Author (full names) ...Emma Elizabeth Cook.........................

Title of thesis ...Failing Freeters : Young Men, Masculinity...

...And Adulthood In Japan..

.... Degree PhD Social Anthropology

Normative ideals of masculinity in Japan continue to largely revolve around the figure of the 'salaryman': the responsible (middle-class) salaried worker, breadwinner and father. Although this model of adult manhood is becoming less attainable for many young men, the social and self expectations of many remain focused on these very ideals, as do normative ideals of adulthood. But what happens to young men who are unable or unwilling to attain salaried work?

This thesis explores the lives of freeters: officially defined as part-time workers aged between fifteen and thirty-four, who, by their employment status, are almost the antithesis of the steady, productive salaryman. Freeters are often depicted in popular discourse as either lazy unmotivated youth or the victims of a changing economic climate. The vast majority of studies on freeters come from sociology, education and labour economics. These are generally data-rich, but people-poor, and most seek to structurally understand why people become freeters and the role that education and changing economic structures play in this. Little focus is given to the role of gender or issues of agency or the ways in which cultural notions of adulthood, selfhood and gender intertwine. Yet these are intimately tied into the discourse on freeters and to their lifestyles.

Much of the concern surrounding the freeter 'issue' focuses on male freeters who are perceived to be failing to be proper productive citizens through their irregular working styles, low (or absent) payments into the social welfare system, and their comparatively modest marriage rate. Indeed, failure was never far from the thoughts of male freeters, though for differing reasons. They felt that by continued pursuit of their non-mainstream aspirations they were failing at being 'proper' adult men because of their inability to become core breadwinners and provide familial stability. Yet, they also felt that they would be failing themselves by shelving their aspirations and succumbing to a lifestyle that many had been seeking to move away from.

By ethnographically exploring the lives of freeters I seek a different perspective from previous studies. By examining the interplay between cultural (gendered) notions of maturity and selfhood, and normative ideals of masculinity in Japan, it is possible to see how individuals' attempts to create more meaningful lives for themselves are mediated by gendered notions (created and maintained by both men and women) of what it means to be an adult man in Japan.

Failing Freeters:
Young Men, Masculinity and Adulthood in Japan

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2009

Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy to the University of London is solely my own work. References to other people's work have been indicated throughout.

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Abstract

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I came to SOAS specifically to work with Dr. Lola Martinez, and it was a great decision. Her support, encouragement, and critique have been critical to the production of this thesis. Through the ups and downs of writing, her forthright, tell-it-like-it-is approach has both toughened me up (a bit) and given me much food for thought. Special thanks also to Dr. Caroline Osella who took the time to read over a full draft of the thesis and offered valuable comments and critique.

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Technical Note

I have largely followed the revised Hepburn Romanisation style when writing Japanese words in English. Macrons are used to depict long vowels. However, they are not used for words commonly rendered into English such as Tokyo.

All names in the thesis have been altered to preserve anonymity, excepting the few cases where people were happy for me to use their real names.

Double quotation marks are used to depict direct quotes of informants and when referencing from materials.

Single quotation marks have been used to highlight specific words or to depict quotations within a quotation.

All Yen to British Sterling conversions in the thesis are done at £1 = 240 yen, which was the average exchange rate whilst I was in the field in 2006/7.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

'Freeters' have been a hot topic in Japan in recent years. They came to public attention at the height of the bubble economy in the late 1980s, but became most visible in the public arena during the recession of the 1990s. At its simplest, the term freeter refers to those people employed in part-time positions who are between the ages of fifteen and thirty five, and are not housewives or students. They predominantly work in the service sector – in cinemas, bars, supermarkets, convenience stores (cf. Whitelaw 2008), restaurants, and fast food outlets (Kosugi 2008).

All anthropologists are aware of the problems with definitions (as shall be discussed in Chapter 3) and the term freeter is no exception, making it difficult to give numbers for this category of workers: the purported figure has considerably varied over the past ten years. The most conservative estimates suggest that in 2002 there were 2.51 million freeters, up from 590,000 in 1982. Male freeters made up approximately 40% of this number (Kosugi 2008). Just a year later (and using a slightly different definition) it was suggested that freeter numbers were at 4.1 million (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare 2003a). However, with the most current (and narrowest) definition of 2007 there are now considered to be 1.8 million freeters with numbers being split almost equally between men and women (at 920,000 and 950,000 respectively).[1] Numbers of male freeters appear to be increasing steadily year on year. Whilst in 1982 male freeters accounted for just 2.4% of the working population, by 2002 this percentage had increased to 9.3% and most estimates suggest that the number of male freeters continues to rise (Centre of Business Development Ability Association 2007b; JILPT 2007).

Although not a huge percentage of the workforce, freeters are a visible reminder of economic liberalisation policies and a changing economic environment. Male freeters in particular have come, in popular discourse, to embody some of the negative changes that are perceived to have been occurring during the long recession of the 1990s and on into the early noughties (cf. Anon 2003b; Kan 2005). They are thus in the public arena for various reasons – they are at the

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[1] Previously numbers of female freeters consistently outstripped those of male. In 1997 for example, there were just over 1 million female freeters and 490,000 male. In 2003, there were 1.19 million of the former, and 980,000 of the latter (Centre of Business Development Ability Association 2007b).

epicentre of: middle-class anxieties about the widening gap between rich and poor, worries over the decline of Japan's economic power, and are also part of a relatively new discourse about what it means to be a man.

