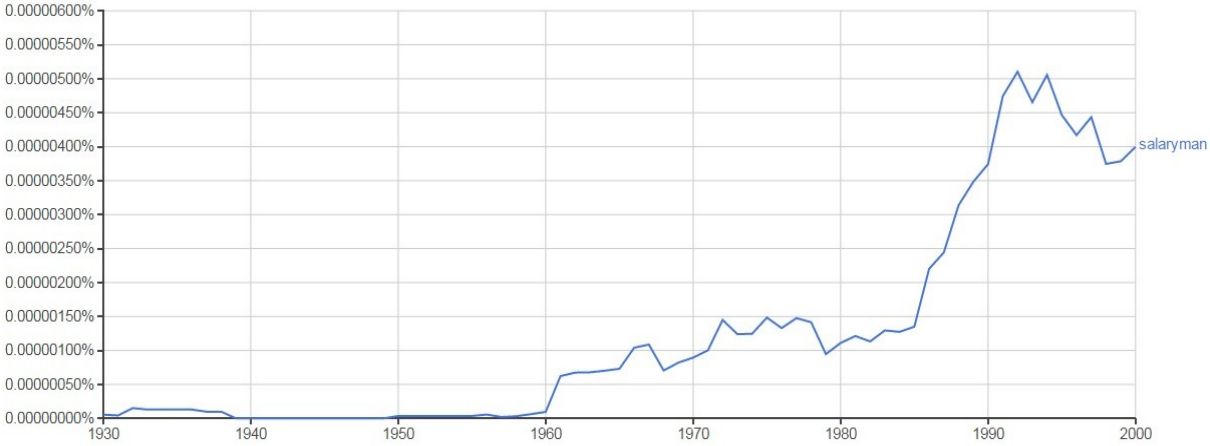
The following chapter deals with the ‘salaryman’ image that has been shaped in U.S. scholarly work. Despite Abegglen’s and Vogel’s early works on Japanese businesses and its salarymen, it was not until the 1980s that the term became widely used in American scholarly work and Western media. This chapter therefore focuses on scholarly work from the 1980s onward. The continued success of the Japanese economy in the 1980s, thanks to Japanese companies venturing into computer technology and becoming leaders in the microchip- and semiconductor industries, affirmed Japan’s status as economic world power. Large Japanese companies and their salarymen were seen as the main proponents for this success and became the topic of discussion in books on Japanese business management.[79] This trend is clearly visible in the amount of books released with the ‘salaryman’ as its main topic. Online database Ngram Viewer shows that this figure almost quadruples between 1981 and 1992 (from 0.0000011103 percent to 0.0000051031 percent of all books published in those years).[80]

Graph 2: Books published with the ‘salaryman’ as its main topic, 1930-2000.[81]

79 Richardson and Ueda (1981); Abegglen and Stalk jr. (1984); Otsubo (1986).

80 https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=salaryman&year_start=1930&year_end=2000&corpus=15&smoothing=3&share=&direct_url=t1%3B%2Csalaryman%3B%2Cc0

81 Ibid.



In this decade, "Americans gobbled up books that painted a Japan that was poised to surpass the United States by dint of a superior education system, good labor relations, bureaucratic acumen, familial ties,"[82] as well as social harmony and a group-oriented system with the 'salaryman' at its helm. These facets are all part of the 'salaryman' image and will thus serve as the topics of discussion in this chapter in the evolution of said image. These facets are divided into three categories that all play an equally large role, and are presented in the following order: education, business culture and management, and the changing role of women in Japanese society. First, this chapter will discuss the earliest conceptions of the 'salaryman' to show the interesting growth and development the term has undergone.

3.1 A short history of the term 'salaryman'

Before the introduction and popularization of the term 'salaryman', a number of Meiji novels such as *Ukigumo* (Floating Clouds) introduced the salaryman-prototype called *koshiben* ('lunch-bucket man') in 1887. He was a "low-ranked civil servant who carried his lunch (*bento*), in a container attached to a cord around their waists (*koshi*)."[83] This term was first used for lower ranked samurai who were engaged in menial clerical tasks. After the turn of the century, the term was used for the lower ranked officials of the state. They were joined by a private sector equivalent known by names as *shokuin* ('staff employee') or *gekkyu tori*

82 Jeff Kingston, *Contemporary Japan: History, Politics and Social Change Since the 1980s* (New York: Wiley Blackwell, 2010), back cover.

83 Earl H. Kinmonth, *The Self-Made Man in Meiji Japanese Thought: from Samurai to Salaryman* (Berkeley:University of California Press, 1981), 278.

(‘monthly salary receiver’) at the beginning of the 20th century. By 1920 the number of white-collar workers had grown to 1.5 million, meaning 5.5 percent of the entire Japanese employed population belonged to the *shokuin* class. In terms of numbers in non-agricultural labor, *shokuin* made up 12 percent of the 12.5 million in total.[84] These clerical jobs were only attainable for higher educated men, out of reach for the vast majority of Japan’s working population. *Koshiben* and *shokuin* did not enjoy a role model-status at the time because of the menial tasks they were asked to perform.

The term *koshiben* was slowly replaced by *sarariiman* (‘salaryman’) between 1930 and 1939. Sociologist Earl H. Kinmonth claims the most likely source for popularization of this new term is popular cartoonist Kitazawa Rakuten. His series on *sarariiman no tengoku* (‘salaryman heaven’) and *sarariiman no jigoki* (‘salaryman hell’) in 1916, and the explicit use of the term in the title is the likely reason the term became established.[85] Its common usage can be linked to the 1928 work *Tale of the Sarariiman*: a journalistic work that included tips on how to lead a successful life. Its popularity triggered the writer, Maeda Hajime, to write a second volume shortly after the release of the first book.[86] There was hostility towards the term because of its synonymic relation with *koshiben* and *yofuku-saimin*, and the negative connotation of being a menial cleric that accompanied those terms. Journals subsequently tried using alternatives such as ‘the new middle class’ (*shin-chuusan-kaikyuu*), ‘those who live on a salary’ (*hokyuu seikatsusha*) or ‘intellectual laborers’ (*chishiki rodosha*) to reverse the trend, but to no avail. As Kinmonth concludes: “resistance to the word was destined, however, to be a losing battle, and after 1930 it became general even in these journals.”[87] The term ‘salaryman’ had thus found its definitive way into the mainstream and has not left popular Japanese consciousness ever since.

It took until the late 1950s and early 1960s for the ‘salaryman’ to first appear in Western scholarly discourse. The earliest works from the West on Japanese business management, business culture, and its salarymen are written by American scholars such as James C. Abegglen (*The Japanese Factory*, 1958) and Ezra Vogel (*Japan as Number One*, 1963). The

84 Dasgupta, *Re-reading The Salaryman in Japan*, 27.

85 Kinmonth, *The Self-Made Man in Meiji Japanese Thought*, 290.

86 Dasgupta, *Re-reading the Salaryman in Japan*, 27-28.

87 Kinmonth, *The Self-Made Man in Meiji Japanese Thought*, 291.

tight economic and political ties shared between the U.S. and Japan since the end of the Pacific War and the American Occupation of Japan afterwards are undeniable. These ties are a likely reason for American scholars and journalists' interest in Japan since the end of the Occupation in 1954. Since American sources comprise the largest body of literature on Japan and its business sector from one single country in the West, this chapter focusses on American scholarly literature to provide an account of the developments relevant to the 'salaryman''s labor and familial relations, as well as his socio-economic status. It is supported by works from their Japanese colleagues who have written in English, providing a deeper understanding of the role Japanese culture plays in Japanese business practices.

3.2 The Japanese educational system examined

A higher level of education became available to the majority of the Japanese population after the Occupation, as discussed in the last chapter. It is one of the pillars of becoming a 'salaryman' and one of the reasons the 'salaryman' was able to establish itself in Japanese society. Large companies focused more on creating white-collar and knowledge-based jobs. As technology advanced and processes were automated, more workers were required to manage these processes and less workers were needed on the factory floors. A salaryman-career with these companies provided the employee with the financial stability needed to support a family and took away the insecurities Japanese workers had faced before and during the Occupation. But as more and more people became well-educated, firms had the luxury of making strict cuts based on education during the hiring process. People with a degree from one of Japan's top universities, such as Waseda University in Tokyo, had the best chances to obtain such a position. Getting into these top universities, however, takes a lot of dedication from both parents and their offspring.

Japanese children often go to *juku* ('cram schools') after the regular school day is done, and most Saturdays are spent at juku as well.[88] The popularity of *juku* is due to their competitive edge over merely following the compulsory elementary school education. *Juku* focus on rote learning: the excessive cramming of facts. High school and university entrance exams tend to concentrate on testing factual knowledge rather than analytic abilities. This choice is made due to the lowered vulnerability to "charges of injustice" when one fails on

88 J.E. Thomas, *Making Japan Work: Originas, Education and Training of the Japanese Salaryman* (Kent: Japan Library, 1993), 18.

factual questions, rather than " examinations involving analytic exercises or essays," which have a "grading based on less tangible criteria."[89] Not all *juku* have a rigid schedule which involves classes in the weekends, nor do all of them focus solely on cramming, but those that do provide the highest success rates in later stages of education. Roesgaard portrays the importance of *juku* in education with the following: "Top cram schools, i.e. those with the best record of clients admitted to elite schools or universities, themselves have entrance examinations and are rumoured to be even more crucial to success than regular school."[90] Thomas adds that this is "arranged by parents anxious to ensure the child will stay in the forefront of the competition."[91]

Parents spend great amounts of money and time to send their children to *juku*. In 1999 for example, expenses on cram school education accounted for 12.6 percent of the average household budget.[92] Some overzealous Japanese mothers, known as 'education mothers' (*kyôiku mama*), play a large role in their children attending *juku*. Performance in the academic hierarchy was seen as an insurance of future status.[93] She works in her child's best interest by creating circumstances conducive to studying. The set-up of *juku* as breeding grounds for future success has led to the belief that this is the most surefire way for boys to become salarymen. The hard-working attitude the 'salaryman' is known for is thus cultivated from elementary school level onward.

The Japanese educational system has garnered its fair share of criticism in the West because of the reasons named above. Thomas argues that Japanese students "perform well if the tests turn on memory," but that schooling "consists of rote learning at the expense of more creative work."[94] *The Economist* published an article on this lack of creativity in Japanese

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89 Marie Hojlund Roesgaard, *Japanese Education and the Cram School Business: Functions, Challenges and Perspective of the Juku* (Copenhagen: Nordic Institution of Asian Studies Press, 2006), 1.

90 Ibid., 4.

91 Thomas, *Making Japan Work*, 13.

92 Roesgaard, *Japanese Education and the Cram School Business*, 5-6.

93 Ibid., 180-181; Richardson and Ueda, *Business and Society in Japan*, 238-239.

94 Thomas, *Making Japan Work*, 17.

education.[95] The system does not encourage initiative and original thought among students, and for a large part explains why so few Nobel Prize winners come from Japan. It does produce an informed and disciplined workforce, but this approach is considered a handicap by the government for developing new technologies. A more Western approach of education, in which individuality and independence play a big role, has not yet gained much support in Japan. But as we will see in this chapter, it might not be an option to keep the current system in place.

Another point of criticism is the faulty egalitarian image of Japan's educational system. As Leslie Bedford says: "In theory anyone can get into Japanese universities, and the national universities are particularly meritocratic in their admissions policies." But the truth is that "there is a cluster of three or four highly prestigious institutions at the very top from which come over 90 percent of Japan's top political elite and 70-80 percent of its economic leaders. Correspondingly, ambitious young men aspire to enter these schools."[96] Taken together with the downturn of the economy in the 1990s, resulting in less salaryman jobs, many students saw themselves losers when they were not accepted by the prestigious universities, because their graduates "often enjoy a lot of respect solely on the account of their alma mater regardless of personal merit."[97] It reduced chances of 'regular' university attendees becoming 'salarymen' even further, resulting in less students choosing to try and become salarymen. This trend is shown in a 2005 survey among 300 students. Only 33 percent of the respondents sought employment in a large company, portraying the low desirability of becoming a 'salaryman' of recent years.

3.3 Salarymen recruitment and becoming a member of society

When top students got through the so-called 'examination hell' (*shiken jigoku*) with the highest merits from a prestigious alma mater, large companies were more than ready to pick them up. But with the prospect of hiring a 'salaryman' for life, large companies took no unnecessary risks. Thomas Rohlen was one of the first researchers who wrote extensively on this matter. Before graduates entered a company, they were subjected to a scholastic aptitude

95 "Clever, but not clever enough," *The Economist*, November 9th, 1985.

