

The Masculinity of Unmarried Sons as Family Caregivers: Changing Family Dynamics and Gender Order in Japan

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Abstract | Focusing on unmarried sons caring for their parents, this study deals with changing family relations and gender order in contemporary Japan. Marriage avoidance among Japanese men has become prevalent since the collapse of the bubble economy and the employment fluctuations in the 1990s. Meanwhile, the Long-Term Care Insurance system initiated in 2000 has served to buttress the normative social practice of children acting as caregivers for their parents. It is in this social context that unmarried male family caregivers have emerged. In order to elucidate this change, this study presents the results of ethnographic research conducted in Tokyo with respect to unmarried men engaged in caring for their parents. Then it goes on to analyze the circumstances by which unmarried sons become caregivers for their parents and illustrates the influence of this phenomenon on the gender order of Japan by employing R.W. Connell's analytical concept of hegemonic masculinity. It first examines the manner in which engagement in parent caregiving diminishes unmarried men's masculinity. When viewed in terms of hegemonic masculinity, these men without female partners come to occupy a lower social status as they engage in care work, a domain traditionally considered to be feminine. Second, it looks at how the parental caregiving by unmarried male children operates as an alternative form of masculinity with the possibility to challenge hegemonic masculinity. It argues that the increasing participation of men in parent caregiving in Japan not only undermines the hegemony of "salaryman" masculinity, but also reveals the striking possibility for transformation in the gender order by hinting at the creation of an alternative form of masculinity.

Keywords | unmarried men, male caregivers, parent caregiving, hegemonic masculinity, defamilialization of caregiving

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Introduction

Focusing on unmarried men¹ caring for their elderly parents, this paper examines changes in family relations and gender order of contemporary Japanese society. Such a topic of discussion is evocative of the population transition that has been occurring in Japan since the 1970s, brought on by fewer marriages occurring later in life, low birth rates, and an aging society.

Until the mid-1960s, Japan's cumulative marriage rate was ninety-seven percent among men and ninety-eight percent among women. With numbers approaching one-hundred percent, Japan was effectively a "marriage society" (*kaikon shakai*). However, having reached its peak, the marriage rate began to decline in the 1970s as the age of first marriage began to increase. According to the national census in 2010, the average age of first marriage, which had been 26.2 for men and 23.6 for women in the 1950s, had climbed to 30.4 and 28.6, respectively. Also, the rate of singles in their fifties who had never been married had increased to 20.1 percent for men and 10.6 percent for women. In 2010, one in ten Japanese women and one in five Japanese men in their fifties had no legal record of ever being married. In this respect, the rates of late and non-marriage are key concepts in understanding contemporary Japanese society.

Meanwhile, Japan's aging society and the accompanying transformations in family care also function as important backdrops to this study. As evident in the *National Livelihood Survey* released by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare in 2012, while the number of households with members over the age of sixty-five living with children were in decline overall, those in which seniors were living with single children were steadily on the rise. The report also divulged that households composed of seniors living with single children comprised 26.4 percent of all households, largely exceeding the portion of families of seniors living with married children, which had decreased to sixteen percent.

This transformation in household structure brought with it a transformation in the domain of family care, a reality reflected in the institutionalization of the Long-Term Care Insurance (LTCI) system (*Kaigo hoken seido*). Against the backdrop of the transforming family structure and system of family care, the

1. In the current study, "unmarried men" refers to male adults over the age of thirty five without a partner, regardless of marital status. Unlike with married women, this definition does not consider the existence of children. This reflects the fact that there is a low rate of children born outside of wedlock in Japan. And in cases of divorce, where women are granted custody eighty percent of the time, father-child families are actually quite rare.

current study intends to draw attention to the increasing number of children living with and taking care of their parents in Japan. It particularly seeks to analyze unmarried men caring for their parents in terms of transforming notions of masculinity and uncovers the implications of this phenomenon for Japan's gender order, which has long been based on a starkly gendered division of labor.

In this study, I primarily utilize ethnography as a method to elucidate the reality characterizing family relations and parent care of unmarried men. The author spent sixteen months in Tokyo conducting ethnographic research pertaining to an organization of unmarried men caring for their parents. From June 2012 until September 2013, I mainly explored the activities of family caregivers in the Suginami, Nerima and Meguro areas, three of the twenty-three special wards of Tokyo that are known for their relatively active local organizations. The primary research locations were family caregivers' self-help groups, facilities of non-profit organizations providing support to caregivers and relevant programs managed by administrative agencies. I deeply enmeshed myself in such organizations and activities and conducted individual, in-depth interviews.

The structure of this paper is as follows. The second section discusses transformations in Japanese society relevant to the rapid growth in the number of unmarried men. It examines falling rates of marriage and the decline of the hegemonic masculinity of the salaryman. The third section deals with the progressive defamilialization of family care and how this relates to the emergence of men as parent caregivers and discusses how norms pertaining to parent care transformed following the implementation of the LTCI system in 2000. The fourth section presents the results of the ethnographic study and employs them as a framework to understand underlying causes of the transformation of Japanese society's gender order. Finally, the fifth section reflects on the overall transformation occurring within the realms of child and parent care in terms of male caregivers and its consequential effect on the Japanese hegemonic masculinity.

Low Birthrate and the Marginalization of Unmarried Men

1. Falling Marriage Rates and Faltering Salaryman Masculinity

Japanese marriage rates began to show signs of decline in the 1970s. As love marriage became commonplace beginning in the 1970s, the number of people

Table 1. Rate of Lifetime Non-marriage in Japan by Year and Gender

	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	1995	2000	2010
Men	1.46%	1.26	1.70	2.60	5.57	8.99	12.57	20.1
Women	1.35%	1.87	3.33	4.45	4.33	5.10	5.82	10.6

Source | Relevant years compiled from Sōmushō (1950-2010).

deferring marriage until finding a desirable partner increased. Meanwhile, the optimal age for marriage became less strictly defined. With the booming economy and the enactment of the equal employment law for men and women in the 1980s, employment conditions improved for women. Consequently, the number of women delaying marriage continually increased. Among men as well, bachelorhood began to garner attention as a new mode of living. The number of people questioning whether marriage was a necessary part of life increased. By the 1980s, the rate of unmarried individuals was equal between men and women. Since the 1990s and the economic downturn, this has become associated with the phenomenon of late marriage and even lifelong bachelorhood. These conditions, in which such people no longer exhibited the desire to begin families of their own, were set against the backdrop of new social norms that were more accepting of those who did not marry.

The collapse of the bubble economy in the early 1990s and the subsequent recession merely served to accelerate such social change. Change among men was especially conspicuous. As displayed in table 1, the rate of lifelong singlehood among Japanese men since the war has been consistently lower than that of women. In the 1990s, however, this situation was reversed for the very first time. Such rates showed marked signs of incremental increase amid the full-fledged economic recession of the 1990s, before reaching twice that of women in the 2000s. In 2010, the rate of men living as lifelong bachelors reached 20.1 percent, increasing by almost four times in just twenty years.

Fluidization of employment is the most often cited cause of falling rates of marriage among men. According to the *Labor Force Survey* released by the Japanese Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications in 2011, one third of all employees were in part-time positions. This period was characterized by changes in the conditions of employment with employment rates for women rising and full-time employment rates among men declining. This was due to the fact that many businesses in manufacturing, construction, wholesale and retail sales, and transportation, areas of employment which men traditionally occupied, had transferred their production bases abroad. This relationship

Table 2. Rate of Married Men by Age and Employment Status

	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34
Full-Time	2	11	33	59
Part-Time	1	5	14	28
Short-Term/Temporary	1	3	9	22

Source | Sömushō (2007).

between the increasing rate of part-time employment and the falling rate of marriage among men is plainly observable in studies categorizing married men by employment status. In table 2 the marriage rate among men engaged in part-time work is consistently lower than among those engaged in full-time work across all age groups. The marriage rate among men engaged in short-term and temporary work is still the lowest.