Whilst there are competing discourses of masculinity in Japan (cf. Dasgupta 2003), discussions of masculinity continue to largely centre on the post-war figure of the white-collar worker (salaryman).[2] Male freeters are often portrayed as essentially the antithesis of this character. However, I argue that the negativity surrounding male freeters is not simply because they are not salarymen. Indeed, the vast majority of men in Japan are not, and have never been, salarymen (Clark 1979; Kelly 1993). I suggest that the issues surrounding freeters, whilst pertaining to masculinity, are actually more concerned with the fact that male freeters are seen to not be embodying a socially sanctioned adult manhood which intricately interweaves specific normative ideals of masculinity relating to achievements (the ability to be a breadwinner and married father) and particular character qualities (the ability to persevere, do one's best, be patient etc.), with cultural notions of what constitutes an *adult* man. This thesis consequently looks in detail at the lives of male freeters, and in particular describes the experiences of trying to become an adult male within a specific social context whilst querying: can (and do) male freeters become 'proper' adult men?

Setting the Scene

Post-war context

In the late 1980s Japan was in the midst of what has been termed the 'economic bubble' (cf. Akira 2001; Sorensen 2002; Tipton 2002). In order to stimulate the economy, monetary policy was changed in 1986 and interest rates were lowered. Banks gave out huge numbers of loans without stringent checks, massive investments were made by corporations, and new small start-ups cropped up all over the place. Investments in real estate and the stock market jumped (Smith 2006). The economy ended up being well and truly stimulated. At the height of this, a Japanese job information magazine called *From A* coined the term freeter

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[2] In short 'salaryman' usually refers to middle-class white-collar salaried employees. The figure of the salaryman will be explored in detail in Chapter 2. However, it is important to note here that it is generally seen to be the hegemonic model of masculinity in post-war Japan (cf. Connell 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Dasgupta 2004; Roberson and Suzuki 2003b).

(*furiitaa* – derived from *furii arbeiter*; free casual worker) to advertise part-time or seasonal jobs (Kosugi 2008). The word was made up of the English word free, and the German word, *arbeiter* (worker) and built on the Japanese term for part-time jobs, *arubaito*. The term caught on and is now widely recognised as a distinct type of employment in Japan. During the bubble economy little risk was associated with taking some time out to try different jobs, or different lifestyles. Young people were confident that they would be able to find a permanent secure full-time position as a *seishain* when they wanted to. What they didn't know was that change was afoot. The bubble could not last forever.

Shortly thereafter, towards the end of the 1980s: "the Bank of Japan began to put the brakes on over-speculation, [and] land prices and equity values plunged quickly, driving the economy into a precarious state" (Allinson 2004: 196). Since then Japan has been in a long and protracted recession (Sorensen 2002; Tipton 2002). The reasons for this are numerous: After the bubble burst many people were unable to pay the interest rates on loans, thereby weakening bank profits. Simultaneously, the stock market collapsed and further weakened the position of the banks, which consequently began to make fewer loans or none at all. This meant that many smaller and mid-size companies, which constituted ninety-nine percent of all firms in Japan, lost out on needed financing from banks leading to many smaller firms going bankrupt and weakening the economy still further (Allinson 2004).

The shift in demographics, towards a rapidly ageing population, changed expenditure patterns. In addition, international competition led to large changes in the ways that Japanese businesses operated. Many companies shifted their manufacturing plants overseas to mainland Asia to reduce their costs (ibid.).[3] Companies began to restructure their work-force by recruiting fewer regular employees and instead hiring irregular workers on short-term contracts who could be hired and fired when needed (Tipton 2002). Concerns over job security were (and remain) high (Genda 2005). Employment instability and anxiety over finances reduced purchasing power, which consequently had a knock-on effect on the economy. Many young freeters who had banked on being able to move into secure work whenever they wished were caught short and were unable to make the transition. Furthermore, young graduates fresh out of education found it

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[3] For an interesting study of globalisation and the overseas operational culture of a Japanese company, see Sedgwick (2007).

difficult to break into the regular employment market and instead began to work in the irregular employment sector whilst still trying to find full-time positions (Genda 2005; Kosugi 2005a, c). This has consequently also affected male marriage prospects due to the perceived instability inherent in irregular employment (JILPT 2007). This will be explored in Chapter 3. Part-time work, previously largely the domain of women (Brinton 1993; Broadbent 2001), began to be populated by both women and men.

This situation is not, of course, unique to Japan. In many other places changing economic circumstances and the effects of globalisation have increasingly led to a situation whereupon young men find it difficult to, or are unable to, enter into secure employment, marriage, and consequently the position of householder (e.g. Gutmann 1996 on Mexico; McDowell 2000; 2003 on the UK; Nisbett 2007; Osella and Osella 2004; Osella, et al. 2004 on India, and; Vigh 2006 on West Africa). This has been argued to constitute a widespread 'crisis of masculinity' in modern societies (Bly 1990; Horrocks 1994; Kimmel 1987; Kimmel and Kaufman 1994). Some have discussed this crisis in relation to labour market changes, the rise in feminism, and women working full-time (McDowell 2003); others see it as part of a wider crisis of capitalism and modernity (Petersen 1998; Rutherford 1988). Some have outright denied that there is a crisis (Clatterbaugh 1996). However, it can also be argued that since hegemonic ideals of masculinity are by their very nature impossible ideals, then masculinity is always in crisis (cf. MacInnes 2001). This thesis is not, however, about a crisis (or lack of crisis) of masculinity. Neither is it a cross-cultural comparative study of how changing labour structures and economic chances are affecting men's ability to marry and achieve the position of the householder. I focus instead on how Japan does or does not fit in with some of the issues raised within this body of literature and seek to bring a discussion of adulthood and selfhood into the discussion of masculinity.