96 Richardson and Ueda, *Business Society in Japan*, 234.

97 Roesgaard, *Japanese Education and the Cram School Business*, 177.

test and a personality evaluation test. After this, one round of interviews followed, usually with the chief of the department the applicant was to join. Those who passed the tests and interview received an invitation for a final interview at the main office. When the results of these interviews were in, HR performs familial and medical background checks. Letters of recommendation were taken into account as well before the final approval was made.[98]

In recent years, it has come to light that personality and nepotism are a bigger part of the recruitment phase than initially thought. Sociologist Earl H. Kinmonth states that the interviews' main goal was to check the recruits' personality rather than their academic performances, which came last on the recruiter's list of desired virtues.[99] Yoshimura and Anderson show this nepotism at work in a case study. One recruit for a top Japanese financial institution, called Hiro, was not just from a prestigious university. He was from the same alma mater as the other employees on his destined department. Hiro received a call from a friend who had graduated a year before him and worked at the bank. When this friend asked if Hiro would be interested to work for the bank, Hiro replied in the affirmative. The two had dinner and discussed the young banker's job. The friend encouraged Hiro to meet with other managers from the bank, who had graduated from the same university as Hiro. Despite hesitations and his interest in working outside Japan, he accepted the job. Just like his classmates, Hiro expected to stay with their first employer for life, but none of them tested the waters first to make sure they ended up with their best match. In the end, Hiro's choice was made on the basis of whom he knew rather than an objective comparison between companies.[100]

After the recruitment phase was over, entrance to the company was the next big step. Becoming a 'salaryman' meant that recruits needed to become fully-fledged *shakaijin* ('member of society'). Becoming a *shakaijin* roughly means becoming a working person, leaving the student life behind and contribute to society through one's employment. New salarymen learn the company's values, etiquette, manners of speaking and other social codes to function within the company.[101] Learning these office politics is more important than one's skills, as these unwritten rules provide the framework for how to function within a company.

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98 Rohlen, *For Harmony And Strength*, 66.

99 Kinmonth, *The Self-Made Man in Meiji Japanese Thought*, 310.

100 Yoshimura and Anderson, *Inside The Kaisha*, 20.

Further necessary skills for a salaryman to do his job at the company are taught by on-the-job training (OJT).[102]

This system is firm in place, as shown by linguistic anthropologist Cynthia Dickel Dunn. She gives ample examples of classes on politeness theory and business etiquette training that are still given to new salarymen: personal appearance such as polished shoes, well-kempt hair and properly ironed clothing are not only a matter of making a good appearance, but also signs of proper etiquettes. Politeness classes cover vocal and facial expressions. Students are reminded to smile in person as well as when holding a telephone conversation. Proper movement training focuses on how to sit, stand, walk, and hand over objects. A separate section covers bowing, including posture and how deep to bow for a predetermined amount of seconds. These training sessions are all parts of learning how to properly function as a person within the company.[103]

Becoming a salaryman is a conscious decision and a hard to define profession, because the job description and desired skillset differs from company to company. The training regimen and complete immersion into the company is seen as the basis for 'salaryman' staples such as loyalty to the company, harmony and collectivism. This regimen is inseparable from business culture and business management in large Japanese companies, which has become a normative model because of its wide societal support and are therefore the biggest influence on our understanding of Japanese employment.[104] Despite their differences, the large firms have a lot of overlap in the build-up of their specific cultures and management styles.[105] The development of these cultures and styles will be the focus of the next section.

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101 Makoto Ohtsu, *Inside Japanese Business: A Narrative History 1960-2000* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2002), 28-29; Yoshimura and Anderson, *Inside The Kaisha*, 14; 22-23.

102 Arjan B. Keizer, *The Changing Logic of Japanese Employment Practices: A Firm-Level Analysis of Four Industries* (Rotterdam: Erasmus Research Institute of Management, 2005), 82; Ohtsu, *Inside Japanese Business*, 92-95.

103 Cynthia Dickel Dunn, "Formal forms or verbal strategies? Politeness theory and Japanese business etiquette training," *Journal of Pragmatics* 43 (2011), 3645.

104 Ibid., 78; Richardson and Ueda, *Business and Society in Japan*, 3-5.

105 Keizer, *The Changing Logic of Japanese Employment Practices*, 82-85.

3.4 Corporate culture in large Japanese companies

Collectivism and loyalty to the company are, to this day, seen as main 'salaryman' characteristics and are attributed to being Japanese.[106] Richardson and Ueda state that the Japanese "are more collectivist than anything else in their orientation to all aspects of life. They value group decisions and group activities whether these be in the local community or the modern company."[107] Regarding collectivism in the company, they say that "cooperative work attitudes and collectivist social pressures also encourage an attitude of diligence on the behalf of workers and employees in Japan."[108] Japanese employees have a greater commitment to their jobs due to Japan's national sense of purpose towards economic growth and the homogeneity of Japanese society, therefore having a dramatically higher productivity.[109]

Collectivism is best visible in the process of salarymen becoming a part of their so-called *doki* (a company-formed group of new entrants of the same year and department). These *doki* are universally accepted as their reference group, even years after it has officially split up and its members have all acquired different positions in different departments.[110] This group feeling stems not only from *doki* during the workday. Activities such as long hours of overwork on a nearly daily basis and after-work drinking sessions are a part of the job as well. When the section chief is done, the others follow - not the other way around. Before everyone goes on the commute back home, they go out for rounds of drinks in the local bar and discuss

106 Subhash Durlabhji and Norton E. Marks, *Japanese Business: Cultural Perspectives* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993), 24-26; Catherine Lu, "From Dichotomy to Relationship: The Public/Private Construct Reconsidered," in *Challenges for Japan: Democracy, Business and Aging*, ed. The International House of Japan (Tokyo: The International House of Japan, 2001), 34-39; Stewart Johnston and John W. Selsky, "Duality and Paradox: Trust and Duplicity in Japanese Business Practice," *Organization Studies* 27 (2006), 191-192; Philip Stiles, "The Changing Nature of the Japanese Business System and Its Impact on Asia," *Long Range Planning* 42 (2009), 429-430.

107 Richardson and Ueda, *Business & Society in Japan*, 235.

108 Ibid., 235.

109 Abegglen and Stalk jr., *Kaisha, The Japanese Corporation*, 4.

110 Yoshimura and Anderson, *Inside The Kaisha*, 65.

both business and personal matters. These bonding experiences create a cooperative and harmonious atmosphere among colleagues, an important aspect for the company.

The sense of belonging to a company also comes from the decision making system. Consensus building between employees and managers in a 'bottom-up' system gives each employee a voice and the feeling that their opinion matters. Through informal meetings between middle managers and the lower placed workers called *nemawashi*, consensual agreements are reached that are passed on to the higher echelons by said middle managers. Once everyone has had their say, a formal decision is made in a *ringi seido*, "in which a memorandum summarizing the decision is circulated and signed by all concerned."[111] Group discussion and shared responsibility for decision making ensures that employees understand their role and act upon it in the implementation of said decisions once they are made.[112]

These characteristics are in sharp contrast with the characteristics of large American companies. American business organization decision making, for example, flows downward from the top echelons instead of flowing upward from middle-level management as it does in Japanese firms. Richardson and Ueda argue this is because of the emphasis Japanese firms put on creating strong employee loyalty, as opposed to the individualistic approach of American companies.[113] In the American economic system, free competition is a part of corporate ideology.[114] The strength of free competition, Durlabhji and Marks contend, "lies not in the capacity to surrender to the group, but in the capacity to stand alone, or even against the group. Personal disclosure, even if it involves more provoking conversations, is the course for fulfilling this aim."[115] Other key differences in personnel management can be found in the staffing of executive positions and internal control of organizations. Where Japanese executives acquire their positions through promotion, American executives are mostly hired from outside based on their resumes. American companies prefer to keep internal control over their employees with explicit rules and managing them by giving clear objectives. Japanese

111 Abegglen and Stalk jr., *Kaisha, The Japanese Corporation*, 208.

112 Ibid., 209.

113 Richardson and Ueda, *Business and Society in Japan*, 3-4.

114 Durlabhji and Marks, *Japanese Business*, 10.

115 Ibid., 97.

firms do so through implicit rules and by creating shared goals among managers and employees.[116]

One should keep in mind, however, that there are grey areas and loopholes in Japanese corporate culture. Yoshimura and Anderson define the phenomenon of *kankyo-seibi* (shaping an environment) as "setting up the way people interpret a situation so that what you want done is the only thing that others can do to meet social expectations."[117] This means that the consensual attitude is manipulated for one's own ideas, be it by gaining the favor of a top manager early on in the process, prematurely getting a senior manager's disapproval of an idea you do not want implemented, or making it publicly clear that a majority favors your proposal, effectively forcing the minority to comply to your plan to avoid social embarrassment.[118]

Loyalty to the company, collectivism and group harmony are, contrary to what some writers claim, not culturally determined for Japanese people.[119] Loyalty is bred at the company from the very beginning through the intensive entrance period by building up feelings of dedication within employees to not only their company, but to their colleagues as well. It is wrong to assume that this loyalty and dedication is inherent to all new recruits. To claim that loyalty in Japanese companies is a myth[120] is a step too far. Loyalty to the company, next to the necessity for compliance and avoiding social embarrassment, is born out of individual needs.[121] The struggle of daily hours of overwork, after-work drinking and long commutes is endured, but accepted as part of salaryman life. Some salarymen would like to spend more time at home and less time going out every night to drink with their colleagues.[122] Their endurance is rooted firmly in the stability that is offered by the three 'salaryman' benefits.

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116 Richardson and Ueda, *Business and Society in Japan*, 5.

117 Yoshimura and Anderson, *Inside The Kaisha*, 182.

118 Ibid., 183-184.

119 Stiles, "The Changing Nature of the Japanese Business System and Its Impact on Asia," 429-430.

120 "An alternative to cocker spaniels," *The Economist*, August 25th, 2001, 51-52.

121 Kinmonth, *The Self-Made Man Made in Meiji Thought*, 320-325.

122 Allison, *Nightwork*, 99-100.

The three ‘salaryman’ benefits, of which lifetime employment (LTE) is most well-known, set the ‘salaryman’ apart from Western businessmen. It was one of the main reasons Japanese management gained so much positive attention in the 1980s: large companies took “the social possession of the workers.”[123] Committing to a worker for such a long time proved for many researchers, such as Richardson and Ueda, that Japanese companies set long-term rather than short-term goals. They achieved these goals through careful preparation in hiring practices and decision making.[124] Employees were rarely fired. They were rather transferred to other departments, or received a less prestigious position within the company. Ezra Vogel said that Western companies could learn from the Japanese employment system by taking more responsibility over their employees and become more economically competitive in the long run by doing so.[125]

3.5 Conclusion

The scholarly literature in the 1980s gives a positive but critical image of the ‘salaryman’ and the realities in his life. The position of the ‘salaryman’ within the company was seen as an example for Western businesses and how they could (and perhaps should) treat their own businessmen. The social contract of LTE, seniority-based wages and support from company unions ensured loyalty to the company and salarymen giving their best performance. Companies thrived on the ‘salaryman’’s dedication and his internalization within the decision making process, giving salarymen the idea that they made valuable contributions on all levels. The company played not only a large role in a ‘salaryman’’s working life, but also in his private life through the belonging to *doki*, after work drinking sessions and long hours spent each day at the company.

At the same time, researchers show that becoming a ‘salaryman’ was no easy feat to accomplish. Through a hard and often grueling education process, potential salarymen were faced with ‘cram schools’ and ‘examination hells’ from an early age. All their hard work did not necessarily get them into the highly acclaimed universities in Japan such as Waseda, as being a student in an exclusive ‘cram school’ was eventually more significant. The

123 Gordon, *Japanese Labor Relations during the Twentieth Century*, 250.

124 Richardson and Ueda, *Business and Society in Japan*, 8-9.

125 Vogel, *Japan as Number One*.

equalitarian character of Japanese education is also falsified by the nepotism that companies show in their recruitment of graduates through their current employees and their respective personal networks at their alma maters. A ‘salaryman’’s position in the decision making process should also not be exaggerated, as there are loop holes and grey areas that nullify their influence.

Through the successful and economically stable 1980s, the ‘salaryman’ had reached his peak in popularity and international attention. The same cannot be said from his image development from the 1990s onward. Negative economic developments greatly influenced large Japanese companies, which in turn affected the ‘salaryman’, as well as changing social relations. The next chapter will deal with these developments and how they shaped the ‘salaryman’ image in scholarly literature from the early 1990s until now.