Nonetheless, analysis of the manner in which marriage rates among men decline in tandem with their ability to fulfill their duties as family breadwinners differs depending on one's point of view. Assuming the perspective of a working man, for example, Morinaga writes, "For a salaryman earning 3 million yen per year, a mortgage, a housewife and children are 'three lifelong insolvent debts.'" In this manner, he recommends that men not to be deceived by state policy and forego marriage as a means of survival (Morinaga 1997, 2003). Morinaga's provocative argument is the sort that associates masculinity with breadwinning and considers marriage as but a means of entering into such a role. Regarding this viewpoint, feminist theorist Ehara (2012, 37) states, "Men engaged in part-time employment unable to fulfill their role as breadwinners are not changing their minds regarding the male-breadwinner family but rejecting the very idea of forming a family at all." Thus, Ehara indicates the fact that men are inducing the falling birth and marriage rates.

In my opinion, Morinaga's assertion is difficult to agree with in two respects. First, he does not factor parents into his thinking. Unlike with one's wife, children or home, one cannot choose one's parents. Morinaga (2003) advises men with low incomes to forego marriage and rather than an "A-life," lead a "B-life" to commensurate their social status. Pertaining to this B-life survival method, however, there is no deliberation on caring for one's parents. This fact will be discussed in more detail later, but for now it suffices to say that in Japan today, one foregoing marriage is far more likely to become a parent caregiver, regardless of gender. In a rapidly aging familistic society, the omission of one's parents from one's life plan is both egotistic and unrealistic. Second, the notion

of a “B-life” is misleading. This expression suggests that a man would opt to live with a lower form of masculinity, as if one is voluntarily giving up one’s “vested rights.” This line of reasoning, however, is backward. Just as Ehara points out, this is but an attempt to evade any challenge to the existing gender order and continue to enjoy the general benefits that accrue from a male-dominated social order. Connell (2013, 127-28) refers to such attitude as “complicit masculinity,” wherein men do not necessarily stand on the front lines protecting the patriarchal order but still extract considerable benefits from it.

However, not all arguments by men against marriage demonstrate this kind of conspiratorial masculinity. In fact, when discourse regarding singles became prominent in the 1980s, “single” simply referred to self-reliant individuals who did not depend on their families or other groups. This idea signified resistance to the prevalent state-and-family-centered salaryman masculinity.

2. From Glamorous Singles to Candidates for a Solitary Death: The Transformation of the Discourse on Unmarried Individuals

In the 1980s, as “individuality” became a popular matter of discussion in mass consumer society, “single life” began to receive attention as an alternative mode of living in which one was free of a smothering family. Cultural industries became awash with products catering to singles, as the number of people referring to themselves as single increased. Ultimately, singles became a social phenomenon, constituting more than just a passing trend. At the center of this “singles boom” was Ebisaka’s book, *Single Life: A Guide to Men and Women’s Liberation* (*Shinguru raifu: onna to otoko no kaihōgaku*, 1986). In his early fifties, Ebisaka published his collection of witty essays describing his life as a professor of French Literature and a lifelong bachelor, making himself out as the representative authority on singlehood. The image people had of his life, in which he played baseball on the weekends, travelled the world on vacations and kept a girlfriend but lived alone, was the essence of what it meant to be a “glamorous single.” Although the life of a “noble bachelor” was still considered scandalous in many circles, men generally accepted Ebisaka’s life as a new model of living. At this time, “single” connoted a positive image of someone who freely chose singlehood and did not depend on family or other groups and pursued autonomy.

With the onset of the 1990s, however, Japanese society became mired in the low birth rate crisis, initiated by what is known as the “1.57 shock.”² Thereafter,

2. It was revealed to the public in 1990 that the number of babies per woman (aggregate birth rate)

discourse purporting the demographic crisis as a consequence of marriage avoidance gained momentum. The very existence of Japanese people was coming under threat from a decreasing population. As marriage avoidance came to be seen as the primary cause of this phenomenon, positive discourse regarding singlehood as the manifestation of a new age and expanding personal choice began to wane. Meanwhile, beginning in the mid-1990s, with property prices in decline and employment becoming increasingly difficult to procure following the collapse of the bubble economy, social instability began in earnest. Marriage avoidance came to be seen as a serious social problem on par with disasters like the Great Hanshin Earthquake and the *Aum Shinrikyō* Tokyo subway sarin gas attacks. Yamada (2004) labeled adults aged in their twenties and thirties living with their parents and depending on them for their basic livelihood “parasite singles.” He sharply criticized the existence of these “unproductive freeloaders” who brought on an “unmarried recession” and were “ruining Japanese society.”

Meanwhile, widespread anxiety spread over the potential collapse of the social security system due to an inverted-pyramid demographic composition, and the public began to have the opinion that unmarried people without children were free-riding in the social security system. In particular, the approaching low birth rate crisis and the burden on the social welfare system brought on by a small number of children and a growing number of elderly became closely associated with the image of unmarried men and women leeching off the social welfare system. This image, however, overlooked the fact that unmarried people were actually relatively disadvantaged by a familistic social welfare system. Working singles contributed as much as anyone to the subsistence of the social welfare system. Not only were they excluded from indirect welfare benefits such as tax deductions, but also direct welfare benefits such as the right to live in public housing. While such negative discourse regarding unmarried men and women abated in the face of public criticism, the social outcry had gone as far as to lead one Diet member to call for a “singles tax.”

In order to understand this social atmosphere in Japan, Allison draws on the idea of reproductive futurism. In family-corporate systems, such as those of Japan, the state and the family invest in children as a means of ensuring the future. Thus, the low birth rate trend has manifested as a sort of specter over Japan, warning that it has “no future”; it is the essential source of the anxieties

had been 1.57 in 1989, a fact that caused an uproar in Japan. This was partly related to superstition regarding the Year of the Horse. The aggregate birth rate of 1.57 was lower even than that of 1966, which had been 1.58, a rate already considered to be unusually low.

plaguing Japanese society (Allison 2013, 23-24). Meanwhile, Nihon Hōsō Kyōkai's (Japan Broadcasting Corporation, hereafter NHK) special broadcast in 2010, "No-Relationship Society: The Shock of Thirty-Two Thousand Solitary Deaths," transposed this problem once and for all into one faced by individuals. This "no-relationship society" (*muen shakai*) took what used to be considered a crisis of the state and made it a personal issue for unmarried individuals who felt that they would face a similarly gloomy fate. In the wake of this report revealing that thirty-two thousand individuals had died with no one left behind to oversee their funeral arrangements, it was now predicted that unmarried individuals would share such a fate (Muyōn Sahoe P'urojekt'u T'im 2012). Particularly, as it became known that men in their fifties were the most likely among those living alone to die without relatives, there arose a stigma around unmarried men, as reflected in the term "candidates for a solitary death" (*muenshi yobigun*).

