

“Male Chauvinism” as a Manifestation of Love in Marriage

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THE IMAGES of Japanese woman hood held by many in the West can be classed into two categories. One is the JAL stewardess, trained in a thousand year tradition to serve beautifully and gracefully; the other, as the feminists see her, is the shy female enslaved by men and by the society of which she is a part (Millet 1973). When I went to Japan, these stereotypes were part of my anthropological baggage. Upon seeing certain male patterns of behavior toward women I interpreted these as outright “male chauvinist pig” (MCP) acts, and I was continually outraged for the women with whom I identified. As I delved further and began to ask myself what was happening, I saw that the pattern was indeed MCP on the etic, or culturally universal, level. But what seemed to be hideous sexism was more complex when one began to interpret it on the emic, or culturally unique level. I found that certain forms of Japanese MCP behavior have crystallized out of conjugal relationships through many generations. These patterned ways of acting have acquired names and marks of recognition. Because they are commonly recognized they also are expectable. Japanese wives may not especially welcome them, but they are “normal” – and thus perhaps not personally threatening.

I want to examine the dynamics of Japanese marriage in its early stages, and the reasons why partners need to realign their relations. But first I need to explain whom I am talking about and then to sketch a paradigm of the early stages of marriage, in order to show the developmental context for the behavior I will discuss.

My data were collected from two groups of women in Tokyo during 1971, and from a preliminary study in 1965–66. The women were all middle class, in their early thirties, married for more than five years, graduates of universities or junior colleges, and had two or three children. Their husbands were middle level executives in government or business bureaucracies. My husband also was a source of data since he participated as a member of a work-based group at a university and was able to give me insights into male behavior. I made use of interviews, observations, and telephone logs; but above all I benefitted from group discussions which began as English conversation classes and ended

as mutual exchanges and even consciousness-raising sessions. The women I will describe are not in farming or small business families where husbands and wives share an everyday work world and where men therefore may not be able to act arbitrarily toward the women who work beside them.

Stages of Marital Relations

Figure I shows four ideal-typical stages for the early course of a marriage. The ages are approximations, with men generally two to three years older than the women they marry. The Asahi yearbook of statistics for 1973 reports that in 1960 the age at first marriage was 27.2 for males and 24.4 for females; 1970 showed 26.9 for males and 24.2 for females. The lower part of Fig. I is a demonstration that the stages reflect broad trends in Japanese attitudes across the young adult life course. The graph is based upon replies to the question, "What do you consider to be most important in life?"

During Stage I many college graduates in urban Japan continue to live within their natal families. Because they remain economically dependent, though often earning a salary, we must view young adults as participating in a parent-child relationship until they enter marriage with its relational equality. Young men are faced with the major adjustment of moving from student freedom to a lifetime commitment to one organization. However, young women, who usually make no such commitment, enjoy a latency period of independence, self-indulgence, and considerable testing of different interests. Throughout this pre-marital phase, parents continue to indulge their children in a degree of dependence uncommon in the West (Lifton 1962; Caudill 1970).

When readiness for marriage is reached, Stage II finds men and women on the lookout for a suitable mate. Many young women acknowledge that they chose to work in order to find a husband on their own. The preference is for a love marriage. Even if men and woman avail themselves of the fail-safe mechanism of an arranged marriage, their ideal is to marry for love. Akiko, who had had an arranged marriage, hastened to tell me, "But it was love." Blood (1962) and Waller (1938) both emphasize that the form of courtship and engagement affect the expectations of the partners entering a marriage and the subsequent development of their relationship. Young people launching a marriage via an arranged courtship are seen by Blood to have lesser expectations about equality and companionship than those marrying via a love match. However, most men and women who marry in Japan do so holding idealized notions of love, companionship, and mutuality as do their counterparts in the West.

After marriage the couple shares a short interlude, before starting a family. In the culturally dictated life course in Japan, when one marries it follows that one has children, and the sooner the better. The husband continues at his job; so does the wife unless marriage involved a geographic move for her. Though she is working she is able to cater to her husband, and he in turn woos