Chapter 4: Changes in ‘salaryman’ reality and image, 1992-2014

In the beginning of the 1990s, the Japanese asset bubble burst that left the economy in a state of recession. The banks at the helm of *keiretsu* networks were a primary cause of the bubble bursting through a system of bad loans to small companies that went bankrupt. This in turn left the companies in the *keiretsu* networks vulnerable to outside pressures, such as decreased demand and imports by international trade partners, who lost their faith in the Japanese companies because of the bank’s faulty policies. This forced companies to solve the problems their banks had caused. At the core stood the ‘salaryman’, now responsible for leading his company out of financial trouble.

With the Japanese recession still firm in place today, large Japanese companies are trying different policies to regain their financial health. These policies mainly involve how the large Japanese companies can reduce personnel cost, as well as running their production process more efficiently. This chapter deals with these recent developments in the Japanese business environment and culture in response to the economic recession, as well as the social relations in Japan changing parallel to these developments, and how they affect the ‘salaryman’ image.

4.1 Changes in Japanese corporate culture

The Japanese employment system that received so much praise in the 1980s is now seen by many researchers as one of the main reasons Japan has lost its competitive edge in the global business world. Salarymen are too generalist and too company-specific to bring

necessary innovation. The social contract that is lifetime employment, however, stands in the way of firing generalist salarymen and hiring specialized employees that can give a new impulse to technological development departments. Companies like Sony are in dire need of such specialized employees, as Japanese have started to lag behind their foreign competitors such as Apple and Samsung when it comes to innovation. Companies also deal with *madogiwa-zoku* (window-sitting tribe): older, redundant employees who are retained by companies due to their mutual commitment, but are demoted to do menial jobs to prevent them from making important decisions. The lifetime employment system, although not legally binding, prevents many companies from firing their employees for fear of causing a panic among other employees.

Large companies have tried increasing their production by straining their salarymen to work harder. Salarymen paid the price for their commitment due to the increasing hours of overwork. Medical research shows that, since the recession caused by the Japanese economic bubble bursting in early 90's, health among Japanese men has faltered due to increasing stress levels. To survive in the business world and maintain their positions within the company, the 'salaryman' felt a need to work even harder to show his dedication. The pressure to perform resulted in unhealthy living patterns, in which energy drinks have become one of the most consumed products.[126] Worsening socio-economic conditions have led to a large increase in suicides as well, and *karoshi* has become a high risk-factor.[127] Dissatisfaction with the system and its consequences has been voiced, in Western media especially, during the last decade. Mostly family members of salarymen show their discontent in interviews, but there are examples of 'salarymen' lashing out themselves[128] as well.

Two of such cases were published in *The New York Times* in 2007. Mr. Toyoda tells about his father, who was always exhausted, sullen or drunk when his son saw him. His father's emotional distance suffocated Mr. Toyoda and the thought of becoming like his father depressed him. Instead, he decided to set up nation-wide men's liberation groups to steer away from the old model strong-and-silent type and get these men to talk about their true

126 D. Lazarus, "For Hardworking Japanese, 'Energy' in a Bottle," *International Herald Tribune*, October 9th, 1995.

127 N. Takei, M. Kawai and N. Mori, "Sluggish economics affect health of Japanese 'business warriors'," *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 176 (2000), 494.

128 M. Fackler, "Revenge of the salaryman Japanese are fed up and increasingly litigious," *The New York Times*, June 11th, 2008; M. Fackler, "The Salaryman Accuses," *The New York Times*, June 7th, 2008.

feelings.[129] The Salaryman Senryu Contest is a short poetry contest in which salarymen mostly voice their discontent with office politics and their lack of a family life. Many aging salarymen feel misfits in their own companies, while their devotion to the corporation has left them with feelings of isolation and alienation from their families and communities.[130] Mr. Horie, a young and successful Internet billionaire, has continually gone against the grain of his salaryman father. He dropped out of college to follow his own path and prevent himself from becoming a copy of his father. His aggressive stance towards what he calls 'the club of old men' is caused by the stubbornness and low-risk outlook the older generation 'salarymen' show in both their work and personal life.[131]

Outside pressure on the so-called 'Japanese management system' is high. The time when Western researchers thought that Japanese human resource management was the pinnacle of how corporations needed to be run has faded. If an economy fails to recover for as long a time as that of the Japanese, change is necessary to reverse the trend. The turning point for this need is the Japanese economic bubble burst in the 1990s, which kicked off what is referred to as Japan's 'Lost Decade'. In the nearly two decades of ongoing recession, a role reversal has taken place: desperately in need of revival, Japanese companies have started taking their cues from American management styles.[132] This need for change had already been predicted by researchers before the 1990s,[133] but Japan's economic performance during the 1970s and the early 1980s had masked the fact that its employment system was not sustainable and that keeping it intact would be damaging in the long run. Scholars agree that Japanese companies need to adjust their management systems to reclaim the competitive edge needed to revive Japan's economy.

Economic researchers Akihiro Kanaya and David Woo show that we cannot put all the blame on the management system. It is wrong to assume that a management system that has

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129 H.M. French, "Teaching Japan's Salarymen to Be Their Own Men," *The New York Times*, November 27th, 2002, 4.

130 K. Makahira, "The lament of the aging salaryman," *The New York Times*, March 27th, 2007.

131 M. Onishi, "A Renegade's Tale of His Scorn for Japan's 'Club of Old Men'',' *The New York Times*, January 6th, 2007.

132 D.E. Sanger, "Pieces of Advice for Japan," *The New York Times*, June 28th, 1998, 1.

133 Abegglen.

proved its power can lose its competitive edge by itself in a few years' time. Rather, the banks that were allowed to provide loans to companies in its *keiretsu*-network through financial deregulation, combined with the excessive asset expansion of the connected companies in periods of economic boom, are the foremost reasons the Japanese economy is in its current weak state.[134] One should not forget that it is these connected companies that need to bear the consequences of these loans. Thus its effects on Japanese management and salarymen should not be underestimated, as economic and business researchers like Kanaya and Woo now tend to do. Human capital fluctuates stronger, as it is more subject to outside influences than a company's financial capital due to the social, individual and economic implications of bad economic performance. These fluctuations leave a significant mark on a company's production levels and its efficiency rates. Though Japanese companies are not solely at fault for their expansive policies blowing up the bubble, they are the ones that will need to change their management and employment practices to regain their competitive edge in the global markets.

4.2 Changes in Japanese employment practices

Business researcher Markus Pudelko sees four different directions Japanese management can take. The first option is keeping the system as it is and opt for traditional survival. The second is a total replacement by American management systems. The third and fourth options are both hybrid versions of both management systems. The former is a Japanized version of an American management system: core Japanese values have their place, but it is largely based on the American system. The latter keeps the current Japanese system intact, but with the implementation of American policies that are seen as compatible and beneficial to the company's performance.[135]

Both Pudelko and economist Arjan Keizer agree that this last option is the most likely of the four to occur. Pudelko states that these practices have already been set in motion, but that it is a matter of trial and error to find out which variables work. The adoption of certain

134 Akihiro Kanaya and David Woo, "The Japanese Banking Crisis of the 1990s: Sources and Lessons," *International Monetary Fund* (2000), 4.

135 Markus Pudelko and Mark E. Mendenhall, "The Japanese Management Metamorphosis: What Western Executives Need to Know About Current Japanese Management Practices," *Organized Dynamics* 36 (3) (2007), 281-283.

variables of Western models, while leaving out complementary other variables, makes them dysfunctional, resulting in friction and frustration among workers.[136] There is not a stable equilibrium yet, but Japanese managers agree that change is needed. They are more willing to look at Western models. Although Western-adopting companies yield mixed results, their performance is overall better than that of Japanese companies still clinging to their traditional management.[137] Keizer argues this as well, stating that employment adjustment is a big part of Japanese employment practices and that it is important for Japanese companies to put themselves back into the market.[138] There are three changes that will have the biggest influence on the 'salaryman' and his benefits, should they all be implemented as drastically as they are proposed in economic literature: new hiring practices, a meritocratic wage system instead of a seniority-based one and the erosion of labor unions.

Hiring practices involving new employees with lifetime employment in large Japanese companies have been a point of discussion since the mid-1980s. During the 1973 Oil Crisis, manufacturing companies had successfully kept their permanent employees on board by reducing the number of non-permanent employees: part-time employees, women, and older workers. Business sociologist and labor relations expert Robert Cole argues that large Japanese companies have left little flexibility for the lifetime employment system to survive a new crisis by cutting a large part of this employee surplus and hiring new salarymen in their stead after the economy recovered.[139] Japan's economic success had masked the fact that hiring new employees under the lifetime employment system would make companies weak competitors on the global markets, especially when the value of the yen rose sharply in 1985.

This rise put enormous pressure on Japanese companies to innovate and restructure their employment practices to reduce costs.[140] Parallel to the economic bubble burst at the

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136 Ibid., 282-283.

137 Ibid., 276.

138 Keizer, *The Changing Logic of Japanese Employment Practices*, 104.

139 Robert E. Cole, "Labor in Japan," in *Business and Society in Japan: Fundamentals for Businessmen*, ed. Richardson and Ueda (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1981), 34-35.

140 Tomasz Mroczkowski and Masao Hanaoka, "Continuity and Change in Japanese Management," in *Japanese Business: Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Durlabhji and Marks (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993), 274.

beginning of the 1990s, large companies started changing their hiring practices to preserve their lifetime employed staff and preventing massive lay-offs. They have done so by three major changes: the first change is employing more part-time employees and contract workers for a short period of time. The second is rotating jobs of LTE employees at other departments, divisions or sometimes even in subsidiary companies that requires relocation by the employee more often. The third change is hiring specialized workers instead of new generalist salarymen.

More companies are hiring specialized workers on the basis of skills for a specific, narrowly defined job to increase productivity instead of relying on new generalists that require on-the-job training and need larger company investments to be as productive as specialists.[141] This increases job market fluidity as well, since it is easier for employees to take their skills to another company. This fluidity "weakens the forces that once encouraged employees to commit to a single employer,"[142] which simultaneously lowers the cost of seniority-based wages for employers. This old wage structure focused on the length of a salaryman's tenure at the company and promoted him accordingly into senior functions, raising his wage to a level fit for his new responsibilities.[143] Such a structure could be maintained "as long as the company made profits and grew," which in turn provided salarymen with "mutual gains and delivered on the expectations of reciprocity between employees and employers."[144] Since neither profit making nor growth is at a desirable level for most companies, this practice has been changing as well.

Seniority-based wages have been shifting towards a more meritocratic system as early as the mid-1980s. Some large companies had at the time already realized that rewarding employees purely on basis of seniority would put middle managers, and especially younger outstanding employees, in a promotional gridlock.[145] Low economic growth rates led to fewer new recruits being hired, resulting in companies having to pay increasingly higher wages for a

141 Ibid., 282.

142 Jennifer Amyx, "Reform in Japanese Financial Governance: Implications for Japanese Business," in *Challenges for Japanese Business: Democracy, Business and Aging*, ed. International House of Japan (Tokyo: International House of Japan, 2001), 121.

143 Aoki, Delbridge and Endo, "'Japanese human resource management' in post-bubble Japan," *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 25(18)(2012): 2553.

144 Ibid., 2557.

growing proportion of senior employees, who are not necessarily more productive or more capable than their younger colleagues.[146] Merit was interpreted differently before the mid-1980s as well. Personnel was mostly evaluated through the concept of *jinji koka* (merit rating), which was based on educational attainment and job ability factors such as communication skills, cooperativeness, and sense of responsibility. This is now gradually being replaced by performance evaluation based on work results. The concept of performance (*gyo seki*) is different from its Western counterpart. Not only does it include the achievement of actual results, but "the expenditure of good faith effort"[147] as well. This means that how the result was achieved is an equally important, if not more important, part of performance evaluation.

This form of evaluation is a double edged knife. On the one hand, it means that a bad result is not a problem if it is achieved through right conduct, meaning an employee does not fail and embarrass himself as long as he acted correctly. But this also facilitates a low-risk attitude that is common among Japanese managers and criticized by business scholars like Yoshimura and Anderson. They say that the "drive to avoid embarrassment can seriously hamstring Japanese firms."[148] They prove this by showing an example of an extremely well-thought out strategic idea with enormous potential that was never brought to the attention of the company's board, purely on the grounds of the potential embarrassment for all those involved in the highly unlikely event of the idea being turned down.[149] Thus, the project died.