Despite both the long recession in Japan and changing employment practices, the ideals of what men and women should do and be remain clearly linked to post-war ideals. In short, the Japanese construction of gender appears to have changed little in the post-war period. This is explored in Chapter 2. Although in recent years there can be seen to have been increased calls on youth to become entrepreneurs rather than salarymen (Mathews 2003), and although authors such as those in Roberson's and Suzuki's (2003b) volume speak to changes in dominant ideals of Japanese work and manhood, these post-war gender and work

ideals remain stubbornly in place, at least in Hamamatsu where I did my fieldwork.

Why Freeters? Why Gender?

But why look at freeters? Why look at masculinities? Although there has been a considerable amount of work written about freeters in recent years (see chapter 3 for an overview of some of this) overwhelmingly the focus has been on structural limitations, the effect of the recession, or the changing employment environment (e.g. Genda 2005; Honda 2004; Kosugi 2002, 2003, 2005a, 2006, 2008; Tarōmaru 2006). Freeters' subjective experiences have been largely lost in the cacophony of statistics and large-scale projects mapping out freeter numbers and assigning their motivations to (in most cases) three major categories: the dream chasers, the procrastinators, and those with no alternative (cf. Kosugi 2003, 2008).

Furthermore, although the work on men and masculinities in the Japanese context has begun picking up speed, overwhelmingly the work on gender in Japan has focused on women (see for example, Fujimura-Fanselow and Kameda 1995; Hamabata 1990; Imamura 1987, 1996; Iwao 1993; Kondo 1990; Lam 1992; Lebra 1984, 1993; Matsunaga 2000a; Ogasawara 1998; Okano 2009; Pharr 1981; Renshaw 1999; Roberts 1994; Rosenberger 2001; Vogel 1978). When I was planning this project I was struck by the fact that, despite the rapidly growing literature, in diverse disciplines, on men and their position within various societies (e.g. Bly 1990; Chopra, et al. 2004; Connell 1995, 1998; Connell and Wood 2005; Craig 1992; Garlick 2003; Gilmore 1990; Gutmann 1996, 1997; Hearn 1998; Horrocks 1994; Kimmel 1996; Whitehead 2002), much of the anthropological and sociological literature on Japan mentioned Japanese men almost in passing and usually with reference to the white-collar middle-class *salaryman* type.[4]

As well as relatively few references to men, only a small number of books in the anthropology of Japan specifically look at the role of gender in the lives of men. Roberson and Suzuki (2003b) took the first step in their edited volume *Men and Masculinities in Contemporary Japan: Dislocating the Salaryman Doxa*. In the

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[4] There are some notable exceptions to this, such as Gill's (2001) ethnography on day labourers; Abegglen's (1958), Dore's (1973) and Roberson's (1998) work on Japanese factories; and Bestor's (1989) exploration of a working-class community in Tokyo.

same year Louie and Lou (2003) edited and published *Asian Masculinities: The Meaning and Practice of Manhood in China and Japan,* a comparative look at manhood in Asia. This was followed in 2005 by McLelland and Dasgupta's edited volume, *Genders, Transgenders and Sexualities in Japan.*

At the outset my aim was to explore how freeters were constructing their masculinities. I anticipated that they would be different to normative ideals. However, what I found was that they all kept coming back to the dominant model of masculinity, embodied in the figure of the salaryman (discussed in Chapter 2), in their personal narratives. Yet I also discovered that their narratives were not solely about masculinity, but also about adulthood[5] – specifically how to be, and what it is to be, an adult man in Japan. This is perhaps not surprising, however, when looking at the Japanese terms used to describe 'masculinity': *otokorashisa* and *danseiteki na koto*. These broadly translate to the English word 'manly' and thus are descriptive terms about the qualities of manhood. As all of my interlocutors were talking to me about what it means to *be* a man (*otoko*) and what they feel they are supposed to do and be as *adult* men in Japan, I will therefore be using 'adult manhood' to describe and discuss indigenous notions of being a man.

In much literature focusing on masculinity the term is used quite ambiguously and, as has been noted elsewhere, what is the relationship of masculinity to actual men: "[I]s masculinity necessarily male? Is it simply a collection of characteristics common among actual men?" (Osella, et al. 2004: 8). Although often treated as something that men *do* there is of course more to it. Indeed, men are not the only ones to 'have' masculinity (see for example the work on female masculinity done by Halberstam 1998). It is not my intention, nor do I have the space, however, to give a blow by blow account of the wider body of literature that has come out of recent theorising about gender and masculinities. It would take too much space here to argue just what *masculinity* is or is not, and it is not particularly relevant to the thesis at hand, as what is focused on is normative notions of masculinity and the ways that individuals negotiate (in varying ways) these ideals; therefore I will touch on this literature only when it is relevant to my thesis.

Post-structuralist theories of the self are, however, useful to understand the fluid

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[5] Osella and Osella (2006) note something similar when they discuss the durability of the 'householder' ethic in India.

and non-essential nature of (gendered) identities, yet care must be taken: by focusing too much on fluidity they may run the risk of overlooking the strong recurrence of normative ideas of gender, or on what Rubin (1975) terms the 'sex/gender system'.[6] However, there can also be a propensity for normative ideas of gender systems to be essentialised, or for analyses to lean too strongly on notions of hegemony or patriarchy (Osella, et al. 2004).

Of course, the men in this thesis are *part* of a particular form of patriarchy, one that not only differentiates and separates men from women, but one that also separates men from men according to class and status (cf. Sangari 2002). It could be argued then, along the lines of Chatterjee (1993), that the post-war period in Japan saw the creation of a 'new' patriarchy that came to exist alongside notions of the 'new' middle-class which sought to reconfigure social, gendered, relations and subjectivities. It was during this time that the salaryman as a model to be emulated first came most forcefully to the fore and distinguished itself from an 'old' patriarchy that focused on tradition and pre-war subjectivities (also cf. Sangari 2002; Walsh 1995). However, patriarchal reformulation can be seen to extend further back to the Meiji period (1868-1912) whereupon gender relations were recast in ways that continue to influence the lives of people in Japan today. This is explored in more detail in Chapter 2. However, it is important to note that all the men in this thesis were indeed complicit (in varying ways and at times not voluntarily) in the creation and continuation of particular patriarchal ideologies that continue to position men as productive (and primary) breadwinners and women as primarily the biological/social reproducers of the nation (Yuval-Davis 1997).