Since the 1990s, the government has made the encouragement of marriage and the production of children an important focus of policy considerations. Looking at statistical figures alone, such action at the state level has largely met with failure, generally amounting to pressure campaigns depicting individuals as responsible for the propagation of the state. For an example of this, one may observe the results of the opinion surveys conducted every five years by the NHK Cultural Research Institute pertaining to Japanese citizens between the ages of sixteen and sixty five. Therein, people adhering to the view that marriage is a personal choice and that singlehood is a perfectly acceptable mode of living have consistently increased in number. In the results of the 2008 survey, sixty percent of respondents said that "marriage is not a necessity," far outnumbering the thirty-five percent of respondents that said "marriage is a necessity" (NHK Hōsō Bunka Kenkyūjo 1980-2010). Be that as it may, the discourse on the low birthrate has had some effect on unmarried individuals. Discourse of linking marriage avoidance and the state crisis has vested so-called normal families composed of a husband, wife, and children with a superior status, while marginalizing unmarried individuals. Such discourse shall be discussed further, but at this point it is suffice to say that it classifies family members in terms of their social productivity, reinforcing the idea of prioritizing productive members and serving to influence the distribution of care labor within the family.

An Aging Society and Unmarried Male Caregivers

1. Caregiving as a Social Issue and the Transformation of Masculinity

The aging of Japan's population has proceeded at an unprecedented rate. In the 1980s, the postwar generation, coming largely from families with a few children, began to reach an age commensurate to parent care. This occurrence was accompanied by a number of social problems, such as the maladjustment of "summoned seniors (*yobiyose rōjin*)" moving from the countryside to the cities or the "parent-care hell" and "parent-care divorce" confronting their children. As a result, the demand for the "defamilialization of parent care" arose across the nation. The founding of the Women's Association for a Better Aging Society (WABAS) in 1983 played a key role in shaping this direction in public opinion. Functioning as an institution for the defamilialization of parent care, the LTCI system was enacted in 1997. This measure was passed in the face of conservative opposition that declared, "If such an institution comes to be, Japan's sacred tradition of daughters-in-law caring for their parents-in-law will cease to exist."

The LTCI system set out to offer welfare to individuals, not necessarily the family, with an emphasis on the universality of its services. In order to implement this vision, however, it opted for principles of in-home care, application-based services, and quasi-marketization. As a result, the LTCI system became unmanageable without family caregivers. In other words, the system came to focus on reducing the burden of family caregivers based on the assumption that such caregivers exist within families. Furthermore, as the LTCI system underwent successive reforms under the pretext of financial difficulties and began to part ways with its founding vision, it tended more strongly toward family and in-home care.

My study focuses on the emergence of unmarried men, traditionally having little to do with such work, as caregivers for their parents amid this transformation. Japanese society is characterized by a strict gendered division of labor and the customs and conventions dictating male and female conduct that accompany it. For generations, daughters-in-law, wives, and daughters have been the primary caregivers for elderly parents. Only in rare, unavoidable cases have circumstances taken precedence over gender, entailing husbands to care for their wives or sons for their families. Even then, however, sons who had eventually marry and become breadwinners for families of their own were often exempt from such duties. By investigating the dynamics of the distribution of care labor surrounding the emergence of unmarried male caregivers, this paper intends to illustrate the

transformation of the gendered division of labor and gender order in Japanese society.

In order to analyze these newly discovered caregivers in terms of gender, I utilize R.W. Connell's research on masculinity. Considering the manner in which she defines masculinity vis-à-vis its differences with femininity and as something socially and historically constructed, Connell positions herself firmly within the tradition of social constructivism. However, in stipulating gender not as a product of discourse but a social practice and defining masculinity as a configuration of social practices, she distances herself from post-structuralist and psychological approaches (Connell 2013, 117-19). According to Connell, there is no singular, universal masculinity. Rather, masculinity always exists in varieties. Here "varieties" does not simply refer to the way in which masculinity manifests diversely according to differing histories and cultures. Variety directly signifies relations of power and hierarchy, as well as the relationships between such phenomena as dominance and subordination or complicity and marginalization (Connell 1993, 2013). Her concept of hegemonic masculinity, connoting the proper consideration of masculinities as related to social, cultural and institutional ideals, encapsulates the essential nature of these kinds of power relations. Hegemonic masculinity possesses clear advantages as an analytical concept. First, it allows one to solidly grasp the complex attributes of masculinity and femininity and the relations of power between as well as within genders. Second, it permits one to discern transformations occurring within genders without depending on external variables.

Since the Second World War, the "salaryman" (*sarariman*) has represented the hegemonic form of masculinity in Japan (Dasgupta 2000; Roberson and Suzuki 2003). Situated atop a gender order characterized by a strict gendered division of labor as an honest taxpayer, family breadwinner, and the backbone of the workforce, the salaryman has been portrayed as the central pillar propping up Japanese society. Since the 1990s, however, the hegemonic masculinity of the salaryman has experienced unprecedented instability amid a number of external transformations. These transformations include employment fluctuations and a faltering economy, as well as rising resistance towards prevailing gender relations.

Due to the fact that the LTCI system does not directly consider family caregivers with respect to these policies, in reality there are only a few documents and a little existing research pertaining to unmarried men who care for their parents. In fact, no provisions exist within Japan's LTCI law pertaining to family caregivers. The law also does not make any allowances for family caregivers regarding LTCI services, and it prohibits cash payments to families in principle. Furthermore, one cannot receive any specific tax or pension benefits as a caregiver

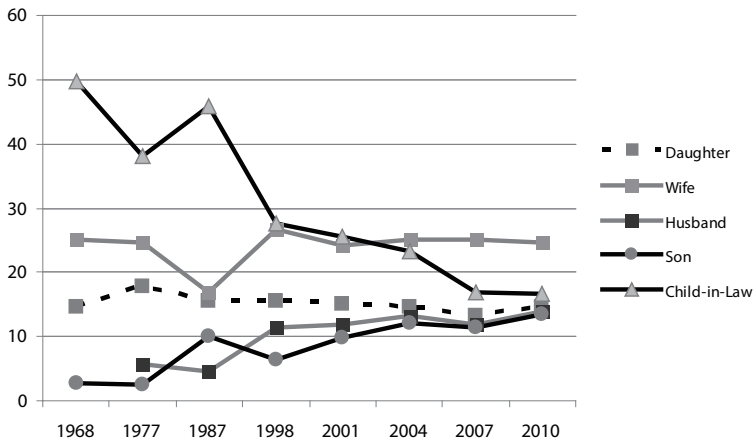
either. Therefore, it is difficult to procure public statistics that might allow one to gain an accurate sense of the circumstances faced by caregivers in terms of gender and family relations.

2. Incomplete Defamilialization and Children as Parent Caregivers

In Japan, parent care had long been conceived of as the “job of the daughter-in-law,” but with the implementation of the LTCI system a new social norm began to spread, which conceived of this work as the burden of “whomever possible.” Here, a brief description of the LTCI system is also necessary. To be sure, its implementation was tantamount to a “Meiji Restoration of Parent Care” in terms of the manner in which it facilitated the defamilialization of parent care. However, in consideration of how it was an institution designed to provide support for parent caregivers presupposed to exist, one might also reckon that such defamilialization was incomplete.

The LTCI system provided support for physical care with medical treatment, domestic assistance with cleaning and shopping, and daily matters such as administering meals. With its implementation, caring for the elderly became a “job that anyone can do.” The LTCI system’s greatest effect on family care was that on the composition of caregivers caring for the elderly; the proportion of daughters-in-law fell and that of children increased. Cases of elderly caring for the elderly, known as “elderly-elderly care,” also rose in number. Meanwhile, the act of children caring for their parents became an entrenched social norm, and cases of men caring for their elderly parents also increased. Figure 1 displays the results of a national survey, begun in 1968, that illustrates which family members have tended to be primary caregivers for bedridden (*netakiri*) elderly over time. Since 2000, sons- and daughters-in-laws have drastically decreased among caregivers, while spouses and children themselves have increased. This shows that, whether one is a man or woman, young or old, employed or unemployed, it is now acceptable for anyone to become a parent caregiver. Thus, as parent care has become a task suitable to anyone whose circumstances allow it, the normative practice of coercing daughters-in-law to undertake the responsibility has begun to fade away. As evident in the figure below, those who have moved in to fill the gap are spouses and children.