The changes Pudelko and Keizer suggested were already set in motion between the mid-1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. These changes have only partially taken place - if at all – due to the risk-aversive nature of Japanese management. The lifetime employment system still exists, albeit only for core employees and select few new recruits. But desires of new salarymen of their employment system are changing simultaneously. Especially

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145 Durlabhji and Marks, *Japanese Business: Cultural Perspectives*, 273.

146 Ibid., 279.

147 Ibid., 281.

148 Yoshimura and Anderson, *Inside The Kaisha*, 48.

149 Ibid., 49.

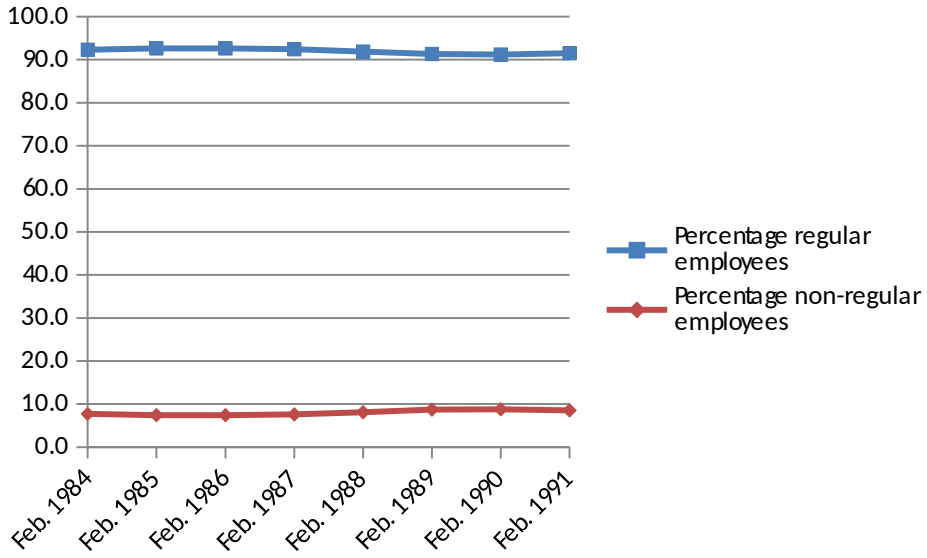
employees age 30 or younger show a large mobility between different companies and sectors.[150] Only a small portion of recruits in their 20's stay with the same company until they retire. Abegglen and Stalk predicted that in the security risk trade-off, younger generations would be inclined to choose the risk-side, because their"patience with and satisfaction from seniority-based pay and promotion systems would then be likely to wear thin."[151] Being able to change jobs and choose the job one likes is seen as a fair exchange for job security at the current employer for these younger employees. This preferred flexible type of employment calls for new ways to ensure employee satisfaction instead of lifetime employment. Which practices will remain the same, which will change, and which will disappear and be replaced by American practices is difficult to predict at the present time. That the traditional 'salaryman' with his stable employment and promotions will become a thing of the past is almost inevitable if the economy does not recover.

The recent changes in employment practices to create hiring practice flexibility are reflected in the graphs below. Graph 2 and Graph 3 are based on the total of regular versus non-regular employed workers. As we can see in Graph 2, the mid-1980s up until the economic bubble bursting in 1991 shows a small decline in regular employment: 92.3 percent in 1984 to 91.1 percent in 1991. Despite the global economic regression, large Japanese companies kept its regular work force intact and continued to hire new regular employees. Regular employment goes into a sharper decline from the 1990s into the 2000s and 2010s however, as portrayed in Graph 3. Where in 1994 91.5 percent of the total male workforce is regularly employed, this percentage drops to 87.5 percent in 2001, to 82.2 percent in 2005, to 79.8 percent in 2011, reaching its all-time low at 77.8 percent at the end of 2014.

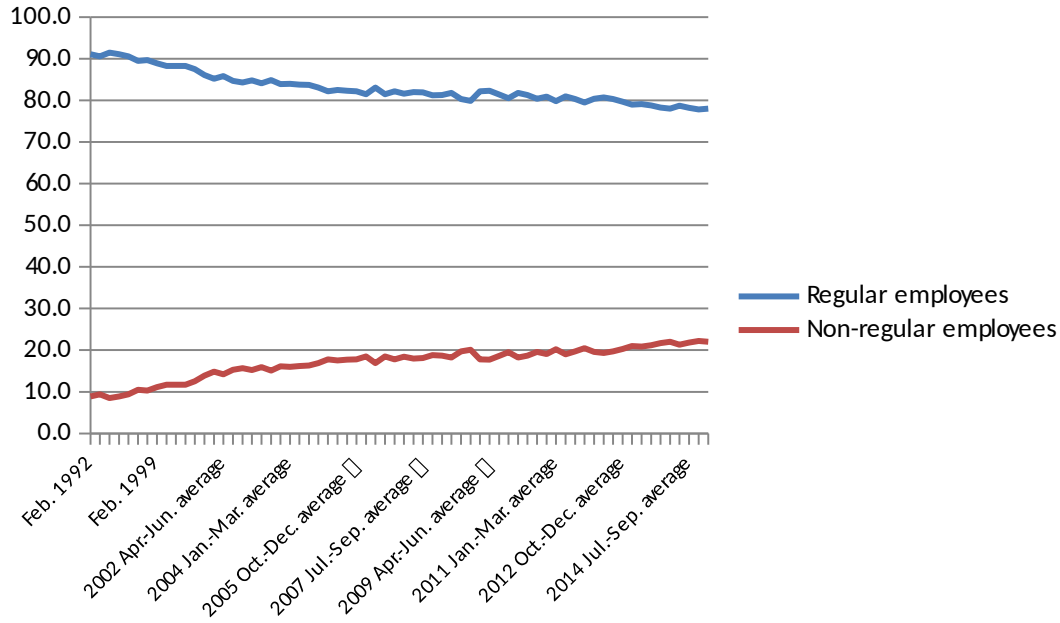
Graph 3: Male employment by type of employment (in %), 1984-1991.[152]

150 Maria M. Cheng and Arne L. Kallenberg, "How Permanent Was Permanent Employment? Patterns of Organizational Mobility in Japan, 1916-1975," *Work and Occupations* 24 (1) (1997): 29.

151 Abegglen and Stalk jr., *Kaisha*, *The Japanese Corporation*, 210.



Graph 4: Male employment by type of employment (in %), 1992-2014.[153]



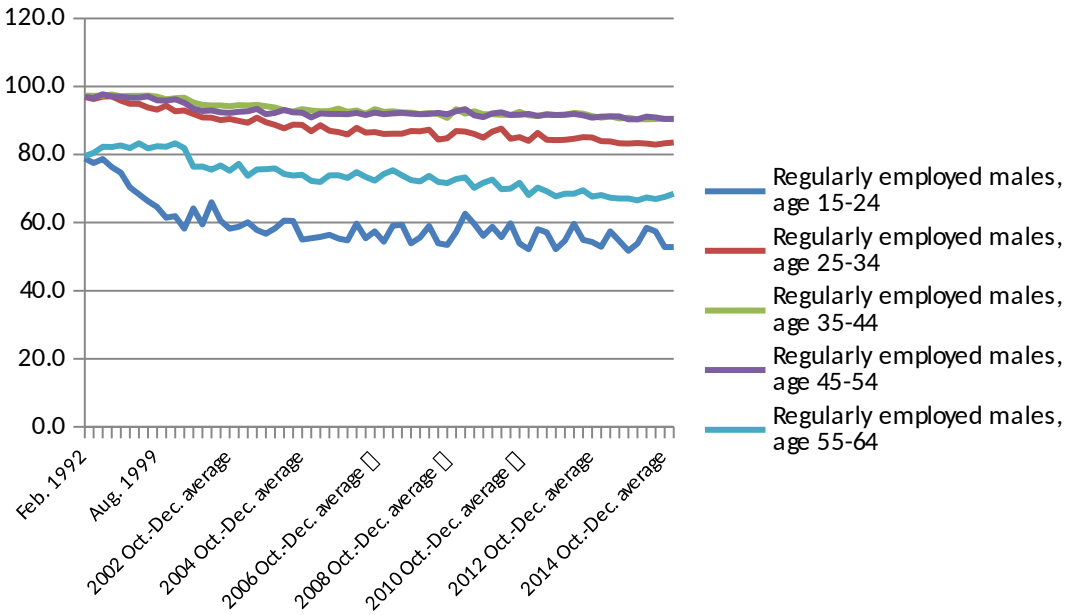
Although these graphs do not show the shifts per industry, they clearly show a trend towards hiring temporary workers to cut costs. When we look at Graph 4, it gives an indication in which age groups regular employment is most prominent. The percentages of

152 Japanese Statistics Bureau, "Historical data 9: Employee by age group and type of employment – Whole Japan," 2015.

153 Ibid.

regularly employed males between 35 and 44, and 45 and 54 have remained most stable. These have gone from 97.3 percent and 96.9 percent in 1992 to 90.5 percent and 90.4 percent at the end of 2014 respectively. Regularly employed males between 25 and 34 started at a similar percentage as the two aforementioned age groups (96.9 percent), but they have gone into a sharper decline: at the end of 2014, 83.3 percent of males age 25 to 34 were regularly employed. A similar pattern shows for those aged 55 to 64: 79.5 percent to 67.5 percent. The biggest fall has been taken by regularly employed males age 15 to 24, who went from 78.8 percent in 1992 to 52.8 percent.[154] Combined with the conclusions drawn above, these figures confirm the decline in the hiring of new salarymen, older salarymen going into an early forced retirement through severance pays, and the 'salaryman''s relative decline in the work force, weakening his hegemonic position. Only the current age groups 35 to 44 and 45 to 54 largely remain in their regularly employed positions, though this is slowly declining as well. If the age groups 15 to 24 and 25 to 34 are an indication for what is to come, the older age groups will go into further and sharper decline during the next two decades.

Graph 5: Regularly employed males by age group (in %), 1992-2014.[155]



154 Japanese Statistics Bureau, "Historical data 9: Employee by age group and type of employment – Whole Japan," 2015.

155 Ibid.

Not only changes in corporate culture, business management, and hiring practices have had their effects on salarymen's positions, but the changing role of the company unions has left its mark as well. The initial big influence of company unions on corporate leadership, ideology and structure obtained through bargaining in the 1950s and 1960s is largely thanks to the involvement of white-collar employees.[156] Since the 1980s, this system of bargaining has been changing into a discussion-oriented process for white-collar workers called the joint consultation system. This is a procedure "between employees and executives to work out a management plan and decide on the levels of salaries and bonus payments through joint-consultation. In addition to attaching importance to human relationships, it encourages employees to regard themselves as fully participating members of the enterprise."[157] Another reason these bargains have become less harsh is the decreasing participation of employees in unions. This decline is, in part, due to young employees who "prefer to abstain from union membership,"[158] and in part due to the rise of part-time and contract workers at companies who rarely join company unions, if at all. Today only one in five Japanese employees is a company union member, as opposed to 35 percent in 1975.[159]

The original function of company unions, namely discussing with management on behalf of employees, is slowly disappearing as a result of Japan's poor economic performance over the last two decades.[160] In the decades of high economic growth, company unions easily achieved their goals of bargaining steady pay raises and larger bonuses. Companies could oblige thanks to their performance and keep their end of the social contract. When Japan's economic performance began to falter, however, the large unionized companies became less profitable compared to small and medium-sized non-unionized companies. Business scientist John Benson shows that productivity was not positively influenced by union presence within the company. Because of this, unions have been forced to meet more of the company

156 Solomon B. Levine, "The White Collar, Blue-Collar Alliance in Japan," *Industrial Relations Journal* 5 (1965): 103; 112-115

157 Web Japan, "Employment: Meeting the challenges of the future," 3-4.

158 Ibid., 3.

159 Ibid., 3.

160 J. Benson, "Japanese management, enterprise unions and company performance," *Industrial Relations Journal* 37(3)(2006): 242-258.

executives' demands since 1995, when the economic downturn started to take its toll.[161] Company unions have retained some of their negotiation power, in particular over pay and working conditions. But pay cuts and employees working longer hours were deemed necessary by both the company and its union to increase productivity in order to increase the profitability of the company.[162] With the changing working conditions and the strain put on employees in the past two decades, one assumes that union members would eventually fight back. Yet the fear of becoming outcasts in the company or worse, losing their jobs, withholds union members from speaking up. The ongoing recession and a lack of transferable skills gives 'salarymen' little hope for another job that provides the same status and wage as their current position. Instead of risking their financial stability, they fall in line with management. One can argue that it is a delicate balance between company-bred loyalty and individual protection.

