

Opponent Report for Maiko Hata's Master's Thesis in Gender Studies at Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic.

Maiko Hata's thesis "Gender Inequality in the Japanese Workplace: Issues Related to the Promotion of Childcare Leave Taken by Men" explores the concept of work and gender in Japan by focusing on childcare leave for men. She seeks to gain an understanding as to why the leave is promoted, how workloads are covered, and what particular problems, if any, companies encounter when trying to enact men's childcare leave. The thesis is well-researched giving us an understanding of what the Japanese workplace looks like in terms of gender distribution and equality, an explanation of current laws and government policies regarding childcare leave, and basic summary of how Japanese work culture and work expectations function. Importantly, she also includes a nod to history and how it has affected the workplace when it comes to gender balance, paying particular attention to how World War II forced women into the workplace and, at the same time, reinforced women's supportive roles towards men.

It was very interesting to read the statistics regarding gender equality in Japan: the research and statistics included about gender gaps; women in management; women in academia; and the like. In my opinion, she has demonstrated women's experiences in the workplace well. She has also explained well how the workplace culture is set up in ways that favor men, and the ways in which segregation in the workplace has created an at-least two-tier job track. I also very much appreciated her reflection on her positionality and her critical thinking when it came to finding enough businesses to interview.

Where I do find somewhat of a disconnect is the amount of time and space Maiko puts into describing women's experience and position in the workplace and then shifts to focus on men's childcare leave. For example, we learn quite a lot about policies to promote women in the workplace, tax incentives for women to work, and the development of some private childcare facilities to give more opportunity to women, but then we spend the quantitative part of the research focused on men's leave. While she does give us some, I would have liked more information about how Japanese cultural definitions of maleness and masculinity are structured. This would have given us more insight as to why it was so difficult to convince men of the importance of childcare leave. It would also I think lend more to statements that Maiko makes at the beginning and end of her thesis that do not really find ground there.

In that regard, Maiko spends some time at both the beginning and end of her thesis discussing a need to reimagine, reconfigure, and reconstruct Japanese understandings of the family. She writes, "The idea of the family that the government promotes excludes certain groups of people. If the government strongly requests the achievement of work-life balance, it is imperative to deconstruct traditional families rather than stick with the feudalistic family system which excludes same-sex couples who want to raise children. The deconstruction of the heteronormative family systems brings openness to a variety of families and sexuality and a more inclusive and egalitarian family system." Here, I would have thought that her thesis leans more towards a critique of Japanese understandings of masculinity than Japanese understandings of the family. If she wants to focus on the

de/construction of the family, I would have liked more research about both heteronormative families and same-sex couples in the research, rather than such a heavy focus on women in the workplace.

With that in mind, I have a few questions for Maiko. First, I am curious why she doesn't spend more time on how men's childcare leave could influence Japanese constructions of masculinity in a way that creates more inclusive and egalitarian gender relations and thus affects heterosexual families. Related to that, I wonder if Maiko could comment on what she wanted to accomplish from a feminist perspective with her examination of men's childcare leave. Second, why did she only interview businesses who set up the leave and not also men who went on leave? Finally, in her conclusion, Maiko offers many excellent questions for the reader that have to do with this topic, so I wonder if she were to take this research further, what would she do with it next?

Overall, I found Maiko's thesis topic interesting and engaging. She did her research and writing very well. I found the feminist analysis excellent even though I often yearned for more of it. Her positioning of herself and the methodologies she used were well-explained. I congratulate her on such a well-done project.

I would argue that even though there is some room for clarification and improvement, on account of the scope, depth, and breath of the project, this deserves a 1 / 2.

Submitted by Ivy Helman, Ph.D.

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