Ultimately however, this thesis explores why the freeters I came to know were struggling between what they felt they wanted to do and what they felt they should do and be as adult men. Many attempted to mediate these feelings in a variety of ways, either by presenting themselves as still children or seeking

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[6] Rubin (1975: 159) suggested that the sex/gender system could be defined as a "set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human behaviour," and that gender identity, sex identity, and desire are all social products. However, whilst in the earlier essay she argued sex, gender, and desire were all intertwined in social formations such as kin-based systems, in a later essay she makes clear that though related, sex and gender are not the same and that "they form the basis of two distinct areas of social practice (Rubin 1993: 33). She therefore advocates that analyses should also be kept separate. And indeed, this thesis explores gender, but does not investigate the sphere of sex.

meaning by travelling extensively abroad, but ultimately they were still caught between their individual desires and aspirations on the one hand and what they felt were societal demands on the other. This thesis therefore looks at freeters' experience of becoming (or attempting to become) adult men while experiencing this tension.

Constraints, Agency, and Performativity

In order to explore the relationship between experience and structure it is useful to draw upon Ortner's (2006) reworking of practice theory. She has sought to bring in a historical framework as well as a greater focus on culture and power to the subject of anthropology. Original practice theorists like Bourdieu (1977) and Giddens (1979) essentially sought to investigate the articulations between the practices of social actors and the large systems and 'structures' which both constrain and yet can also be transformed by actors' actions. Rather than arguing that these were oppositions, they framed them as being in a dialectical relationship and suggested that if social subjects are produced through their actions and practices in the world, and the world is produced through their practices, essentially the world can be both made and unmade as a result of the actions of individuals (Ortner 2006).[7]

There were, however, limits to original practice theories and Ortner suggests that a clearer concept of culture, which crucially incorporated ideas of power, was needed. Practice is, after all, itself culturally organised and cultural movements can (and do) reshape both subjectivities and practices. She suggests that:

> [C]ulture is both enabling (allowing people to see, feel, imagine, understand some things), and constraining (disabling people from seeing, feeling, imagining, and understanding other things). But this relatively unreworked concept of culture takes on a very different cast when it is embedded in narratives of power and inequality ... I pursue the idea of cultural constraint via the idea that culture shapes subjectivities of people not so much as members of particular groups (although that is not totally irrelevant) but under specific historic regimes of power.

(Ortner 2006: 14)

Rather than focusing on social *reproduction* she seeks to explore social

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[7] Essentially this idea develops Marx's idea that: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past" (Marx 1869 (1963): 15).

transformation. This does not only change or rearrange institutions, but also changes culture itself – it involves rupturing:

> [T]he (politically inflected) schemas through which people see and act upon the world and the (politically inflected) subjectivities through which people feel – emotionally, viscerally, sometimes violently – about themselves and the world ... [S]ocial transformation works in part through the constant production, contestation, and transformation of public culture, of media and other representations of all kinds, embodying and seeking to shape old and new thoughts, feelings, and ideologies.

(ibid.: 18)

In order to move practice theory in different directions Ortner suggests a 'serious games' perspective (1996, 1999, 2006) in which, like practice theory, social life can be seen as something that is played and which involves both routine practice as well as 'intentionalized action' towards achieving goals and projects which are culturally constituted, but also incorporates relations of power and the subjectivity of actors (ibid.: 129). Intentionality and agency become core components in exploring subjectivities and routine practice, but they are not the same thing. Intentionality is a part of agency, but it is specifically directed towards a goal or a purpose. It can include a huge variety of concrete plans or vague goals/desires, but ultimately all these aims point towards something (also cf. Sewell 1992). Thus agency constitutes an active agent striving towards something. It will be clear throughout the thesis that the freeters I worked with had intentionality in abundance, but this of course does not suggest that they all consciously had concrete goals in mind (cf. Giddens 1979).

Agency then is culturally and historically constituted:

> It is about people having desires that grow out of their own structures of life, including very centrally their own structures of inequality; it is in short about people playing, or trying to play, their own serious games even as more powerful parties seek to devalue and even destroy them.

(Ortner 2006: 147)

Consequently, not all people 'have' agency to the same degree. It is distributed unequally and because people are always situated in relations with others, agency is therefore always negotiated.

Whilst these theories account well for experience, agency, and interactions with social structures, and resonate well with the ethnography presented in this thesis, normative gender ideals also played a crucial role in the narratives of the freeters I worked with. Male freeters were caught in the structures that sought to mould them into particular kinds of men – predominantly productive earners and

husbands/fathers. They were caught between their own intentions and what they felt were the demands of society. The men I knew were conflicted about these competing desires and demands because these dominant discourses had been largely internalised (though not completely – agentive action is also a key part of the thesis). The articulations between these normative discourses and their own desires were thus complex.