It is easy to imagine that the declining importance of company unions and the probability of American management styles and policies being implemented in large Japanese companies will lead to an individualization among Japanese employees. Specialized workers bring useful skills to the company and are less costly to train than the current generation of generalist salarymen that acquired their skills through OJT. Specialists therefore have a competitive edge over the generalists and are in a good position to demand higher salaries. These demands will clash with seniority-based wage increases, if this factor still influences one's pay in ten years. Such developments are thus expected to have negative effects on the harmonious balance between employees, since it goes against the egalitarian character and the collectivist nature of Japanese business. The evolution of these interpersonal relations between generalist salarymen and specialist salarymen are unfortunately outside the scope of this thesis. Nonetheless, it is a significant development that will have big consequences for Japanese management, as well as current and future salarymen.

4.3 The role of women in 'salarymen's lives

The most important social changes for salarymen lie within their familial relations. More specifically, it lies within the changing role of women in today's Japanese society. Young Japanese women are up and coming in the business sector. Next to a relatively large increase

161 Ibid., 253-254.

162 Ibid., 253.

of female labor participation when compared to male labor participation (from 34.1 percent in 1980 to 41.6 percent in 2006), more of these women are working full-time and making a professional career in fields like law, politics and economics (14 percent in 1980 to 18 percent in 2006).[163] Thanks to the Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEOL) in 1985, employers are required to eliminate gender as a factor in hiring practices. This law was modified in 1999 to "further eliminate employment discrimination against women."[164] This gives Japanese women today better chances than their 1960s and 1970s counterparts to build up a successful career.[165] But, as stated earlier, Japanese women and especially office ladies are still expected to quit when they get married. As Allison argues: "a woman may work, but her social status and place in society is not defined primarily as worker."[166]

An increasing number of women now chooses to marry later in order to stay at their jobs, living at home or cheap company accommodation, attempting to make a career for themselves and enjoying the bachelorette life. Yamada Masahiro calls this phenomenon 'parasite singles': young women and men who do not adhere to the expected course of getting married and having children, thus avoiding their social responsibilities. It should be noted that these 'parasite singles' are not against marriage. They consciously choose to marry later and wait until they have found the ideal partner. But standards for potential partners are at an all-time high, which is one of the reasons marriage is postponed more often.[167]

Women look for a husband who can function as the *daikokubashira* (central support pillar), or as we would call: it the primary breadwinner. With the large increase in young temporary and part-time workers (*freeter*) in the 1990s due to the economic slowdown, growing to over two million Japanese under thirty-five by the mid-2000s, it has become increasingly harder for males to live up to the expectations of becoming the sole provider for a family. It makes them less attractive marriage partners, as reflected in the number of unmarried men in the age category thirty to thirty-four. 70 percent in the non-regular sector is

163 James F. Mahoney, "Changes to the White-Collar Career-Track Employment System in Japan Resulting From Increased Female Participation Rates," Capella University: UMI (2010): 70-71.

164 Ohtsu, *Inside Japanese Business*, 438.

165 Ibid., 437.

166 Allison, *Nightwork*, 91

167 Dasgupta, *Re-Reading The Salaryman in Japan*, 104-105.

unmarried, as opposed to 41 percent of those in the regular employment sector. By 2007, the average age of marriage in Japan had reached Scandinavian standards: men marry at an average age of 30.1, women do so at 28.3.[168] The financial stability of a 'salaryman' is still an important factor for most women when choosing a marriage partner.

Married salarymen also enjoy a higher status and are seen as more trustworthy than their non-married counterparts because they can support a family. They enjoy more privileges such as faster promotion and lesser workloads than their unmarried colleagues because they have more responsibilities.[169] Marriage is therefore advantageous for salarymen. In recent years, young salarymen's attitudes have become more tolerant towards the idea of their wives continuing their jobs after child birth, thus accommodating women's expectations. But helping with the housework and childrearing is still something few salarymen are prepared to help with. This puts a strain on women who actively want to pursue a career next to having a family. Only in a few cases do career women succeed in managing both a successful professional and familial life.

One successful account is found in Japanese sociologist Hiroko Hirakawa's discussion about Bandô Mirako, a successful Japanese businesswoman who combined her work with the responsibilities of a full-time housewife best known for her best-selling book *The Dignity of the Woman* (2006). The book is a collection of tips on proper conduct, etiquette, and philosophy for women to become 'dignified women', and has sold more than a million of copies to mostly Japanese women in their twenties and thirties.[170] "Dignified women," in Bandô's view, project an "upper-class aura while remaining ever modest and grounded in an appreciation for the old-fashioned values of frugality, respect, and sentiment."[171]

The main point from *The Dignity of the Woman* is that being a loveable person in a business environment who loves her coworkers will get this love in return and create the basis for a long-lasting career. Lovability is a strategy for survival in a male-dominated society. One example is Bandô being grateful for the cooperative attitude of her boss and colleagues when

168 Ibid., 105.

169 Ibid., 104.

170 Hiroko Hirakawa, "The Dignified Woman Who Love to Be "Loveable"," in *Manners and Mischief: Gender, Power, and Etiquette in Japan*, ed. Bardsley and Miller (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 136.

171 Ibid., 142-143.

she would take her maternity leave or when she needs to take care of sick in-laws. Even though many women desired and fought for these rights, Bandô argues that women should not forget to express their thanks to both boss and colleagues.[172]

Many of the book's young readers have a different view. They see it as an accommodating attitude towards the '*oyaji* society', the old system in which the salaryman rules supreme as breadwinner and decision maker at home. It does not represent present working and social conditions for young women today, whose position is still dictated by the stereotyped gender division of labor.[173] Bandô is part of the ruling elite bureaucratic order that is sheltered of the harsh reality where women are excluded from the promotion track and are sometimes forced to become temporary workers. Bandô's ideal life is unattainable for a large majority of women. At the same time, women refusing to comply with the 'dignified woman'-ideal shows a declining willingness to accommodate the expectations of being just a loveable person. Women are trying hard to further their careers through other means and values as well.

The paragraphs above indicate that women are not only looking for a *daikokubashira* husband, but also a man that is not stuck in the values of '*oyaji* society' and who is willing to help with housework and childrearing. Marriage is an important institution for salarymen to be seen as *ichininmae no shakaijin* (a fully adult social being),[174] but their attitude towards their wives working, doing housework and helping with childrearing needs to change more drastically to get on the same page as their potential wives. With expectations of potential marriage partners this high from both women and men, it is easy to see why Japan's marriage and birth rate is at an all-time low. The standard middle class family where only the husband works and the wife is a full-time housewife that takes care of the two children is vanishing because of these developments. Mari Osawa confirms that this family set-up makes up an increasingly smaller portion of known families in Japan: from 75 percent of full-time housewives being married to salarymen in the 1980s to 46.6 percent in 1995.[175] If salarymen are not willing to change their attitudes, Japan's aging population problems will increase.

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172 Ibid., 147-149.

173 Osawa, "Twelve Million Full-Time Housewives," 266.

174 Dasgupta, *Re-Reading the Salaryman in Japan: Crafting Masculinities*, 101.

175 Osawa, "Twelve Million Full-time Housewives," 260.

That, in turn, will have its consequences for Japan's work force and pension system that lie outside the scope of this thesis.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an account of how Western scholarly literature has dealt with the 'salaryman' since the 1990s. The 1980s portrayed an idealized image, due to Japan's successful economic performance in the business sector. The subsequent demystification of the 'salaryman' came when the Japanese economy went into a steady decline throughout the 1990s and 2000s. The 'salaryman' had initially been portrayed as the average businessman in Japan, whose position was attainable for most self-perceived middle-class white-collar workers who received lifetime employment, and seniority-based wages and promotions, working in companies that cared for their workers, backed by a company union. Research shows that the 'salaryman' of the 1980s was an ideal only men with the highest education and the best connections in large companies were able to reach.

When the bubble burst in the early 1990s, it became clear the employment system with benefits such as age-based wage raises and promotions could not be wholly maintained. Seniority-based wages had actually already been changing since the 1980s towards a system where only the best performing employees received promotions to the highest echelons of the company. The declining influence of company unions on working conditions and an ever-growing workload have made becoming a salaryman less and less attractive to today's youth. They see their fathers as mere providers and slaves to the wage with little lust for life.

Furthermore, research has proven that so-called 'Japanese management' has lost its competitive edge in today's global economy due to its continued low risk-taking attitude and focus on preferred operational conduct instead of desired results. This focus on conduct has convinced researchers that Japanese management needs to shift its corporate operational management and employment practices towards American business practices. This, however, does not mean Japanese businesses should abandon their entire system. Japanese corporations are advised to implement American practices only partly, while maintaining the core of their own systems. Which American practices work and which do not is a matter of trial and error, and will differ per company. Taking the staunch stance to change of most large companies into account, it will take years before significant changes are made. Small changes are visible, however, such as the increasing uncertainty of lifetime employment for new company recruits and the call for more specialized workers instead of generalists.

Not much has been done on the 'new' generation of salarymen that have entered large companies in recent years, save from accounts in Dasgupta's *Re-Reading the Salaryman in Japan*. It is clear that interest for the 'salaryman' in scholarly literature, like his hegemonic ideal, is waning. How the 'salaryman' image has evolved in popular media, and whether it has undergone a similar fate as it has in the scholarly literature will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Development of the 'salaryman' image in Western media, 1980-2014

"Not long ago, Western firms would have turned to Japan for advice about how to foster loyalty. Companies there were thought to have an inside track on the subject. The Japanese "salaryman" traded loyalty, punishing hours and obedience for lifetime employment security, and everybody benefitted. But the idea was always something of a myth. The "lifetime" security lasted for little more than 30 years (most salarymen retired on a negligible pension at 57), and it applied only in the biggest companies, representing probably no more than one-third of the workforce."[176]

The quote above is from a 2001 edition of *The Economist*. It is exemplary of how Western media have shaped the 'salaryman' and his image during the last decade. With the steady decline of the Japanese economy, so too has the image of the 'salaryman' started to falter since the bursting of the economic bubble. As in the scholarly literature, the 'salaryman' image underwent its demystification in Western media in the 1990s. Leading magazines such as *The Economist*, which likes to typify itself as a weekly newspaper, and large daily newspapers like *The New York Times* have shown their justifiably critical attitudes towards Japanese business management and the 'salaryman' image. But in what respects did the Western media coverage of the 'salaryman' differ from the conclusions drawn by researchers in the previous chapter? It is expected that media focus on different aspects of the 'salaryman' and Japanese business than the scholarly literature. Where scientists focus on the macro-economic and political changes that influence the 'salaryman', the media look at what cultural and social changes the 'salaryman' undergoes. This information will serve as a valuable addition to how our understanding of the 'salaryman' image has developed since the 1980s. How the 'salaryman' image was established in Western media will first be presented in a short historical overview from the 1950s until the 1980s to show the image's full evolution.

176 "An alternative to cocker spaniels," *The Economist* August 25th, 2001: 51-52.

5.1 Early Western media attention, 1950-1980

Western media slowly turned their attention towards Japan and its business sector in the early 1950s. As stated in the previous chapter, the close ties between Japan and the U.S.A. and the astounding success of the Japanese economy are the most probable reasons both scholars and journalists alike turned their attention toward Japan. *The Economist* and *The New York Times* were at the forefront of documenting Japan's economic, political and social developments, bringing these into Western popular consciousness. This chapter will therefore use *The Economist* and *The New York Times* as source material for discussing the 'salaryman''s image development, as they offer a good overview of this development due to their leading role in Western media and critical coverage of the subject matter. Despite Abegglen's and Vogel's early works on Japanese business and the 'salaryman', it was not until the late 1980s and 1990s that the term came into widespread use in Western media and scholarly work. This chapter therefore focusses on the period from the 1980s up until now in terms of the 'salaryman''s image development. A brief overview of media attention during the postwar decades is provided first. This overview provides the context for why the 'salaryman' became a topic of interest in Western media.

Japan's economic development did not receive much positive attention directly after the American Occupation. Its economy was still weakened and suffered under large reforms during the early 1950s. Hence, it was of little interest to leading magazines like *The Economist*, except for a few small pieces on labor unions and strikes.[177] The continuous high economic growth period in the 1960s and 1970s instigated the extended coverage on Japan, with topics ranging from its success in the manufacturing sector,[178] Japan's economic growth rate,[179] and the deepening of international relations.[180] One reporter described Japan's economic success as a "run of luck,"[181] dependent on exports to the United States. *The*

177 *The Economist*, January 1957 to December 1957.