While expectations for children to care for their elderly parents have increased, such expectations pertaining to daughters have done so significantly. Particularly regarding unmarried daughters, the phrase, “When the age of marriage passes, the age of caring arrives,” has become a common saying. However, not all seniors are endowed with daughters, and even when they are,



Source | Tsutome (2013).

Figure 1. Trends among Cohabiting Caregivers by Family Relation

not all daughters are necessarily able to care for their parents. Therefore, with the provision of parent care by children becoming an entrenched social norm, cases in which sons are becoming parent caregivers are on the rise along with an increase in daughters.

There are roughly four million people currently receiving assistance from care insurance services. Eighty-three percent of these beneficiaries are receiving care in their homes. Among those providing care for such recipients, about 1.2 million are men, of which about three hundred thousand, or one fourth of them, are sons (Kōsei Rōdōshō 2010). One source providing trustworthy data on such men is the *National Livelihood Survey* published by the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare, which is reflected in the figure above. By investigating the distribution of caregivers attested to this report, one can see that wives make up the largest proportion of caregivers at 36.8 percent. Following that, daughters-in-law make up 17.2 percent, daughters 15.6 percent, husbands 14.3 percent and, finally, sons 12.0 percent. Thus, one can see that spouses make up about half of all caregivers, and children, both sons and daughters, are far more numerous than daughters-in-law. However, because the data does not account for marital status, the rate of singles among the children caregivers is unknown.

The event that first revealed the elusive existence of unmarried caregivers was a law revision. The revised LTCI law, implemented in April 2006, strengthened restrictions on living support services for families living together. This was intended as a means of reducing financial strain. Those most greatly

affected by this new law were singles working and taking care of their parents. The most direct blow came in the form of restrictions on the use of hired living support service personnel (commonly known as “helpers”), who assisted with the likes of cooking and cleaning. This meant that employed singles would be forced to choose between working and caring for their parents. As a result, many began to quit their jobs. While the annual amount of employees citing parent care as the reason for changing occupations had been about one hundred thousand, following the implementation of the revised LTCI law in 2006, this number increased to 144,800. It was soon revealed unmarried individuals made up the majority of this increase. This was also reported in NHK’s broadcast of “Single Care” in October 2008.

When elders are in need of care, should not someone offer it? Those assertions that the state and society should provide such care have steadily increased since the 1980s. The government’s response to such thinking has been sluggish, however. One can say that conditions improved following the enactment of the LTCI, but recently this system has implemented more and more restrictions for who might qualify for services. Even while paying their insurance premiums, the number of seniors unable to utilize services due to various restrictions is on the rise. Thus, the burden of elderly care is steadily returning to the family.

The incomplete defamilialization of family care is leading to refamilialization. As this occurs, those previously exempted from family care are now engaging again with this work in greater and greater numbers, and unmarried sons are no exception. Unfortunately, this means that many of those becoming parent caregivers must give up their jobs and endure long-term social isolation without any hope of receiving formal compensation or appreciation from society. Due to such circumstances, the question of who might become caregiver tends to induce fierce “political” debates within the family. The following section investigates the rise of competition between siblings over the question of who might undertake the role of parent caregiver.

Family Dynamics in the Distribution of Elderly Care

This section first outlines data collected in a self-help gathering for sons caring their parents called *Musuko* Salon.³ Such an endeavor, however, must base itself

3. *Musuko* means “son” in Japanese. This organization was founded in July 2010 and was still active as of January 2016.

on the linkage between masculinity and care work leading to the marginalization of such men. It is also necessary to discuss the influence of care work on masculinity via the distribution of care work among siblings. Thus, two focal points of analysis exist. First is the tendency for marital status to operate as the primary variable determining the distribution of care work among siblings. Second is the transformation within the care work field and how this affects both existing hegemonic masculinity and the gender order.

1. Unmarried Men and Parent Care: The Case of *Musuko* Salon

Musuko Salon is a cooperative organization supporting family caregivers affiliated with Aladdin.⁴ Its members meet monthly in the Tokyo city center. Every month, Aladdin organizes the gatherings, providing a location and preparing refreshments. Anybody who is a son looking after a parent can attend for a fee of five-hundred yen. Information regarding the organization is distributed by Aladdin's website or brochures available online. The author attended sixteen gatherings of this organization held between June 2012 and September 2013.

Musuko Salon is distinct from many family care organizations in several respects. First, it focuses on sons, and particularly unmarried sons. It is well known that more than ten thousand self-help organizations related to family care exist across the nation, but the number catering to men is scarce. Those accommodating sons are even scarcer. Rather than a lack of demand for such organizations, however, it is rather that men are less likely to become enmeshed in local networks and more likely to feel insecure about discussing their problems. Second, the aim of *Musuko* Salon meetings and the days on which it meets are also characteristics that set it apart. Typically, such organizations directed at housewives and retired men meet on weekday afternoons. Thus, working individuals are naturally unable to attend such gatherings. *Musuko* Salon, on the other hand, has been holding meetings on Saturdays at one o'clock since it began operations in 2010, adjusting to the needs of working sons caring for their parents. Third, *Musuko* Salon features a characteristic openness to its meetings and a certain level of energetic engagement among its members. Participants have constructed an environment imbued with the desire to actively communicate to the world about the reality of male family caregivers. This attitude of openness has led to exchanges with other groups and has

4. Formally Known as Non-Profit Organization Care-worker Network Support Center Aladdin. <http://www12.ocn.ne.jp/~arajin>.

Table 3. Composition of *Musuko* Salon Participants (19 members total)

Age Average – 53 Range – 35 - 66	Living Status Living Alone – 8 Living with Spouse – 3 Living with Parent(s) – 6 Living with Parent(s) & Spouse – 1 Living with Grandparent(s) – 1
Marital Status Married – 4 Unmarried – 15	Parents’ Gender Female – 16 Male – 8
Employment Status Employed – 12 Retired – 3 Unemployed – 4	Grandparent’s Gender Female – 1 Male – 1
Occupation Status Full-time – 4 Self-Employed/Freelance – 5 Part-Time – 3	Parents/Grandparents’ Qualifying for Care Care Level 5 – 5 Care Level 4 – 6 Care Level 3 – 4 Support Required – 2 Deceased – 9
Siblings Only Child – 4 Sister(s) – 7 Brother(s) – 6 Brother(s) & Sister(s) – 2	Presence of Dementia Present – 14 Not Present – 3 Unknown – 9
Marital Status of Siblings Married Sister(s) – 8 Unmarried Sister(s) – 1 Married Brother(s) – 6 Unmarried Brother(s) – 2	Parents/Grandparents’ Living Status Living Alone – 3 Living with Child(ren) – 7 Living with Grandchild(ren) – 1 Care Facility – 6 Deceased – 9
Position in Birth Order Only Child – 4 First – 11 Second – 3 Youngest – 1	

ensured that new members constantly join.

Over the course of sixteen meetings, the author observed a total of nineteen participants, with an average of 7.25 participants attending each meeting. One can see by investigating the attributes of the participants that their average age was fifty-three, with most participants in their forties or fifties. Notably, there were two men in their sixties who continued to attend meetings even after their

parents had died. There was one man in his thirties as well. In terms of marital status, there were four participants who were married and fifteen who were not, making up the vast majority. With respect to birth order, eldest sons were numerous. Participants had an average of 1.84 siblings each, and there were four only children. Among those with siblings, the majority had siblings who were married.