It is here that the work of Judith Butler on gender performativity becomes pertinent. Gender performativity is something that is compulsory, unconscious, and not willed by any self. It does not constitute putting on a mask, playing out a performance, or a conscious wilful shaping of the self (cf. Goffman 1959). Butler suggests instead that actions are all there is: actions make us and no person is outside of gender, instead people are the objects of their own actions (Butler 1999). Importantly, performativity: "must be understood not as a singular or deliberate "act", but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effect that it names" (Butler 1993: 2). She suggests that gender (and sex) are not cultural constructs which are imposed, but are instead norms, and that the "reiterative power of discourse ... produce[s] the phenomena that it regulates and constrains" (ibid.). While clearly having agency, it is clear that the ideals that male freeters engaged with were hegemonic and normative; they were deeply inscribed into my informants' conceptions of what they should do and be. They could not don different masks, but rather struggled with, and in varying ways, recreated, reinscribed, and reiterated these culturally constituted norms within their narratives, their practices, and their intended future practices. Power is thus a crucial element, and drawing on Foucault, Butler suggests that: "regulatory power produces the subjects it controls ... power is not only imposed externally, but works as the regulatory and normative means by which subjects are formed ... I understand this constituting effect of regulatory power as reiterated and reiterable" (ibid.: 22). This should perhaps not be overstated, however, for while gender performativity may be unconscious this does not preclude agency or the fact that though constituted through relations of power, people are to a certain extent able to choose certain *aspects* of masculinity to embody (cf. De Neve 2004); nor does it account for how people's gendered identities change over time as people age (Lamb 2000).

Age, adulthood and selfhood are also intricately interwoven into gender ideals and expectations and therefore before moving onto a discussion of the methods I used in my research and of the core methodology of this thesis, a short

exploration of adulthood, self and maturity in the Japanese context is needed in order to fully contextualise the material presented in this thesis.

Adulthood in Japan

I have already noted that part of the continued power of post-war gender norms in Japan comes from the fact that normative ideals of adulthood are tied into post-war notions of masculinity and femininity. Though this has been acknowledged by authors working on Japanese masculinities (see for example, Dasgupta 2004; Roberson 1995), adulthood (and maturity) has not been interrogated as a category and experience in and of itself.[8] However, although not specifically focusing on adulthood *per se* there are numerous works which indirectly touch on it (see for example, Rohlen 1983 on the lives of high school students; Sato 1998 on biker gangs, and; Yoder 2004 on youth deviance). Meanwhile, there are many ethnographies that, in their exploration of the *experiences* of adults, for example, of middle-aged people (Plath 1980); of middle-class housewives and mothers (Imamura 1987; Lebra 1999; Lock 1988); part-time workers and office ladies (Brinton 1993; Ogasawara 1998); or what it means to be an artisan (Kondo 1990), a white-collar employee (Clark 1979; Rohlen 1974; Vogel 1963), a factory employee (Abegglen 1958; Roberson 1995, 1998) etc, what it means to be an adult is touched upon. Therefore, what constitutes adult masculinities has to currently be sought in a variety of ethnographies, for example, of work (Clark 1979; Frühstück 2007; Matsunaga 2000a; Roberson 1995, 1998, 2003), of drinking (Allison 1994), or in other locations such as in religious practice (Faure 2003; Hardacre 1994). The ethnography presented in this thesis is not, however, of one particular locality such as a workplace, nor does it centre around other 'traditional' forms of socialities, which might take place in bars or through religious practice, but rather looks at the lives of individual freeters and how they come to navigate their desires and what they felt were demands to be particular kind of men. But, what is it to be an adult in Japan?

Kinsella, in her survey of young adults' impressions of adulthood, notes:

> Adulthood was directly understood to mean society, and vice versa; it was

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[8] A notable exception is Plath's (1975; 1980) work which explores maturity from the perspective of middle-aged informants, and Okano's (2009) recent sociological study focusing on working-class women's transitions to adulthood.

not viewed as a source of freedom or independence, it was viewed as quite the opposite, as a period of restrictions and hard work. The most common impression of adulthood was that it involved responsibility (*sekinin*), typically a huge responsibility, which was not an abstract individual, but specific, responsibility to society, to one's family, and to large organisations, in which one had to work hard and conform to expectations.

(1995: 242)

Rosenberger (2007) echoes Kinsella (1995) when she suggests that: "Independence leads to adulthood, but interdependence with others is necessary for full adulthood" (2007: 92; see also Kondo 1990; Plath 1980).

In her longitudinal study of young Japanese women, Okano (2009) suggests that women understand transitions to adulthood as 'feelings' which fall into three categories: the first requires defining and pursuing a purpose (*mokuhyō*), which leads to having motivation (*yaruki*) and consequently awareness of one's own growth (*seichō*) to achieve these goals. The second is having a "balanced sense of responsibility (*sekinin*)" (2009: 8) towards personal needs and others' needs. The third involves acquiring a sense of independence (financial and/or decision making) through the achievement of their goals. These all resonate with many of the interviews I conducted. Whilst the character qualities she describes – for example, being responsible for self and others, having and achieving specific goals, being independent etc. – were expected of both men and women regardless of gender, the ways these qualities are actualized and the ways in which men and women are supposed to achieve them are different. What could be stressed more I think is the gendered nature of transitions to adulthood and the relation between selfhood and maturity.

Adulthood is an ongoing process of becoming (Christiansen, et al. 2006; Martinez 2004). Whilst there are normative ideals of the life course in Japan which revolve around specific life transitions – the school to work transition, marriage, children, retirement etc – I do not suggest, of course, that individuals follow this as a linear progression of events. Aging and the life course are socially constituted and, as Bledsoe (2002) has so powerfully argued, lives do not predictably unfold due to time progression, but are also contingent – they are affected by unpredictable and unforeseen events that considerably affect the course of lives and lead people into different futures. Misfortune, uncertainty, and vulnerability affects individuals and their lives and life courses in different ways (ibid.). Therefore, whilst transitions and 'rites of passage' are important, both for self and others' assessment of whether an individual has reached adulthood (MacCormack 1977; Strathern 1995; van Gennep 2004 (1977)), individual character attributes also

play an integral role in the project of becoming an adult. Indeed, being able to show that one possesses the qualities associated with being an adult affects not only how a person thinks of themselves, but also how others' think of them (Kondo 1987, 1990; Mines 1994). Although perhaps exacerbated in rural village contexts (as the case study of Nobu in Chapter 5 will illustrate) this remains relevant in urban contexts as well. This can have repercussions on, for example, job promotions and on marriage prospects. Therefore the possession (or not) of specific character attributes is not only limited to self-assessments of whether adulthood has been attained, but also feeds into wider social assessments on maturity made by families, co-workers and bosses, girlfriends and even prospective girlfriends. To better understand all this, it is necessary to briefly explore understandings of Japanese selfhood and maturity.