178 "Japan's 43-month boom goes on and on," *The Economist*, June 7th, 1969: 81.

179 "Japan: growth as before," *The Economist*, December 27th, 1969: 21-22.

180 "Holding down the yen," *The Economist*, November 8th, 1969: 80-81.

181 "Bulls in waiting," *The Economist*, August 6th, 1966: 587.

Economist showed its reservations on Japanese policy towards exports and the growing surplus. Nevertheless, the magazine reported on Japan's expected growth rate for 1970 as if nothing less was to be expected. Carefully, *The Economist* starts to show a more positive attitude towards Japan's economic policies, mostly due to its ongoing success.[182] Although scholars had already documented on the 'salaryman', the term had not yet caught on in Western media.

From the mid-1970s onwards, *The Economist* shifts its attention from Japan's economic performance to companies and their human resource management. The word 'salaryman' is not used in these pieces, but staples such as bi-annual bonuses,[183] the lifetime employment system,[184] and the description of the perfect male partner for women hinting toward the 'salaryman' ideal[185] are all discussed. From then on, the 'salaryman' is portrayed as the embodiment of both the typical Japanese working male and the success of the Japanese business sector. He is seen as the 'corporate warrior', loyal to his company and his colleagues no matter what. He is happy to work long hours of overtime and go out for drinks with his department to maintain his position in the firm, steadily climbing the corporate ladder through hard work, diligence and compliance. The world 'salaryman', however, would not come into use until a decade later. It is an important part of his image development nonetheless. The ideal resonated with the media and received more and more positive attention.

Journalists showed an increasing interest for socio-cultural and socio-economic developments in Japan. *The Economist* pieces from the 1970s on Japan mainly focused on the consequences of the Oil Crisis and Japan's dealing with the subsequent power shortages. In the 1980s, the range of Japan-related topics broadened to subjects like Japanese working hours in contrast to those in the West, the well-being of Japanese workers and other social phenomena seen as exclusively Japanese. Recognized as a sustainable economic superpower, Japan now found itself in a leadership-position not only economically, but as a role model for business management as well. Western media started looking for explanations why Japanese businesses were outperforming American businesses and what lessons there were to be

182 "Japan: growth as before," *The Economist*, December 27th, 1969: 21-22.

183 "Mostly down," *The Economist*, January 10th, 1976.

184 "The female fiddle," *The Economist*, April 24th, 1976.

185 "Let us eat and be merry," *The Economist*, October 16th, 1976.

learned from the Japanese. As the 1970s passed over into the 1980s, facets of 'salaryman' life are highlighted and exemplified for American businesses in Western media, followed by the 'salaryman' himself becoming the main subject of pieces on Japanese business in the early 1990s.

5.2 The Economist: 1980s and early 1990s

In its review of Ezra Vogel's *Japan as Number One* in 1980, *The Economist* agrees with Vogel that it is sadly true that "Western countries are still mostly ignorant of what makes the world's second largest economy tick and are also unwilling to learn from the Japanese"[186] and that America could learn from Japan's business sector. Japan's economic success is accredited to Japan's large companies with 500 or more employees. These companies have become "world leaders with the help of a government wholly committed to economic strength."[187] This is also thanks to Japanese managers and workers, who "get along better than any others in the world."[188] At the same time, *The Economist* recognizes that Vogel writes a one-sided story that fails to show that most potential lessons are not transferable to America. Vogel acknowledges this fact himself and argues that U.S. reformers could borrow selective policies and leave the rest. He suggests that the United States "should give itself a political and cultural heart transplant"[189] and become competitive through a stronger government, staffed by young people who put group interest before that of the individual. *The Economist* calls it unrealistic to change the American system in this fashion and laments the fact that little of Vogel's proposed changes are feasible. *The Economist* would have liked Vogel to give concrete examples from Japan that could improve America's business sector. The review suggests a willingness to learn from and an interest in the Japanese business sector and its businessmen, but not at the cost of America's own system nor through a one-sided account from Ezra Vogel. This positive yet critical outlook is typical for *The Economist*'s coverage of Japan.

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186 "One side of the success story," *The Economist*, January 19th, 1980: 84.

187 Ibid.

188 Ibid.

189 Ibid.

Japanese workers' loyalty to the company was a topic of great interest. In a graph of hours worked on a yearly basis by engineering employees, numbers indicated that Japanese engineers worked an average of 1,840 hours a year, with an average of 40 hours per week.[190] Hours of overtime were not taken into account, however, as they were mostly kept off of official records in Japanese companies. Japanese engineers also had six weeks of holiday time, while their American counterparts had to settle for four weeks. This, however, was no realistic portrayal of actual time spent on holiday. *The Economist* reported that much of this holiday time was often left unclaimed, so "say the (delighted) bosses."[191] *The Economist*, through such pieces and graphs, showed its clear interest in facets of Japanese working life. It did so especially in sectors in which American and Japanese competition was fierce, such as the heavy and electronics industries. Loyalty towards one's company thus also received its fair share of attention. But not only working life caught *The Economist*'s attention.

The intricate cultural development of love hotels[192], the phenomenon known as *manga*[193], the act of gift giving[194], and the lack of creativity in education[195] are all discussed in several issues between October and December 1985. An attempt to deepen the understanding of Japanese practices and customs is actively made by *The Economist*. Its primary focus on the exotic and unknown side of Japanese life, ironically, has the same risk *The Economist* warned for in its critique on Vogel's book. The focus provides a one-sided view of Japan that only depicts the differences between America and Japan instead of making an effort to find common grounds as well. *The Economist* therefore offers a particularistic outlook on Japanese socio-economic developments that led to an eschewed image of Japanese society. Focusing on solely the exotic in a positive way, *The Economist* compromises its researches validity by leaning towards Orientalism.

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190 "Focus: Working Hours," *The Economist*, March 24th, 1984: 97.

191 Ibid.

192 "An intimate business," *The Economist*, October 12th, 1985.

193 "Through a glass darkly," *The Economist*, November 23rd, 1985.

194 "Japan imports the fun," *The Economist*, December 21st, 1985.

195 "Clever, but not clever enough," *The Economist*, November 9th, 1985.

At the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, interest for Japan's business sector and Japan's cultural traits reached new heights. *The Economist*, in October 1988, reported that large Japanese chip manufacturing companies might be taking a risk upping their production capacity because of another possible boom-bust like in 1984, when the personal computers market's fall caused a price war between American and Japanese chip companies. But *The Economist* also states a reassurance that the chip market seems to keep rising. Together with the broad basis of the companies' activities in manufacturing chips for fax machines, laser printers, engineering workstations, and mobile phones instead of just personal computer chips, *The Economist* saw a bright future for this sector in Japan.[196]

Japan's opportunistic approach towards multiple religions is a topic of discussion as well. *The Economist* quotes an old joke, saying that "it is common for a Japanese to be blessed as a child by a Shinto priest, married by a Christian one and passed through to the next world by a Buddhist one."[197] The magazine recognizes that such an opportunistic view of religion is common enough among Westerners as well, but it is often accompanied by a twinge of guilt. This does not apply to Japanese people according to the magazine. Japanese use an idea if it is appropriate, and put it away until it is required again. A Japanese person might feel shame, but not guilt. Shame which can fortunately be taken away by saying sorry. "That is the Japanese way in politics, business and life," *The Economist* argues.[198] Shame is indeed a big part of Japanese culture, but one cannot assume that Japanese people never feel guilt towards others. Broad generalizations like this, focusing on the differences between 'the Japanese' and 'the Americans', have an air of Orientalism. These generalizations are frequent in *The Economist*'s pieces in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and resonate in their analyses of salarymen.

Another example of *The Economist* leaning towards Orientalism is the explanation of the Japanese concepts *tatemae* and *honne*. These terms are defined as follows: "The Japanese like masks. There are even a couple of words to describe the face you put on in public (*tatemae*, appearance) and what you actually look like behind that (*honne*, reality). Half-truths or virtual lies are accepted for form's sake."[199] This explanation poses the phenomenon as

196 "Buying into the memory boom," *The Economist*, October 15th, 1988: 93-94.

197 "Japan's heaven-sent opportunism," *The Economist*, December 3rd, 1988: 61.

198 Ibid., 61.

199 "When the mask has to drop," *The Economist*, December 17th, 1988: 55.

uniquely Japanese. But this approach of *tatemae* and *honne* can be found in many other countries and industries. Take, for example, the service industry. Workers in this industry are all smiles and at their cheeriest when guests are around. At the end of the day, everybody lowers their defenses and discusses the worst guests of the day. *Honne* and *tatemae*, however, affirm the assumptions scholarly literature makes about Japanese businesses not being completely transparent and having its fair share of backdoor politics. Although these pieces do not specifically mention the 'salaryman', the authors do mention how these cultural outings affect business and politics. *The Economist*'s focus first lay on how businesses and businessmen portrayed themselves in a *tatemae*-fashion. After this piece, *The Economist* delves into the *honne*-side of matters, trying to find reasons why Japanese companies are losing their financial strength, and adopting a more negative and critical view on salarymen.

5.3 The Economist: 1990s and 2000s

Lifetime employment and a patriarchal company, once considered comparative strengths of Japanese business, became the reasons in the 1990s why the Japanese economy needed to fight a losing battle against its first recession in decades. *The Economist*'s harsh critiques regarding business management in light of the recession came through best in a piece from the issue released in November 14th, 1992: "the big companies have reacted in the usual way. They have squeezed suppliers, cut or even abolished overtime and slashed bonus payments. NEC, an electronics firm, has warned 6,500 of its managers that a portion of their annual bonuses will be paid in vouchers (exchangeable into the company's products) rather than cash. Deference to Japan's post-1945 tradition of lifetime employment remains a potent force. However, the cracks are beginning to show. Nissan and JVC, both in financial trouble, have announced to lay off 4,000 and 3,000 people (respectively) over the next two years. The usual ways to get rid of people – dumping excess labour into new subsidiaries, for example – are becoming trickier as companies close unprofitable operations set up before Japan's economic boom turned to bust."[200]

There are two major themes in this quote that need to be addressed. First is what *The Economist* called the big companies' 'usual reaction'. Instead of taking drastic measures to improve performance, a company tried to reduce cost where possible without laying off its core personnel. The social contract of the lifetime employment system more or less forced

200 "The end of the beginning," *The Economist*, November 14th, 1992: 74.

them to keep their status quo and keep their workforce appeased. This fits in with the general consensus among scholars that Japanese management is risk-aversive by nature. Its managers preferred adhering to correct form to taking a risk that could possibly have a worse outcome while its gains would be much greater than sticking with what they know.

The second is tied in with the first, namely the cracks showing in the lifetime employment system. Where it previously had been portrayed as a strength of Japanese businesses, it was now seen as a deadweight forcing companies to keep underperforming workers in their ranks. The announcement of these large companies laying off such workers instead of transferring them to subsidiaries was shocking. As stated in the previous chapter, these changes have not set through two decades later. It is likely that the targets of these layoffs had been employees close to retirement, who received a severance pay for their premature leave. Part-time and female workers were also part of the layoffs, albeit without the severance pay. The small amount of those in lifetime employment being laid off resulted in an image of Japan's business sector refusing to go with its time, run by managers stuck in the ways that had proven to be less competitive than researchers and media initially thought in the 1980s.

This negative image was portrayed on all salarymen and was strengthened in the late 1990s. In August 1997, one article starts with the following: "In his blue suit and white shirt, with his standard-issue briefcase in hand, the salaryman is the symbol of modern Japan."[201] These salarymen "squeeze uncomplainingly into packed commuter trains, stagger home after 12-hour workdays, rise predictably through the corporate hierarchy and never, ever, take any risks."[202] This sentence indicates the author does not particularly envy the position of the salaryman. That the envy towards Japanese businessmen and their businesses was disappearing is more evident in the July 18th 1998-edition of *The Economist*. The article starts out with a portrayal of American managers dealing with the so-called "white-collar recession" in the late 1980s that left them with "less prestige, less security, and fewer nooks and crannies in which underperformers can hide. Those managers have had it easy, however, compared with what is about to happen in Japan."[203]

The author stressed that macro-economic woes were just one problem for Japan. Japanese businesses needed to restructure for the long-term in order to survive the shift from heavy to

201 "Exercised," *The Economist*, August 2nd, 1997: 63.