There were seventeen participants engaged in parent care and two no longer doing so. Among the former group, there were eight taking care of their parents in their home, four with parents admitted to care facilities, and five that lived separately from their parents, either close by or far away, engaging in long-distance care. Among parents receiving care, mothers outnumbered fathers by a two-to-one ratio. There was also one case in which a man was looking after his grandparents. Among those receiving care, many qualified for high levels of “Long-term Care Required” (*yōkaigodo*)⁵ and those stricken with dementia were the majority.

Total duration of care was hard to pinpoint exactly since this depended on precisely how one defined the point at which care began, yet seven claimed to have been engaged in care labor for more than seven years. Of that group, two had been caring for family members for more than ten. While such extended periods of time may be attributable to circumstances such as a family member having dementia or being bedridden (*netakiri*), this was also due to the fact that instances in which children were looking after both parents were increasing. Among the seven that had engaged in long-term care, five were looking after both parents. There was even one man (aged fifty at the time) who had nursed his grandfather, grandmother, and mother until they each passed away and was now living with and caring for his father, who was at care level five. Furthermore, the younger the participant, the shorter the period was between the passing of one parent and the need to care for the other. Finally, cases of “all-at-once care” were increasing, in which both parents required care over the same period of time.

The kinds of care these participants were implementing can largely be divided into three different categories, consisting of physical care, emotional care, and management. First, physical care is largely administered by outside services. Overall, participants in the *Musuko* Salon meetings demonstrated

5. Care Levels are 1-5. Levels are assigned according to a care recipient's Activities of Daily Living, with higher numbers indicating a greater need for care. Thus, a care recipient is entitled to receive more care and accrue greater costs the higher the level he or she is designated. When a care recipient is classified higher than level 3 he or she may be entitled to twenty-four hour care, since there is likely little he or she can do alone.

positive attitudes with regard to utilizing such outside services. They were engaged in using various services of this kind. However, while such services were a great help for independently performed tasks carried out according to a set schedule like eating and bathing, other tasks performed more frequently, such as using the toilet or moving around, were not so amenable to such assistance. While this is partly due to the nature of such activities, it also has to do with the complicated restrictions on what services a provider is permitted to offer. Due to liability issues, for example, the most commonly used outside helpers are prohibited from administering simple medical procedures, such as cleaning a colostomy bag and supplying nutrition via artificial equipment. Even assisting a care recipient with movement without a family member present is not allowed. Consequently, even when family members are not directly engaged in administering physical care, their presence is still often required.

In 2000, around the time of the implementation of the LTCI system, discourse regarding the “incapability of male caregivers” was prevalent. The rationale for this perspective was that men had limited housework experience, as well as that female care recipients tended to feel uncomfortable with a male caregiver. However, upon examining the case of *Musuko* Salon, such concerns seemed exaggerated. First, there was hardly a single participant that complained about housework. Most had entrusted cooking, cleaning, and other household tasks to outside helpers for a period of time before they learned to do these tasks by themselves from those helpers. Moreover, though it seemed to be a widely accepted fact that it was difficult for men to care for women, it was evident that this need is not necessarily the case for an unmarried son. Those who had experience caring for both parents claimed that it had been easier caring for their mothers, who had been much more cooperative than their obstinate fathers. Thus, it looks as if mothers who displayed less emotional aversion to care than their male counterparts were much more manageable, despite the gender difference. Perhaps this was because a sense of reciprocity was more naturally achieved between mother and son. Certainly it would seem that a son changing his mother’s diaper or giving her a bath might violate some sort of taboo and make him uneasy. Many participants, however, showed a marked willingness to perform such tasks, claiming, “It’s not like that. There are much worse things than that.” Of course, without input from the mothers, one cannot positively claim that such caregiving relationships were completely lacking in problems.

Nonetheless, it should be emphasized that these care relationships did not accord with popularly accepted notions pertaining to men caring for women. In other words, the idea that men are reticent about caring for their mothers

because it's "more difficult for men," is not all that persuasive.

Emotional care, in which sons watched television with their mothers or spoke of earlier days while perusing photographs with them, was also common. Participants insisted that it was this part of their relationship with their parents that most greatly changed by caring for them. One participant frankly disclosed, "It's the first time since I've become an adult that I've been able to have a real conversation with my dad without shouting. We even laugh together while watching television." Another participant remarked, "I don't know how long it's been since I held my mother's hand. It's been decades. Now I'll take her hand and we'll have a nice chat about her day for about half an hour every night before she goes to sleep." Needless to say, such emotional care is not always without friction. One participant recalled how, after losing patience with his mother who was stricken with dementia, he angrily shouted at her, "Just die already!" However, as pointed out in prior research (Meredith and Lewis 1988), it is not that the elderly care recipients only inflict pain and suffering on their caregivers. In analyzing caregiving relations with respect to the family in particular, one must be careful of over-representing the pain and sacrifice of the caregiver. Depending on how the caregiver accommodates changes in attitudes and feelings toward the relationship between caregiver and care recipient, the experience of care is imbued with varying modes of significance.

Japan's care insurance service is not free of charge. It is a system in which beneficiaries must incur ten percent of the cost for every service rendered and 100 percent of the cost for those instances where they exceed the amount of services allowed according to their care level. As a result, tension exists between the desires to improve the quality of care through diverse services and to reign in costs. This is also precisely the reason why family caregivers often declare, "Good care comes down to money." *Musuko* Salon participants providing in-home care for parents typically spent between thirty-thousand and sixty-thousand yen a month on care alone. However, costs greatly differ according to a care recipient's physical and mental state or the kind of services they require. Moreover, care costs particularly tend to surge right before a care recipient's death, not to mention the incidental costs incurred therein. To gain a sense of this, one may observe a study published by the Health, Labor, and Welfare Statistics Association (2008), which reports that the average National Pension Insurance monthly premium distributed to senior citizens was 55,196 yen in 2006. This means that many could not cover living expenses and the costs of care for their parents' pensions alone. Accordingly, *Musuko* Salon participants deliberated over what they could do to reduce the costs of care, deeply involved in gathering information with respect to the likes of non-profit organizations

and discounts and free services offered by the administration. Such actions may be described as “care management.”

When the members of *Musuko* Salon relayed their own personal stories as caregivers, instances in which they specifically presented them from a male perspective were rare. For the most part, they would speak in terms of their “duty as children” or “responsibility as human beings.” Therein, many took pride in their choice to engage in caregiving, claiming that it had “allowed them to mature” and that it was a “life-changing choice of which they had no regret.” Some also declared, “It’s an experience I would strongly recommend to other people,” emphasizing the value and positive benefits that accrue from engaging in caregiving. Listening to such testimony, it felt as if the association between singlehood and caregiving was surely contributing to the construction of a new form of masculinity. Nevertheless, this was but one aspect of overall circumstances. Shifting focus from the particular relationships among caregivers and care recipients toward a larger social context, it was clear that caregiving was the core impetus for the marginalization of such unmarried men.