Self and Maturity

The majority of anthropologists exploring ideas of the Japanese self tend to agree that 'it' is both sociocentric and relational; that Japanese people situationally choose appropriate behaviour from a range of different possibilities (cf. Bachnik 1992a, b; Kondo 1987, 1992; Lebra 1976, 1992; Plath 1980; Smith 1983a; Tobin 1992).[9] Whilst there is a large literature on selfhood in anthropology and sociology (e.g. Giddens 1991; Mauss 1985; Miller 2009; Mines 1994; Morris 1994; Strathern 1993), often focusing quite broadly on notions of the self (cf. Giddens 1991; Taylor 1989), the work on the Japanese self tends to be quite insular, with a context specific focus (Japan), rather than being comparative. While this work is both important and useful in understanding notions of Japanese selfhood (and shall be briefly explored below) I will also be making some comparisons in the following sections in order to show that the strategies selves use are not necessarily context specific – there are similarities across space and time in how individuals (irrespective of place) may attempt to negotiate the structures in which they live.

Much of the discussion of the Japanese self stresses the importance of native concepts – such as *uchi* (inside) and *soto* (outside); *omote* (surface appearance/in front) and *ura* (what is kept hidden/ in back); *tatamae* (public behaviour) and

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[9] There is also a body of literature that focuses on psychological analyses of the Japanese self. See for example, Doi (1973, 1986) and Roland (1988). However, I will limit my discussion to anthropological understandings of the Japanese self.

honne (inner feelings); *amaeru* (to ask to be indulged) and *amayakasu* (to indulge) etc – on how the self is constituted (Doi 1973, 1986; Lebra 1976; Rosenberger 1992). Other work focuses on the shifting of the Japanese self between these poles (Bachnik 1992a, b). These are important concepts within Japanese society and also to the understanding of discourses of the Japanese self (Kondo 1987). But these are not unique to Japan. In a similar vein, Mines' (1994) work on individuality and 'public faces and private voices' in south India resonates somewhat with much of the Japanese work which discusses 'inside and outside'. However, he also emphasises that public and private lives are intermixed and that: "[T]he dual dimensions of personhood, their public faces and private voices, being inseparable, are often mixed together in peoples' interpretations of themselves and others" (1994: 13). This is important to stress, because as already discussed, people (selves) internalise outside social norms, expectations, and constraints and therefore there is not a clear delineation between, for example, inside and outside, but instead is a complex, fluid and nebulous arena where people incorporate, resist, and reject elements of it. It is the particular management of these vying elements that make up and define the self and maturity in Japan.

Mathews (1996), in contrast to much of the material on Japanese selfhood, takes a phenomenological approach. He has suggested three levels of the cultural shaping of self in Japan: at the deepest level (and drawing on Bourdieu's concept of habitus) is that which involves language and embodied social practice where selves are shaped beyond an individuals' comprehension. The second level is that of '*shikata ga nai*' – that which can't be helped. He suggests that it is at this level that social practice, expectations, norms and values (*seken*) operate, and that whilst Japanese selves are aware of the cultural shaping of the self at this level they are little able to do anything about it. The final level is what he calls the "cultural supermarket", where selves have a level of autonomy in their shaping by picking and choosing from culture to justify and create their sense of themselves: "At this shallow level of shaping, selves may be thought of as cultural consumers and creators, and as creators of self" (ibid.: 724).

Mathews' theory of the ways in which selves are shaped in Japan works well. However, he somewhat underestimates the control that selves have at the second, *shikata ga nai*, level. The freeters I worked with, though buffeted from most sides by norms and expectations, especially as they aged, did seek to have some control at this level. Some did indeed give up as they aged, and this links with older

Confucian notions of maturity – by consciously giving up (*akirameru*) and seeking more normative life courses they were on the path, it was suggested, to mature selfhood.[10] Lebra (1976: 167) also suggests that this is the case when she states: "One's capacity for *akirame* [resignation] is often taken as proof of maturity and wisdom." Other freeters, however, continued to resist resigning themselves to the expected: they sought alternative paths, and were making peace with that decision as well. Cultural shaping and the ideas of shifting are consequently linked to ideas of maturity. For as Long (1999: 13) notes: "What is it that learns to shift identification if not a maturing self?"

Maturity in Japan is then, at its simplest, about the ability to shift: the ability to navigate social expectations and personal desires, but it is clear that the ability to shift is not the only factor at play. Other key components constituting maturity are hardship, the ability to endure (*gaman*) and overcome, persistence, trying one's best (*ganbaru*), and selflessness (Kondo 1990).

Given that (male) freeters are often seen to be taking the easy way, as being parasitic on families and, in the future, on the state, it is not hard to see why, in public discourse, they are considered to be childish. Furthermore, as Rohlen (1974: 51-52) notes, work and personal aspirations have typically not been considered mutually exclusive in Japan:

> Stated simply, devotion to duty, perfected through greater self-discipline, in time leads to a reduction of the disturbance caused by conflicting demands. The result is an improved state of personal spiritual freedom and a sense of joy focused on fulfillment in one's work ... Satisfaction or unhappiness depends on the individual, particularly on his attitude, and not on outward causes such as low pay, long hours, boring work – all of which are relative and therefore cannot be eliminated.