202 Ibid., 63.

203 "Sayonara, sarariman," *The Economist*, July 18th, 1998: 63.

high-tech industries, “and at the same time unravel several mutually reinforcing habits,”[204] referring to the three salaryman benefits. The author argues that “a decade ago those habits were the envy of the West. Now, they spell trouble.”[205] The argument is congruent with that of the scholarly work: when capital was strong, it was easy to promise new salarymen lifetime employment and seniority-based pay. But as the economy matured, they became ageing liabilities. The on-the-job training and frequent job rotation of these now middle managers had left companies with workers that had lost their function within the company due to their lack of expertise and now sat idly by the window. *The Economist* argued that the solution lay in the way Japanese companies recruit, train and promote their managers. But many Japanese managers denied there was a problem. They did not see a need for a change in their hiring practices.[206] The article shows a deepening understanding of Japanese business and that its evolution, or lack thereof, is damaging Japan’s economy. In this evolution, salarymen play a large role by their risk-aversive attitudes towards change. Abegglen’s predictions of the Japanese employment system losing its advantages when the economy takes a downturn have now become a reality, of which *The Economist* shows it is more than aware.

The masculine role model function of the ‘salaryman’ started changing as well. While it still remained dominant, other masculine role models made their way into Japanese mainstream society. In July 1999, *The Economist*-article “Japan’s pretty boys” stated that “the blue-suited salaryman is having a rough time. He faces being fired or being demoted. Worse, he is losing the respect of his family. The recession is hurting male pride and profoundly changing Japan’s traditional, rigid society. Young Japanese men are abandoning the concept of masculinity championed by their fathers. Instead they are laying claim to Japan’s traditional feminine values. Images in the media show men as emotional, even as objects of ridicule, not powerful, as in the past.”[207] Not only did Japanese youths reject the lifestyle of salarymen, they tried to distance themselves from traditional behavior patterns associated with salarymen. The salaryman’s decline in both Japan and the West was now a fact.

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204 Ibid., 63.

205 Ibid., 63.

206 Ibid., 63.

207 “Japan’s pretty boys,” *The Economist*, July 10th, 1999: 77.

The 2000s showed a further waning of the ‘salaryman’’s image as the economy stayed in recession. The uncertainty of the ‘salaryman’’s position became clear when Japan’s largest electronics firms announced they needed to lay off large numbers of personnel, even more than in 1992. Toshiba and Fujitsu had to cut 19,000 and 16,000 jobs respectively, while NEC was upping its announced lay-offs from 15,000 to 19,000 as well.[208] In the same week, “the official unemployment rate rose to 5% of the labour force, the highest since 1953.”[209] These were signs for salarymen potentially losing their jobs. But as Pudelko and Keizer have pointed out, “lifetime employment is still being protected: Fujitsu’s cuts were mainly overseas, and Toshiba’s are being phased in over three years.”[210] Instead of the older generations getting the cut, “the pain is being borne mainly by the new school-leavers and graduates who will now not be recruited, rather than by high-costing workers, who will be retained.”[211] Despite protection by the lifetime employment system within the company, the middle-aged ‘salaryman’ had to deal with his position being discredited because he was weighing his company down with his high salary and pension costs.

In its aptly titled 2008-spread “Sayonara salaryman,” which translates to “goodbye, salaryman,” *The Economist* shows large parallels with the scholarly work on salarymen from the same time period. Previously the “paragon of modern Japan,” now becoming a “figure of the past,” the ‘salaryman’’s company “is the dominant institution in people’s lives, affecting not only Japan’s world of work but also wider Japanese society.”[212] The changing labour market had affected the ‘salaryman’’s benefits and forced companies to hire new staff on short-term or part-time contracts, diminishing the patriarchal role the company played in its employees’ lives. A generational shift also affects corporate culture, as many young professionals refuse to make their jobs the center of their lives.[213] This generational shift

208 “Lay-offs with no sign of revival,” *The Economist*, September 1st, 2001: 51.

209 “The shadow of joblessness,” *The Economist*, September 1st, 2001: 11.

210 Ibid., 11.

211 Ibid., 11.

212 “Sayonara, salaryman,” *The Economist*, January 3rd, 2008.

213 Ibid.

shows that *The Economist* no longer sees new recruits of large companies as 'salarymen'. The article unfortunately does not coin a new term to provide a solution for this semantic gap.

The older generations' salarymen started to voice their discontent towards the companies in a civil manner, as *The Economist* argues: "Today's older salarymen are stoical about the changes. They see that they are the last of their breed, but feel neither nostalgia for their past nor frustration at the younger generation's rejection of their ways. In private moments, indeed, the old guard question the sacrifices that led them to put work ahead of family and conformity ahead of their own interests. In a survey by a global consumer-products company, many salarymen expressed frustration at how their lives had turned out."[214] This image is a definitive break with the 'salaryman' image as always being loyal and obedient. First thought to be a cultural and inherent trait to Japanese, loyalty is rather conditional when the company fails to keep its end of the lifetime employment-deal.

In 2011, little remains of the 'salaryman'. *The Economist* portrays him as a lackluster figure, who has gone from the "workhorse of Japan's miracle" to "a national joke."[215] His salary is controlled by his wife, who decides how much pocket money he gets each month. Gone are the late nights out into town drinking and taking a taxi. No more expensive lunches or golf games. This is the case for the older and married salarymen according to *The Economist*. Their younger counterparts enjoy the single life and have 150 dollars per month more to spend. This is partly because they are delaying marriage and children, mostly because of the expenses both entail.[216] Women thus play a role in the 'salaryman' image development. But like young salarymen, their role is still only marginal.

5.4 The New York Times: 1990s and 2000s

In the early 1990s, *The New York Times*' reports on the 'salaryman' are similar to *The Economist*'s: they both show a large interest in the social, cultural and socio-economic developments salarymen are going through. But *The New York Times*' critique and social commentary on salarymen is more on the foreground than that of *The Economist*. In 1993 for example, David E. Sanger reported on a new government program that teaches men not only

214 Ibid.

215 "The salaryman's song," *The Economist*, March 31st, 2011: 62.

216 "Feeling the pinch," *The Economist*, September 27th, 2012.

to be company men but to be fathers and husbands as well. One evening lecturer darkly said for a group of 40 salarymen that they had 20 to 30 years to live after their retirement. They will no longer have a job, a job title, or a business card. All that is left are their wives and children.[217] Teruko Ohno, the Education Ministry official in charge of the program, stated that when "fathers come home earlier, they find they have no place. They don't know what to do. They are there, I guess, but they are spiritually nonexistent in their house."[218] Yoshihiro Onoue, member of the Osaka Prefectural Board of Education, in addition said that "when you look at the conditions in Japan today, you still have corporate warrior fathers imprisoned by the company," and "some companies want to keep it that way."[219] Instead of looking up to the 'salaryman' and his secure position within a company, *The New York Times* highlights the shadow side of the corporate warrior's existence, which shows his lack of a life outside the firm's walls.

With Japan's recession firmly in place, Sanger and scholar Andrew Gordon see the need for changes in Japanese business practices that researchers like James C. Abegglen had already predicted would become necessary. Changes that Pudelko and Keizer would still see a need for in the late 2000s and early 2010s. Where in the 1980s Japan was a leading example for American businesses, Japanese companies are now expected to take their cues from the United States in a relatively rapid role reversal. Sanger says that, now the "economic reckoning has come to Japan," it only seems fair to "return the favor with a few modest suggestions from America that might help revive the ailing giant of Asia."[220] He includes tips to get the Japanese to spend more money by putting chips in money bills that turns the money into dust if it doesn't change hands for more than a day and provide credit cards to all who want them. Although the suggestions themselves are not to be taken too seriously, it touches upon a serious subject that the Japanese economy suffers from: the risk-aversive spending of Japanese people who'd rather save their money for when another credit crunch is announced.

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217 Sanger, David E., "In Japan's Astounding Future: Life With Father," *The New York Times*, November 12th, 1993: 4.

218 Ibid., 4.

219 Ibid., 4.

220 Sanger, David E., "Pieces of Advice for Japan," *The New York Times*, June 28th, 1998: 1.

A crunch that is due to the stock market crashes, land prices, and banks that fail because of their bad loans to small businesses, gangsters and property developers.[221]

Andrew Gordon sees that permanent employment is vanishing at last. He describes this process as "a profound, traumatic transformation"[222] that Japan needs. As argued in *The Economist*-articles, these changes are less drastic and revolutionary than business researchers had hoped. Gordon notes that this process might represent a way companies deal with their workers, but is also shows an almost irresponsible continuity in business practices. Although Gordon does not refer to him, it is evident that he has read Abegglen's work when he states that "for decades, American analysts have been predicting that a change in the Japanese ways of doing business was imminent," but it would be challenge because of "the deep historical roots of Japan's employment practices, roots sunk in its legal system, the structure of schools, its systems of job recruiting and skill development, its decades-old cooperative relations between companies and unions, and the implicit expectations we call culture."[223]

Gordon does not see the long-lasting recession as a product of an ineffective employment system. Where other researchers and reporters have gone from praising to rejecting the Japanese employment and economic practices, Gordon still sees merit in the system that is now in place. He recognizes the need for more domestic demand to reduce the production surplus of electronics companies. According to him, "job security and stable wages, and public policies to insure them, could reduce fears and make people more comfortable about buying" can increase this demand and ultimately promote recovery.[224] The 'salaryman', his company, and his benefits would in this case not be required to change on as many levels as Pudelko and Keizer suggested. Corporate policy, however, is easier to alter than an entire populace's attitude toward spending money. Especially when faith in the government has dropped because of bad financial policy, still fresh in people's memory.

In the 2000s, *The New York Times* keeps its critical attitude towards salarymen, showing the struggles of Japanese employment practices and new emerging masculinities as role

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221 Ibid., 1.

222 Gordon, Andrew, "Scaring the Salaryman Isn't the Japanese Way," *The New York Times*, October 30th, 1999: 15.

223 Ibid., 15.

224 Ibid., 15.

models. New retirees, for example, see that their expected after-retirement trajectory of a second, ceremonial job has started to disappear. Stephanie Strom says regarding salarymen that the "10-year economic malaise, coupled with long-standing demographic trends, has changed the anticipated trajectory of their lives. Public and private pension systems are teetering toward insolvency, a result of poor management and a very low birth rate, which has meant fewer young workers paying into a pension system that must support their elders."[225] Salarymen are forced to go into retirement as soon as they reach the retirement age, or even before, leaving them with a smaller pension than they had initially thought, and without additional income. Companies cannot fulfill their promises, their patriarchal role diminishes, and trust in corporate management dissolves. This is just one of many reasons why young people are shying away from salaryman life.

Young people now postpone career choices, delay marriage, take time to travel, dabble in temporary work, and thus reject their parents' heavily structured lifestyles. They show "little loyalty to a system that once delivered unparalleled prosperity to Japan but is paralyzed now by inertia and crisis. At universities across the country students are already reshaping the labor force of tomorrow, choosing liberal arts degrees over engineering: for decades the occupation that buttressed Japan's manufacturing prowess."[226] The pressures of 'salaryman' life are traded in for personal freedom. Job security makes place for part-time work, next to which young people make an effort to chase their dreams of becoming pop stars and comedians.[227] Though still a national symbol of a successful male, the 'salaryman' is no longer the leading role model for Japanese youth. In one 2000-poll done by an advertising agency, less than 5 percent of teenagers said they "admired the job of "business executive," the pinnacle of salaryman culture."[228]

That the 'salaryman' image has definitively lost its cool is most evident in Howard W. French's article "Teaching Japan's Salaryman to Be Their Own Men." In it, he explains that calling oneself an "average salaryman" has gone from a cool introduction to an almost

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225 Strom, Stephanie, "In Japan, Golden Years Have Lost Their Glow," *The New York Times*, February 16th, 2000: 7.

226 Fuller, Thomas, "Work Hard? Young Japanese Have Other Ideas," April 11th, 2001.

227 Ibid.

228 Ibid.

shameful confession. Gone are the days of Japan being a world-leading economy, "where women dreamed of nothing more than raising a family with a man with a lifetime job."[229] During the recent years of low growth, more women have joined the workforce and learned to enjoy new freedoms, not eager trade them in for running a household in service of a dark-suited company man that comes home in the evening as part of the "*nure-ochiba zoku* ("the wet leaf tribe"): clingy, musty, and emotionally spent."[230] Not only his job, but the 'salaryman''s lifestyle and personality have lost their appeal to both men and women.