2. Marginalization of Unmarried Caregivers

In tandem with the transformation of the labor market in the 1990s, building pressure regarding gender relations culminated in demand for the reorganization of the gender order. The argument that men must participate more in the family affairs and caregiving began to gain support not just among women, but among men as well. Already distressed at the falling birth rate, the government responded to this situation by establishing measures that might encourage fathers to take greater part in raising children, beginning with the legalization of paternity leave. The Child Care Hours for Men and Women Network (*Otoko mo onna mo ikuji jikan o! renrakukai*, hereafter Care Hours Network), launched in the 1980s, was an organization representing this social mood. According to field research conducted on the Care Hours Network, aspects of members’ active participation in childcare dissociated them from hegemonic-masculine roles, but at the same time they did not face social marginalization due to their engagement in caregiving either. This is partly by the fact that Care Hours Network members largely consist of young middle-class individuals who tend to not deal with social marginalization anyway. On the other hand, it is also because their idea of more involving in childcare departs from the salaryman model of fatherhood, which happens to align with government objectives. Thus, albeit unintentionally, the Care Hours Network was able to present a new image of masculinity that became a part of the mainstream discourse (Ishii-Kuntz

2003). In comparison, engaging in parent caregiving tends to be a source of marginalization for *Musuko* Salon members. This suggests that, unlike the fathers championing great engagement in childcare at the Care Hours Network, *Musuko* Salon members will have a more difficult time of challenging hegemonic masculinity and constructing a new idea of masculinity via their engagement in parent caregiving.

Among the *Musuko* Salon members, there were none who attributed their ongoing bachelorhood to caring for their parents. From an objective standpoint, however, it was quite clear that engagement in parent caregiving had contributed to ensuring their marital status. Above all else, this was due to the fact that none of the institutions and norms that these men encountered acknowledged their needs or desires. Family caregivers are absolutely essential to preserving the LTCI system. However, such individuals exist outside this institutional structure; their labor is all but invisible. Lack of compensation and public support for caregiving is standard in practice. Furthermore, caregivers often confront social pressure that regards them as asexual beings, lacking in their own particular desires, and that demands a manner of “self-obliteration” in the fulfillment of their duties. For instance, one man in his fifties wished to entrust his mother to a care facility for two or three days to spend some time with his girlfriend, but circumstances did not even allow him to bring up the matter. During the interview, this man confessed that he had felt an embarrassment to the fact that his needs as a human being had not been respected, and thus had not brought up the matter.

Caregiving had an even more direct impact on the professional lives of these men. While only four were unemployed, as shown in table 3, these were men caring in the home for parents qualifying for high care levels, who had previously been employed in full-time positions before losing their jobs or quitting. Outside of this, there were many men who worked temporary jobs or had become self-employed so as to better look after their parents. In accordance with these circumstances, the fact that parent caregiving affects men’s employment situation is well represented in a survey conducted in 2012 by the Japan National Health Insurance Clinics and Hospitals Association. According to the report of this survey (Zenkoku Kokumin Kenkō Hoken Shinryō Shisetsu Kyōgikai 2012), fifty percent of male caregivers were full-time employees before engaging in caregiving, while this number dropped to 21.7 percent among those already engaged in caregiving. The unemployment rate also increased from 13.8 to 35.8 percent. Although the report does not present changes in employment status with respect to marital status, the likelihood of withdrawing from employment to engage in caregiving is higher among unmarried men than their

married counterparts. This is because unmarried sons tend to find themselves having to choose between work and caring for their parents when they commence caregiving. Moreover, unmarried men will experience relatively greater institutional and normative pressure to give up their jobs in such circumstances.

Parent caregiving is the catalyst for an important turning point in an unmarried man's life. If one becomes a chief caregiver, one's opportunities to pursue romantic relationships are naturally reduced and the chances that one will be forced to change or give up one's career are high. What is particularly remarkable, however, is the prevalence of discourse attesting to the opposite sequences of cause and effect. Representative of such reasoning is the belief that unmarried men are "parasite singles," "people who failed to find a suitable partner after years of clinging to their parents without ever finding a decent job that eventually just end up caring for their parents." This is a perspective widely shared not just in the media but in academia as well. As evident in the case of *Musuko* Salon, however, unmarried men caring for their parents are diversely aged. Furthermore, since many of them are former civil servants and professionals, one cannot claim that their ending up as parent caregivers is a natural consequence of their own social marginalization. Nevertheless, the dominance of discourse referring to such individuals as parasite singles functions according to the logic of gendered division in labor, asserting that any "real man" would not be unmarried and caring for his parents full-time. The commonly held notion that singlehood is a cause and not a result of parent caregiving leads to the view that the social marginalization of male caregivers is their own fault, and such notion operates as a solid basis for the abandonment of social support for them. Even within the *Musuko* Salon gatherings, there existed no counter-discourse despite the fact that these were meetings conducted largely by unmarried men. Singlehood remains strictly a private issue, rarely even mentioned. Thus, these unmarried male caregivers remains as subjects of marginalization at the discursive level as well.

3. Distribution of Care and Masculinity of Unmarried Sons

Changes in elderly caregiving systems have engendered the novel mentality that parent caregiving is not the job of the spouse of one's children but of one's children themselves. As a result, care relations within the family have largely changed accordingly. The greatest shift has come from the consistent decrease in the number of daughters-in-law acting as primary caregivers. The duty of parent caregiving remains securely within the family, but decline of the semi-

institutionalized position of daughters-in-law as caregivers has brought about contention among siblings over who might be the most well suited to take on this task. Also, to the degree that care insurance services now ease the workload with respect to physical care and housework, gender is no longer a decisive determinant in allocating tasks related to parent care. Consequently, struggles over the division of care labor have become all the more noticeable.

Before discussing the tension among siblings over the distribution of care labor, one conjectures about the condition of siblings' spouses. In the *Musuko* Salon group when unmarried sons caring for their parents possessed siblings who were married, they often expressed grievances toward the siblings themselves but rarely mentioned their spouses. In fact, they barely breathed a word of expectation that their brother's wives—daughters-in-law—should assume some of the caretaking duties, and this was naturally true with respect to sisters' husbands as well. While this does not mean that participants harbored no expectation or dissatisfaction to their siblings-in-law, it perhaps suggests that the gatherings were not so conducive to voicing such concerns.

First, a more in-depth discussion of those participants with married sisters is necessary. When asked about distributing care work, most participants displayed an attitude of understanding, stating that, "Well, she has her own family." Approving of the fact that their sisters put their own families first, they assumed that their position as caregiver was natural or inevitable. Such attitude was particularly noticeable in one participant who had looked after one parent until passing away and had been living with the other for an extended period of time. There were many instances in which participants had become chief caregiver without hesitation or conflict. Mr. Itō,⁶ for example, was a representative of such situation:

I looked after my mother suffering from Alzheimer's for about four years. We had already lived together for twenty years since my father died, so my mother already depended on me much more than my sister who only visited from time to time. My mother depended on and recognized only me until the very end. ... As my care for her continued, our bond grew much stronger. Although my physical tasks decreased toward the end, my devotion to her had not lessened. Since I had a house but no wife or children of my own, I thought there was no need to send her to a care facility. I could care her by myself. So I happily accepted the job without hesitation. (Case 1: Mr. Itō, sixty-five year-old unmarried man, one younger sister)

While Mr. Itō became a caregiver without hesitation, one should not overlook

6. All names have been changed.

the fact that he was in his late fifties nearing retirement, which means that he was just a few years away from qualifying for a pension. Along with his mother's pension and his savings, they each had enough to feel economically secure. Mr. Itō's case, in which he was possible to concentrate wholeheartedly on care without having to worry about their economic security, has more in common with that of a husband caring for his wife than that of a son caring for his mother. Kasuga (2013) points out that in terms of the plethora of resources required for caregiving, husbands are better off than sons in many respects. In other words, while husbands may not be as healthy as sons, they are generally far better off in terms of the necessary resources for care, such as time, money, and energy.

