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BOOK REVIEW

Brigitte Steger, Angelika Koch (editors), *Manga Girl Seeks Herbivore Boy. Studying Japanese Gender at Cambridge*, Wien; Zürich; Berlin; Münster: Lit, 2013, 229 pp.

The book *Manga Girl Seeks Herbivore Boy. Studying Japanese Gender at Cambridge*, is a collection of essays from the University of Cambridge, written in English and edited by Brigitte Steger and Angelika Koch, which was published by Lit Publishing House in 2013. The title suggests a new approach towards analyzing gender issues in contemporary Japanese society. Moreover it was created by young scholars, and merits attention because of this fact.

This book contains a complex introduction to gender questions in modern Japan and four essays on different topics, including the anime and manga question, the issue of fatherhood combined with education matters, the question of masculinity, and the problem of transgender identities.

As Angelika Koch and Brigitte Steger claim in the introduction to the book, many cultural images and stereotypes regarding gender issues prevail among Western scholars. But it is extremely important to confront these problems while examining Japanese society, in the light of the problem of gender inequality, confirmed by the *Global Gender Gap Report 2012*, which this volume's editors raise. Furthermore, new gender roles can be observed in contemporary Japanese society. The masculinity issue is worth attention because of the recent changes which can be witnessed while examining the behavior of Japanese males.

In the second chapter of this book, entitled *Manga Girls*, in an essay titled 'Sex, Love, Comedy and Crime in Recent Boys' Anime and Manga', Hattie Jones uses her discussion of boys' manga to examine the very important issue of the Japanese Equal Employment Opportunity Act (EEOA), which was a turning point in the situation of Japanese females. Jones dates the Act to 1986 (and its revision to 1999); however, in my opinion it is worth mentioning that these dates are the years in which the Act took effect, but it was initially enacted in 1985 and revised in 1997. After arguing that the study of women as written by men is 'anti-feminist' (p. 27) Jones describes numerous *manga* and *anime*, alternating them with the ideal of woman according to the stereotypes present in Japanese society, and with feminist issues. This is an interesting way of depicting this problem, but sometimes one can feel unsatisfied with the overwhelming amount of summaries of individual works.

In the third chapter, *Absent Father*, Zoya Street's essay 'Fatherhood in Moral Education Textbooks' seems to deal with an extremely interesting question, especially since the implementation of a government project called *Ikumen*, launched in 2010 to encourage Japanese fathers to get involved in parenting. Unfortunately, this is not raised in this essay, although this can be explained by the fact that the thesis which formed the basis for this essay was defended in 2010, the year in which the government project was launched. An error can be found in this chapter, wherein Street argues: "The political uncertainty after the death of the Meiji Emperor in 1911 and the end of the First World War in 1918 brought more controversies over moral education policy" (p. 92). It should be clarified that the Meiji emperor died on 30 July 1912.

Nonetheless, in this chapter we can read a detailed history of the Japanese (moral) education system. The examination of the Japan Teachers' Union and the rightist *Atarashii Rekishi Kyōkasho-o Tsukuru-kai* association is necessary in order to investigate the education problem in Japan in any great depth. I would only suggest that a distinction be made between the Japan Teachers' Union Enlightenment Association (p. 92) and the Japan Teachers' Union (JTU), mentioned on the next page, which was established on 8 August 1947, as a result of the merger of three teachers' organizations. This chapter is especially valuable as it presents the content of the stories from 20 century Japanese textbooks and the appendix which details them.

The fourth chapter, Chris Deacon's *All the World's a Stage*, contains the essay 'Herbivore Boys and the Performance of Masculinity in Contemporary Japan'. This is a very good and compact piece on the role of males in Japanese society, both from the historical perspective (emphasising the role of the Meiji Restoration and the Second World War) and the situation in contemporary Japan. He raises the 'men becoming useless!' problem in modern Japanese society and gives a definition of *sōshokukei danshi*, which is of great importance in any research on present Japanese culture. The subsections on 'Hegemonic Masculinity' and 'Performing Masculinity', often illustrated with pictures from newspapers and books, give us exemplary images of Japanese men through ages, and their stereotypical and actual picture – from the pre-war strong hegemonic masculinity, through the salaryman to the current subversion of hegemonic masculinity. In his conclusion, Deacon inquires about the contemporary societal shift being seen as a crisis of masculinity in Japan, and states that behaviour which the older generation perceive as a crisis may be seen as an opportunity for the people from the younger generation, which is a very interesting deduction on the situation in modern Japan. I consider this chapter as the most interesting and definitely worth reading.

The last chapter by Nicola McDermott, entitled *Resistance and Assimilation*, raises the issue of 'Medical and Legal Transgender Identities in Japan', and considers the problems posed in fundamental areas of life in Japan and the discussions held in this country on this question. She presents the readers with the available sources on this matters, based on questionnaires she has conducted, which is very valuable information. She discusses the post-war boom of interest in transgender people as well as an analysis of the Blue Boy Trial, the Eugenics Protection Law, and the legal and political issues facing transgender people, questions which are not often raised in the scientific works. A very interesting point is the *koseki* issue and its importance in this analysis.

This book is a very interesting source of information for both beginners and experienced researchers in Japanese studies. I would highly recommend this publication to academics

specialising in the topic of Japanese society and gender studies, as well as to those who are generally interested in contemporary Japanese society. Even those researchers with wide knowledge on these issues will find interesting information which may be new to them. The book's main advantage lies in the authors, who are young scholars interested in contemporary social problems in Japan. They present a current view of Japanese society, which can be a great source for all researchers in Japanese studies.

Olga Barbasiewicz

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