This view remains relevant for many non-freeters and is explored further through the ideas and images of freeters that I detail in Chapter 3, and also in comments some of my informants made about what constituted an adult man in a more general sense.

Crucially, however, the ethnographic data indicates that cultural constructions of

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[10] Plath (1980: 5) notes that "In East Asia the heritage of possibilism – the idea that we can go on improving with age – can be found expressed as early in history as Confucius. In the *Analects* the master says, 'At 15 I thought only of study; at 30 I began playing my role; at 40 I was sure of myself; at 50 I was conscious of my position in the universe; at 60 I was no longer argumentative; and now at 70 I can follow my heart's desire without violating custom'."

selfhood and maturity are very clearly gendered. The majority of literature on the Japanese self and on cultural constructions of maturity appears to somewhat overlook this; there is a sense that 'the' self discussed is genderless, ageless, classless and sexless; that these categories precede context. However, gender plays a key role (as does class and age) and context is also of importance. Indeed, Lamb notes that many studies of gender also overlook the importance of processes of aging. She comments that:

> Social relations are "aged" just as they are gendered, though of course the meanings and politics of age alter according to cultural and historical context ... By overlooking age, those in women's studies and gender theory have increased the difficulty of their task of theorizing about the ways women and men are constituted as gendered beings.

(Lamb 2000: 9)

Plural Pathways?

As already noted, lives (and life courses) are contingent and dependent on any number of factors and circumstances that shape individuals' lives (cf. Bledsoe 2002). I definitely am not arguing that there is only one type of masculinity in Japan or only one way to become a mature person. There have always been diverse lifestyles and various ways of making a living, no matter that the post-war ideals posited the salaryman as the poster-man for adult masculinity. However, I will illustrate and explore why the ideological power of normative ideals of masculinity remained highly pervasive and important in all of the men's narratives that will follow. It is what the salaryman *represents* that is most pertinent for the majority of men I knew in Japan: not actually being a salaryman *per se*. Given that the salaryman remains a hegemonic ideal which the majority of men do not and cannot embody it is perhaps more useful to think of this ideal as a 'structuring structure' (Bourdieu 2001). The characteristics that it represents – becoming a breadwinner and a married father – remains: "[P]art of a generalised masculine hegemony, a hegemonic ideal against which actual male performances are measured which serve to structure other aspects of life" (Osella, et al. 2004: 16). Therefore, although the majority of my informants did not desire to become an actual salaryman, the ideals he represents were ever-present in their narratives.

I want to stress here that the salaryman is a firmly middle-class ideal.[11] Many of the men in this thesis are not middle-class, but rather were aspiring (or being pressured to aspire) on the edges. By working part-time the middle-class men who were freeters were essentially in danger of downward mobility. Whilst their anxieties and uncertainties, particularly around marriage and relationships with women, reflect they are aware and concerned about this, they also put in place various strategies to offset the future chances of it happening. These strategies include having clear age cut-offs whereupon if they are not successful by a particular point (usually a certain age) they asserted they would give up and find work in the regular employment sphere (see the case study of Kenji in Chapter 4). Some gained qualifications as Japanese language teachers to allow them to move and work overseas. This was also a strategy of upward mobility due to the high esteem that teachers continue to be held in (see Nobu's case study in Chapter 5 and Taro's in Chapter 6). Others reconciled themselves to accept (or planned to accept) more secure contracts at their companies whilst continuing to strive for their goals in their spare time (see the case study of Takeshi in Chapter 5).

Whilst many middle-class men (and frequently the people surrounding them, parents and girlfriends, for example) were concerned about losing middle-class status, working-class men were often seeking to enter the middle-class. Many of these men desired (enjoyable) white-collar jobs. However, whilst some took government-funded computer courses (run through Hello Work, the national job centre) to increase their chances of being employed (see Yoshio in Chapter 6), most strategized in other ways, for example, through attempting to take in-house exams within companies they worked for in order to transfer from an unstable contract to a secure one (see the Age, Life Course and Work section in Chapter 5 and Kentaro's case study in Chapter 6). In these cases, whilst educational backgrounds were important, length of service and an individual's character played a key role in the opportunities afforded them within the company for which they worked (cf. Sedgwick 2007: 70-92).

However, opportunities to move up the class-ladder, even after gaining additional qualifications, remain limited in Japan. Educational level remains of critical

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[11] For notable early ethnographies focusing on white-collar employment and the middle-class salaryman, see Vogel (1963), Clark (1979), and Rohlen (1974). Furthermore, for an interesting analysis of the subjective experiences of the contemporary salaryman, see Sedgwick (2007).

importance, so the decisions and opportunities that youth make at junior high school and high school (including the type and level of school they attend), and the decision (or opportunity) to attend university remain key components of an individual's ability to gain secure white-collar work in the future (cf. Dore 1997 (1976); Ishida 1993).

Some of the strategies employed by the men in this thesis resemble those used by youth in India. Much work written on this subject explores the effect of recent liberalisation policies on the middle-class and the role played by the concept of credentialisation. Whilst India has undergone rapid changes and the burgeoning of a new middle-class (something Japan underwent in the immediate post-war period), this work reflects and explores the strategies that individuals use to cope with major structural shifts and the changing subjectivities that accompany them. Jeffrey (2009), Nisbett (2007), and Cross (2009) all discuss how many Indian youth remain in education or undergo course after course in attempts to gain qualifications that will put them ahead of the game and provide them access to the middle-class.[12] Ultimately they are investing in social mobility (also cf. Fernandes 2006). Cross (2009) discusses how many youth in Andhra Pradesh are confronted with the realisation that their education has been devalued. They are unable to live up to local ideals of masculinity and they increasingly occupy a marginal position and therefore their futures are full of uncertainty. Consequently, at a time when increasing numbers of people are investing in education to improve their prospects, economic changes and unemployment are rife, leading to what Jeffrey (2009) calls 'educated unemployment and underemployment'. This plays an important role in reproducing structures of exclusion and marginality (Bourdieu 1984; Cross 2009; Jeffrey, et al. 2008). This is not, however, limited to India, but has been widely discussed across Asia (Jeffrey 2009; Jeffrey, et al. 2008) and Africa (Mains 2007) since the 1990s.