In other cases similar to that of Mr. Itō, where sons lived with their parents for extended periods of time and accepted the position of caregiver without reservation, care recipients were always mothers. Typically, a mother cared for her husband until he passed away—at that point her son had already moved in,—and they lived together for a time until the son eventually became the mother's caregiver. In cases of unmarried sons, they showed greater willingness to care for their mothers than their fathers. Mr. Kawamura, for example, refused to care for his father but later cared for his mother:

When my father fell ill, I didn't even know what caregiving was and didn't want to do it. So we put him in a hospital. He died a year later after staying at a few different hospitals. It was only after he died that I began to feel this sort of emptiness. Then something shocking happened. ... Six months after my father passed away, my mother lost her sight and became difficult for her to move around. From that point on, I began to sincerely think about what caregiving was. I was young so I didn't study very well. ... I was a bit worried about my parents and I felt a kind of debt of gratitude. ... So I began to look after my mother in her home. My sister was married and living close by, but she was busy with her own family and had her own problems to worry about. So it didn't look like she would be able to provide regular assistance, thus I just did it myself. I'm self-employed, so I thought I would be able to continue my work and care for my mother at the same time. (Case 2: Mr. Kawamura, fifty-one year-old unmarried man, one younger sister)

Mr. Itō and Mr. Kawamura each had married sisters living nearby but became caregivers of their own accord. And yet, one could not intuit any damage to their masculinity. This was rather an opportunity for these men to reinforce their masculinity. In caring for their parents, these men were now granted with full authority over their mother's assets and all issues related to treatment and were even able to exercise greater influence over their sisters. In some sense, they became the pillars of their households, if only temporarily. Behind such circumstances, in which unmarried men were able to reconstitute a patriarchal

form of masculinity via parent caregiving, lay the fact that in almost every case they received assistance from their sisters. No matter how far they lived or how busy they were, daughters always helped their unmarried brothers with caregiving at any way they could. Ehara does not define the gender division of labor as husbands working and wives taking care of the home. Instead, she sees it as a general pattern permeating every facet of society that confines housework, childrearing, and every form of caregiving to a single gendered category (Ehara 2001, 126). This definition of the gender division of labor offers a clear explanation of why sisters experience “apologetic and uneasy” feelings when their unmarried brothers become caregivers. Owing to such feelings, unmarried sons are able to exercise considerable power and authority over their sisters when they become primary caregivers.

The distribution of caregiving work, however, does not always proceed smoothly among unmarried brothers and their married siblings. Among *Musuko* Salon members, younger men and those with more siblings were more likely to experience conflicts with regard to the distribution of care work. Particularly, married brothers were apt to cause problems. This is reflected in the case of Mr. Honma, who felt that he had sacrificed greatly for his family:

I lived with and looked after my father for twelve years. At first it was just a stroke and he got better, but after suffering a second stroke he became partially paralyzed. His first stroke was in 1996. ... My mother was only 140 centimeters tall, so she was very short. There was no way she could take care of my father, who was 175 centimeters tall and had trouble in moving around. At first I began caring for him because I lived close by and wasn't married, but eventually I became his primary caregiver. Before he died he underwent kidney dialysis for three years, and he had diabetes. He was like a department store of diseases. He died in 2008, but I had already given up my job in 2006. I was working for a top-tier construction company. I had just learned all about design, and I didn't want to give it up. But thinking about what would happen if I lost my mother, I couldn't help. ... My brother who lived in Fukushima would visit from time to time and tell me to “put him in a care facility.” I knew that he lived far and had his own family to think about, so he was too busy to provide a care. But he didn't know that father begged my mother and I to not to send him to a place like that in tears, so we couldn't do that. Anyway, he didn't help. My younger sister who married and lived nearby in Yokohama would come a few times a month and brought him to the hospital though. After my father passed away I was so burnt out that I couldn't do anything for a year. At that point my fiancée had already left me. ... I was so stressed out thinking that caregiving had turned my life into a mess. Thinking about it now, it would've been okay if I had just let it out, but keeping it to myself just made things worse. Did my sacrifice make my father happy? Who knows? (Case 3: Mr. Honma, forty-eight year-old unmarried man, one older brother and one younger sister)

Mr. Honma now lives together with his mother who is eighty years old and works as a care worker at a facility. He confessed that when his mother too became ill he feared that, as an unmarried man, he would inevitably wind up as her primary caregiver as well. He lamented that although he wanted to get married as soon as possible in order to prevent this, it would be difficult for him to get married with his small income, even if he did find someone.

Mr. Honma's case is quite different from the two prior cases. Mr. Honma was looking after his father as the youngest son with a married elder brother who lived far away. Unlike the other two cases, Mr. Honma was still greatly angry about the unequal manner in which care work had been divided between him and his siblings. This anger was directed more toward his older brother than to his younger sister. This was partly due to the fact that his older brother only made a little contribution in caring for their father, but this fact cannot explain all aspects of Mr. Honma's anger. For this, one must understand this in terms of authority and masculinity. First, with respect to authority, as mentioned above, married sisters typically embrace the patriarchal authority of their unmarried brothers who have become the family caregivers. On the other hand, since they are not prone to the guilt caused by the gender division of labor, married brothers are less likely to give way when their caregiving brothers attempt to exercise authority over the family. Mr. Honma was largely unable to exercise the kind of patriarchal authority granted via parent caregiving that was present in the other two cases. Second, in terms of masculinity, Mr. Honma's case involved competing masculinities. Mr. Honma stated that his brother had never apologized to him about the unfair distribution of care labor. Rather than because Mr. Honma's older brother poorly expressed himself, it was more likely the case that he actually was not sorry. From the perspective of Mr. Honma's elder brother, Mr. Honma looked after their parents simply because it was possible for him to do; Mr. Honma was merely a "viable caregiver." Just like other industrialized societies, Japan's structure of gender relations is characterized as patriarchal order, a gender division of labor and an emphasis on heterosexual love. The essential device by which this social configuration is realized is marriage. Thus, men without wives can be evaluated as being lower in status vis-à-vis hegemonic masculinity. This signifies the point at which masculinity approaches femininity. For that reason, unmarried sons may be considered more suited to caregiving than their married counterparts. Within this configuration, Mr. Honma was considered to be a "woman" in the eyes of his brother. This is precisely what caused Mr. Honma to feel his masculinity being slighted and was plausibly the root cause of his anger toward him.

All cases examined until this point have involved caregivers with married

siblings. While these caregivers each had their individual characteristics, they commonly shared the opinion that their being “single” had led them to become primary caregivers. Though they differed in terms of conflict processes over the distribution of care work, they are in common insofar as none of them ever rejected the role of caregiver. However, if these cases had featured unmarried sisters, the process of dividing care work and the attitudes of the unmarried sons would likely have been different. When discussing the division of care work with *Musuko* Salon members, a particularly interesting fact was that the expectations for sisters to engage in caregiving hinged decisively on whether they were married or not. Marriage was also a factor for brothers, but its impact on women in this process was markedly greater. When unmarried sons confronted the idea of becoming caregivers to their parents, they each expressed their intention not to do so if they had unmarried sisters, regardless of whether she lived far away, possessed a top-notch full-time job, or herself was in poor health. This finding was accorded with the experience of *Musuko* Salon members, albeit those with unmarried sisters were fairly few.⁷ Women those who attended a group for daughters caring for their parents, which is overseen by the same organization, also attested to this fact. While it was difficult to catch even the slightest reference to unmarried sisters in the *Musuko* Salon group, resentment and criticism pertaining to intransigent unmarried brothers composed the most common topics of conversation in the group for daughters caring for their parents.

