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Review of Maiko Hata's master thesis *Gender Inequality in the Japanese Workplace: Issues Related to the Promotion of Childcare Leave Taken by Men (2021)*, submitted to Gender Studies Program, Faculty of Humanities, Charles University, Prague. Supervisor: Ľubica Kobová, PhD.

Maiko Hata's master thesis did not take long months to research and write. Therefore, the energy, dedication, and time the author put into intense research and writing the thesis are admirable. A year ago, Maiko approached me with a handful of topics she found interesting – paternity leave, sexual harassment, women's professional promotion, and nurses' working conditions in Japan. It took us several consultations to carefully sift through them and consider the practicalities of research during the covid-19 pandemic. What was, however, clear right from the start was the broader terrain of the diploma project, that is, the intersection of work and gender in Japan.

The thesis topic may seem conventional, but in the Introduction and Methodology chapter, the author very well explains that this is far from true in the case of Japan. The interests of various stakeholders and the goals they aim to achieve by introducing a variety of childcare leave arrangements taken by men are relatively broad. Compared to the situation in the Czech Republic, for example, the childcare leave taken by men in Japan is considerably more directed by companies than by any other stakeholders. As Maiko Hata explains in the theoretical part of her thesis, the state also has its claims as it has been laying the groundwork for gender equality policies since the mid-1980s due to international political pressure and economic pressure. Nevertheless, it is the companies that make paternal leave part of their efforts to create a workplace that is more attractive to potential employees and a workplace that can pride itself with the label of "diversity" or "equal employment opportunity" employer. The thesis shows how macroeconomic and demographic concerns (low productivity, stagnation, low birthrate, and lack of workforce) play out in gender equality policies introduced by the Japanese government and private companies.

I very much appreciate the effort Maiko Hata put into the first two theoretical chapters of her thesis. They have been considerably cut and rewritten numerous times as Maiko strived for balance between the inclusion of all information necessary to understand the context on the one hand and the clarity needed to comprehend it well on the other hand. The research question "What is the reality of Japanese companies which have enthusiastically encouraged men to take childcare leave?" is exploratory and aims to confront the official declarations of Japan's readiness to turn itself into "womenomics" with the actual accomplishments of and challenges faced by Japanese companies.



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Despite the obstacles she encountered during the research process, Maiko Hata successfully managed to accomplish her task and delivered an empirically rich diploma thesis that is well structured and gives a detailed answer to her research question. After the theoretical chapters, the author explains her methodological concerns and choices well. As the Methodology chapter shows, the author had a perfect idea about what she wanted to achieve by interviewing small and medium Japanese enterprises representatives and how to do it. She took careful ethical steps when approaching the gatekeeper, Work-Life-Balance consultancy company. The difficulties, however, arose when a majority of the SMEs did not reply to her requests for an interview. Maiko was able to swiftly adjust her focus to studying SMEs and larger companies and draw appropriate conclusions from this shift attest to her growing maturity as a researcher.

The author of the diploma thesis managed to collect data under time-constrained circumstances. I very much appreciate that she acquainted herself with coding and analytical techniques promptly and used her newly acquired skills to work through the material. The analytical part itself is organized following the four research subquestions. I want to point out that Maiko Hata shows the reader intersections of various interests at stake in the adoption of the childcare leave taken by men, mainly the interest in gender equality on the one hand and more economically utilitarian interests of companies on the other hand. Suppose the thesis was to draw more theoretical conclusions from the analysis. In that case, it could focus on precisely the “boundary work” between the ideals of gender equality and business goals, which at point seem to override the former.

My short critical remarks concern the choice of literature in the theoretical chapters. Even though there is a vast scholarship on the gendered division of labor and organization culture in Japan, the thesis’ author reached for journalistic rather than academic sources.

To conclude: In her thesis, Maiko Hata attempts a more extensive framing of men’s childcare leave issues. She starts from general considerations of gender inequality in the Japanese workplace, academia, and political representation. She then proceeds to tackle more specific issues that are the primary focus of her concern: the relation between childcare leave taken by men and gender equality. I believe this wide framing was also necessary due to the nature of our international gender studies program. A Czech reader will undoubtedly find the “value-added” of the thesis in that it enables interesting comparisons between Japan and the Czech Republic. Despite different countries’ histories, they share the culture of long working hours, the normativity of the three-year parental leave taken by women, strict division of labor between breadwinners and primary carers.



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The submitted diploma thesis meets the criteria for a successful thesis. I recommend grade “very good” (2) or “excellent” (1) and that the candidate proceeds to the oral defense.

Lubica Kobová, PhD.

Prague, September 13, 2021