In an opinion article, Kumiko Makihara thought that "the stereotypical salaryman, often mocked as a corporate drone, was a thing of the past."[231] She sees many fathers at her son's primary school, who come early on field days for a good viewing spot of their children, showing their devotion to their family's lives. But these dads "may have simply extended their corporate servitude to the household"[232] by putting their families at 'Number One' for the first time in their lives. Furthermore, in one of Japan's biggest security firms' yearly poem competition, many entrants take up the lack of a family life as its main theme. This lack is "a serious consequence of the extreme corporate loyalty that stems from Japan's lifetime employment system."[233] With the company always coming in first place, Makihara is not surprised that "after 30-odd years of absentee husbandry and fatherhood, the salaryman doesn't have a warm body to come home to."[234] The irony of salarymen being faced with their own failure as fathers while the company's patriarchal role is diminishing is not lost here.

5.5 Conclusion

The 'salaryman' was typically portrayed in the 1980s and early 1990s as a proud man, who loyally worked with his colleagues for a patriarchal company to enjoy benefits such as

229 Ibid.

230 Ibid.

231 Makihara, Kumiko, "The lament of the aging salaryman," *The New York Times*, March 27th, 2007.

232 Ibid.

233 Ibid.

234 Ibid.

lifetime employment and senior-based wages. He is presented as the common Japanese businessman, able to provide for his housewife and children. But this image is only a half truth. While the modern 'salaryman' still reaps several of these benefits in a diminished form, this position was and is only attainable for a select group of men. As Dasgupta rightfully says, the term 'salaryman' in Western literature and media is "interpreted and deployed in a variety of ways, often well outside the narrow and even not-so-narrow definitions of the term as a white-collar, middle-class employee."[235] The 'salaryman' is an ideal that is held up high in Japanese society, the ultimate and desirable position for men to attain. In reality, only a small percentage of white collar workers will achieve the position of the strictly defined 'salaryman'.

This discrepancy is not made by *The Economist* or *The New York Times*, who both use the word 'salaryman' as an interchangeable term for both the high positioned core employees of a large company and the full-time white collar worker of small and medium-sized companies. For workers of small and medium-sized companies, there rarely are company unions that help the employees in their bonus negotiations, nor do they receive strictly seniority-based wages but are judged on their performance as well. Lifetime employment is highly exceptional for companies with a capacity of less than 500 workers. Only in pieces in the late 2000s and early 2010s does *The Economist* start to define salarymen as higher ranked white-collar employees of large companies.

Regardless of which groups of workers belong to the strict definition of the 'salaryman', both the scholarly literature, as well as *The Economist* and *The New York Times* mainly discuss older generation salarymen. Changes in age-based wages and the lifetime employment system are mainly linked to how they affect salarymen in their forties and fifties, and how their family and personal lives are affected because of it. The implications of changes in lifetime employment rules are never linked to new recruits or how their 'salaryman'-existence is different from that of their older counterparts. This leads to a lop-sided view of Japan's hegemonic male role model, focusing on the recruits from the 1970s and 1980s. Newer generations play only a marginal role in the 'salaryman''s image development.

One possibility the new generations are omitted in the discussion is that, with the changing of their working conditions and different values in life, these generations at large companies are not seen as fully-fledged salarymen. By highlighting differences between different generations in the late 2000s, *The Economist* and *The New York Times* signify such a

235 Dasgupta, *Re-Reading The Salaryman in Japan*, 24.

break line, as does Dasgupta by making a few case studies about young recruits in *Re-reading the Salaryman in Japan*'s chapter 3. Another option is that the older generations play a larger role within the companies through managerial functions and therefore have a larger effect on company policies. But the predominance of the now older generation of salarymen can be linked to the double role the 'salaryman' image plays in Western media.

The 'salaryman' in Western media not only functions as an umbrella-term for Japanese white-collar salaried workers: he also functions as the human incarnation of Japan's economic performance of the last three decades. From a positive role model, the 'salaryman' has changed into a less than desirable male that neither men want to be nor women want to be with. Parallel to this development is Japan's image as a global economic frontrunner in the 1980s, but is now seen as a nation with a sluggish economy that cannot seem to break out of its old corporate and financial habits in favor of economic revival due to a risk-aversive nature, paired with a focus on correct protocol over optimal result. The lack of coverage on company unions by Western media in recent years is parallel to the literature's claim that these unions have lost their function and their trivial role in today's corporate culture among large Japanese companies.

The image portrayed by both *The Economist* and *The New York Times* shows many parallels with the scholarly literature written on the 'salaryman' and Japanese business management. Like the Japanese economy of today, the 'salaryman' is stuck in the past. Middle management has lost the competitive edge it had over its American counterpart by holding onto an employment system that is unsustainable in times of economic decline. Salarymen are part of a corporate policy that focused on high production and export-based growth, leading to a trade imbalance that left trading partners overseas unsatisfied. This was followed by an asset surplus within most firms, and ultimately by a system of bad loans that burst Japan's asset bubble. The image of the 'salaryman' as a proud and strong 'corporate warrior' has transformed into that of a 'slave to the wage', desperately clinging to the waning security of a job at a company that would rather fire him than keep him on board.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

"When they were young they might spend the night at the office, sleeping under their desks. For years they would go out drinking with colleagues and clients, returning home sozzled at 3am before rising at dawn to head back to the office. They accepted boring jobs or postings to provincial backwaters without question. And they did it all simply because the

company asked them to. The thought of finding another employer never crossed their minds. That is how the "salaryman" became the paragon of modern Japan."[236]

"His company wants to sack him. His wife despises him. His children laugh at the boring blue suit and his out-of-date ways. Among middle-aged Japanese men recently, suicide rates have soared so high that they are making a real difference to the profitability of life insurers."[237]

This thesis has shown what the previous two quotes perfectly depict. The 'salaryman' image has developed in the past three decades from being a loyal employee and a 'corporate warrior' that fought for the Japanese economy in the 1980s to the slave to the wage in the 2010s in both scholarly literature and Western media. This image applies mainly to the older generations of salarymen who were new recruits in the 1970s and 1980s, who are now the stubborn and rigid middle managers in their forties and fifties. The image shift is due to the worsened economic conditions in Japan that have kept a two-decade recession in place, changes that are too few and too little in Japanese companies to regain its economic prowess and a competitive edge in the global business sector due to risk-aversive management, shifting expectations of life, work and partnership among young people, and the slow rise of women pursuing full time careers. While still a dominant image in Japan, the 'salaryman' is slowly losing its hegemonic role model-position that has been stressed by researchers such as Romit Dasgupta, James E. Roberson and Nobue Suzuki because of the position of 'salaryman' is increasingly harder to obtain and less stable due to changes in both Japanese corporate culture and the three salaryman benefits. While still a role model for many, the 'salaryman' is slowly becoming the anti-thesis of what he once was and what modern men want to become.

The wider implications of the 'salaryman' image waning is that it leaves room for other masculine role models and images to come to the fore in Japanese society, contending for its hegemonic position. More young people are choosing a lifestyle free from corporate bonds. As they have seen what the 'salaryman' lifestyle does to their fathers, they are less than enthusiastic to go down the same career track. School pressure that amounts from a young age up to adolescence makes more university graduates realize that the securities once promised are not worth the sacrifice, especially if enduring this pressure does not guarantee a high position in a large company. Young people now prefer to have their personal freedom and chasing their dreams instead of aspiring the restrictive lifestyle that their parents want for

236 "Sayonara, salaryman," *The Economist*, January 3rd, 2008.

237 "The salaryman's song," *The Economist*, March 31st, 2011: 62.

them. Their examples and heroes are rock stars and sportsmen and –women, instead of the middle managers or president of a company.

Women emancipation, although not as far developed as in European countries and Scandinavia in particular, has become more prevalent in both daily and corporate life in Japan and influences the ‘salaryman’ image. New laws passed in the 1990s have ensured that discrimination on the work floor on the basis of sex is not allowed, thus preventing companies to fire women when they get married. This does not guarantee, however, that no distinctions are made on the work floor between men and women in the tasks they perform or the position they have within the company. Despite women being unable to climb the corporate ladder, they stay at their jobs longer than before because they are delaying marriage to enjoy their personal freedom that is free of the bonds of family life and child raising. Most women still desire to marry a ‘salaryman’ because of his stable financial situation, but refuse to be solely responsible for the housework and child raising as was more custom in the early decades of Japan’s high growth period. In addition, they expect men to be more like modern Western businessmen that groom themselves and are more social, and less like the staunch and stuffy Japanese middle managers of today. The effect is that the old ‘salaryman’ ideal is rejected in favor of a more modern businessman, thus making the ruling ‘salaryman’ image to be viewed as less desirable than before.

Young recruits of large companies thus now have to deal with new realities such as cutbacks on the three ‘salaryman’-benefits and a bigger role for family life due to different expectations women have of marriage and child raising. Corporate culture among large companies however, with an intensive entrance period after graduating from university and on-the-job training that still plays a large role next to worker specialties, has stayed largely the same despite these new realities. New recruits dealing with these realities are less willing to accept the costs their salaryman fathers bore, as their position is no longer secure for the remainder of their careers. They refuse to center their lives around work, and are unwilling to sacrifice themselves for the company.

The above leads me to believe that the term ‘salaryman’ no longer fits new recruits of large Japanese companies, especially when taking Dasgupta’s strict definition of the term ‘salaryman’ into account.[238] Although these new recruits are still white-collar workers in large companies, their outlook on work and unwillingness to sacrifice themselves for their job security to support their family set them well apart from the ‘salaryman’ discussed in this

238 Dasgupta, *Re-reading the Salaryman in Japan*, 24.

thesis. I would therefore like to propose a new term for these recruits: the ‘saranaiman’. It is derived from the Japanese turn of phrase *mi wo saranai*, which means ‘not willing to sacrifice oneself’. The term ‘saranaiman’ shows a close semantic relation to the ‘salaryman’, which denotes that the role of young white-collar workers within the company has largely stayed the same. But they will not do so at the cost of having to sacrifice their lives for the company. If the conditions are sub-par, he will resort to leaving his current company for another that has better prospects for him in the long run. This is regardless of stability and the height of their salaries, which are no longer the only important aspects of a job.

The ‘saranaiman’ lacks a strict definition in regards to his hierarchical position within the company, be it president, middle manager or new recruit. More important is that he is part of the large conceptual frame of Japanese corporate culture within a specific time period, and the role work plays in his life, both professionally and socially. The ‘saranaiman’ could possibly become a new role model for both men and women, who want to combine careers in a large company with rich and fulfilling social and family lives. For now, the ‘salaryman’ retains its dominant position when discussing Japanese businessmen. But with a need for more change in company policies, thanks to an ongoing recession that has unfortunately not gone despite the government’s repeated intervention programs, one can assume that the ‘saranaiman’ will quickly gain popularity among scholars and journalists. He is the one that will have the leading role in pulling ailing companies out of the past and into the present.

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Tables

Table 1.1: Japanese Labor Statistics: Employed Persons 15 Years Old and Over, by Industry and Sex (1920-1950) [x1000]

	1920			1930			1940			1950		
Industry	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Agriculture	13.949	7.603	6.346	13.955	7.590	6.365	13.557	6.373	7.184	16.362	7.925	8.437
Manufacturing	4.461	2.892	1.569	4.708	3.263	1.445	6.864	4.965	1.899	5.703	4.051	1.652
Textile	1.350	407	943	1.411	484	927	1.264	416	848	-	-	-
Iron & Steel	275	264	11	246	233	13	463	426	37	-	-	-
Electrical Machinery	36	32	4	61	54	7	275	220	55	-	-	-
Machinery & Weapons	120	111	9	174	171	3	945	849	96	-	-	-
Finance & Insurance	131	118	13	194	175	19	274	207	67	363	241	122

Table 1.2: Japanese Labor Statistics: Employed Persons 15 Years Old and Over, by Industry and Sex (1955-1970) [x1000]

	1955			1960			1965			1970		
Industry	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Agriculture	15.582	7.566	8.016	13.710	6.404	7.306	10.966	5.066	5.900	9.405	4.189	5.216
Manufacturing	6.914	4.795	2.119	9.565	6.439	3.125	11.541	7.560	3.981	13.576	8.717	4.859
Textile	-	-	-	1.393	464	929	1.446	498	948	1.428	513	915
Iron & Steel	-	-	-	-	-	-	696	615	81	803	700	103
Electrical Machinery	-	-	-	-	-	-	934	581	353	1.457	794	663
Machinery & Weapons	-	-	-	-	-	-	930	791	139	1.139	940	199
Finance & Insurance	-	-	-	707	448	259	964	539	425	1.110	592	518