At this point, the context surrounding the manner in which sons become caregivers and their role of the distribution of care within the family have been examined. The influence of parent caregiving on the masculinity of unmarried sons is complex and multifaceted. This masculinity is forged under the constant pressure and the process of renegotiation. In terms of this new form of masculinity produced therein, there are two further points that demand attention.

First, the tendency to consider unwedded children more suitable for caregiving is becoming more pronounced. Moreover, the fact that this tendency affects not only sons but also daughters is what sets the present apart from the past. Following the war, unmarried daughters constituted an “unending supply” of caregiving. The logic of the gender division of labor that closely linked caregiving with femininity had been observable in the lives of women over the decades. As a rapidly aging society led social norms to compel blood relations to become caregivers, unmarried sons have also come to be considered “suitable” as caregivers for their parents. The association between unmarried sons and

7. There was one exception where an unmarried brother and sister each lived together and cared for their mother stricken with dementia.

parent care is a social trend accompanied by social marginalization of those sons and daunting challenges to their masculinity. Nonetheless, as discussed earlier, the results are not that uniform. There is yet the need to adopt a wider perspective and to analyze the formation of new masculinities taking place within the dynamics of different social relations.

Following that, it is imperative to consider a long-term engagement in physical caregiving as another important facet of constructing masculinity. The provision of care involves repeated engagement in tasks that demand careful attention and a sensitive bedside manner, which are conducive to preserving the dignity of care recipients. One must change care recipients' diapers, assist them on the toilet, feed them, and keep close watch over their frail bodies prone to injury and misuse, which even care recipients themselves undergo without notice. The relationship forged between a son and his parents via physical care and its significance to his sexual relationships provides a stimulating point for discussion. It seems that this discussion might offer a novel context for the formation of overly sexualized masculinity.

Discussion and Conclusion: Male Caregivers and the Transformation of the Gender Order

Examining the distribution of parent caregiving among siblings alone, two noticeable transformations in family norms occurred in Japan during the 1990s. First, parent caregiving came to be recognized not as a task for daughters-in-law but for children. Second, the decline in the normative demand on daughters-in-law to care for their parents-in-law was accompanied by the overall decline in the normative role of married children caring for their parents.

In terms of entrenchment of the norm that children should care for their parents, the following ranking system has manifested among children with respect to parent caregiving. Deciding which child will become a caregiver has transformed into a matter of suitability but with the preference of unmarried daughters, followed by married daughters or unmarried sons, and then married sons. Thus, the major factors determining suitability are now marital status and gender. If one considers the fact that parent caregiving has long been the task of daughters-in-law whenever possible, then of daughters, and finally of sons if there is no other option available, changes in such a ranking system may indicate a relaxation of the gender division of labor.

With respect to hegemonic masculinity, however, such change appears rather minimal. It is simply the case that other women have replaced daughters-

in-law. Moreover, while there has been a transformation in norms with respect to one's marital status among sons, the essential social configuration of married sons remains highly detached from parent caregiving as it was in the past. Furthermore, there have been changes in the arrangement of family caregiving, but the principles of the gender division of labor, which thrust responsibility of caregiving on the shoulders of women, maintain unchanged. Just as the ingress of a portion of women into the upper echelons of the workforce does not necessarily signify a fundamental transformation in the gender division of labor, an emergent of certain number of men taking part in caregiving does not mean that one may anticipate the breakdown of the traditional gender order either.

Nonetheless, it is not prudent to conclude that gender dynamics has simply become more flexible as they retain their essential configuration. This is because the term "configuration" implies an aggregate collection of people's thoughts and deeds, not a strict binding of social system and its institutions. Accordingly, gender as a configuration is not a simple inventory of norms, which are passively internalized and carried out, but is an interaction formed and reformed through social practices. Thus, the norm of masculinity inevitably transforms. In particular, hegemonic masculinity as an idealized masculinity is constantly challenged by other masculinities and changes in tandem with the transforming conditions that has protected patriarchy. It is difficult to encapsulate such transformation, because it transpires rather than follows. This paper has traced changes in masculinity relative to singlehood and caregiving. Thus, it concludes with a discussion of each indicators.

When the "singles boom" first arose, singlehood as a manner of living was imbued with resistance to salaryman masculinity revolving around the family. With the persistence of a faltering economy and the discourse pertaining to the demographic crisis that emerged in the 1990s, unmarried men have been further marginalized vis-à-vis authority vested under the aegis of hegemonic masculinity. Rather than furnishing a forum for introspective critical thinking pertaining to the family-centered nature of society, the discussion of unmarried men has merely focused on the problem of part-time positions leaving men unable to get married. Meanwhile, the realm of caregiving underwent a transformation in the composition of caregivers. Though traditionally exempted from this task, unmarried men too have now been designated to caregivers. Currently, it appears that the association between unmarried men and caregiving primarily functions as a variable leading to the marginalization of unmarried men's masculinity. In the view of a rapidly aging Japanese society characterized by growing rates of unmarried people, one receives the impression that the number of male caregivers will continue to increase. In the meantime, the voices

of men, such as those of *Musuko* Salon, declaring the value of caregiving and demanding the improvement of their labor conditions are, albeit limited, increasingly growing. Accordingly, one cannot rule out the possibility that these male caregivers might put forward an alternative form of masculinity, which is capable of challenging its hegemonic counterpart.

The prevailing hegemonic masculinity of salary men, inducing women to accept their roles as caregivers and men as breadwinners, appears as robust as ever. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily mean there are no signs of change. The younger demographic is more likely to reject the traditional idea of masculinity that emphasizes men as breadwinners and thus, allowed to represent and exercise authority over the household. Moreover, it looks as if the gap between caregiving and masculinity is narrowing.

In 1999, the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare began its “*Ikumen*”⁸ campaign on a grand scale nominating the husband of a celebrity singer as a representative. This was a significant change as it involved direct intervention by the government in attempt to break down the existing gender division of labor and to alter the prevailing form of hegemonic masculinity. The slogan adopted by the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare was “Fathers who do not raise children are not fathers.” It was so memorable and is still referenced until these days. On the other hand, under the condition of men still retaining the burden of breadwinning and of the government lacking sufficient support for childrearing, the campaign was criticized as an attempt to shift the duty of caregiving to the family. Ultimately, the campaign manifested too slowly. The number of men who actually took advantage of paternity leave was extremely low. In 2012 the figure stood at just 1.89 percent.⁹ Even if they wanted to take paternity leave, they had to consider the reality that their income and evaluation within the company will be disadvantaged.

In comparison, the participation of men in caring for the elderly has undergone a noteworthy transformation over a similar span of time. The ratio of men among all family caregivers has increased greatly and, alluding to the *Ikumen*, there is now a term referring to men who actively participate in caregiving as “caremen” (Tsutome 2013). While the positive image of men engaging in childrearing has been established at the discursive level, the actual existence of such men was rather insignificant. Considering such circumstances, the fact that more than one-million men engaging in caregiving for the elderly

8. “*Ikumen*” is a Japanese neologism signifying fathers that actively engage in raising their children. It is a combination of the terms “*iku*,” which means childrearing, and the English word “men.”

9. The rate of women taking advantage of maternity leave, on the other hand, is 83.6 percent (Kōsei Rōdōshō 2012).

presents as a symbol of a novel form of masculinity. Future research must endeavor to gauge the success of this symbolic attempt. In any case, it seems clear that the link between masculinity and caregiving is providing a space for reimagining hegemonic masculinity.

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