The ethnographic data in this thesis illustrates that something similar is happening in Japan. However, whilst many young men that Cross worked with felt cheated by: "[T]he promise of secondary education and actual employment outcomes, [whereupon] their academic achievements became a source of dislocation and disenfranchisement" (Cross 2009: 365; also see Osella and Osella

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[12] Whilst the jobs these youth seek to gain are high-paying ones, for example, in the IT industry, the freeters I knew were not interested in gaining high paying jobs for the sake of having one. Instead, they were seeking meaningful, enjoyable work.

2006), for the freeters I worked with this wasn't the issue. Their feelings of anxiety came from their anticipated future marginality, their likely inability to get married, and concerns that they would have to choose between making their dreams a reality or living a secure, regular, lifestyle.

In order to gain the kinds of information necessary to explore the issues raised in the Introduction so far a variety of research methods were used during my fieldwork year. Therefore, before moving onto a more in-depth discussion of these issues in the thesis, it is necessary to outline my fieldwork, research methods, and thesis methodology employed.

Research Methods

Gaining Access

I arrived in Japan at the beginning of August 2006 and set about trying to meet with the freeters I knew, searching for new contacts, and trying to get my Japanese to a higher level. I spent thirteen months (from August 2006 to September 2007) in the industrial city of Hamamatsu, the largest city in Shizuoka prefecture. The city has a population of around 800,000 people[13] and is located equidistant between the main metropolitan areas of Tokyo and Osaka. Whilst the city extends over a large area, the centre itself is quite small (it can be easily walked around in an hour), and a large amount of the area that the city covers is used agriculturally – for tea, rice and fruit orchards.

There were a number of reasons why I chose Hamamatsu as the site for this research. The first was that I had previously lived and worked there for four years (between 2001-2005) and had a number of contacts in place (including three freeters). As I was funded for only twelve months of fieldwork I deemed this prior contact to be critical (Bestor, et al. 2003). The city felt small and compact which was important to me, especially as freeters are such a disparate heterogeneous group. In addition, most of the research that I had read regarding freeters was carried out in large metropolitan cities such as Tokyo and Osaka. Many people working in such places move from their hometowns to these urban centres to

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[13] In July 2005 the city population jumped from around 600,000 people to 800,000 when it merged with eleven surrounding towns and cities to become a 'designated city' (*shitei toshi*). The city limits now stretch 52km from East to West border, and 73km from North to South border and encompasses a land area of 1511.17km^2 (http://www.city.hamamatsu.shizuoka.jp/foreign/english/outline/profile.htm).

work. However, I wanted to explore how it was to be a freeter in a smaller, more conservative, city such as Hamamatsu. Whilst relatively small (compared to Tokyo, Osaka or Nagoya) it is primarily an industrial hub with a strong (though currently adversely affected) manufacturing industry. Three of the core industries for the city consist of transport vehicles, specifically motorcycles; musical instruments; and textiles. Companies such as Honda, Yamaha, Suzuki, Kawai, and Roland all started in Hamamatsu and the latter four are still based there. Whilst these big companies have a high profile the majority of employees in the city are employed by smaller and mid-sized subsidiary companies, contractors, and sub-contractors (Hamamatsu City Hall. n.d.). Thus the city has numerous factories, with much of the population engaged in blue-collar work, and a thriving service economy to meet the needs of the population.[14]

In the 1990s more than half of total employment in Hamamatsu was located in the manufacturing industry. During the recession of that decade Cornelius and Tsuda (2004) found that, among foreign workers at least, there was neither mass unemployment nor an exodus back to native lands. Instead companies reduced working hours and salaries in an attempt to reduce costs and keep afloat. The manufacturing industry was therefore affected, but not to such an extent that it was crippled. In the most recent recession of 2008/9 (after my fieldwork was finished) companies have attempted to handle the situation similarly; by cutting back to a four-day work week, not allowing any overtime etc. However, there have also been large numbers of temp and foreign workers laid off, with foreign, or more specifically resident *nikkeijin* (Japanese-Brazilian) workers, being encouraged (by a rapidly implemented government policy) to return to their native countries and not return (Tabuchi 2009).[15]

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[14] In 2008, 84,396 people (up from 81,182 people the year before) were employed in the manufacturing industry in the Hamamatsu area, with 5,775 people (up from 5,697 people the year before) in the city's service sector (Hamamatsu City Commerce and Industry Department 2008a).

[15] Hamamatsu has one of the highest numbers of Japanese Brazilians in Japan. Most work in the manufacturing industry prevalent in the city. See ethnographies by Roth (2002) and Tsuda (2003). Hit heavily, however, by the most recent recession huge numbers of Japanese-Brazilians have lost their jobs and are now returning to Brazil. On a recent visit I was shocked by the conspicuous absence of many people I regularly saw and chatted to during previous visits. The government has instituted a scheme where, for a sum of money (300,000yen [£1250] plus 200,000yen [£833] per each dependant), Japanese-Brazilians and their families return to Brazil on the agreement that they and their children are not entitled to apply for a work visa to return to Japan again (Ryall 2009; Tabuchi 2009).

In 2006-2007, however, when I did the fieldwork, the Japanese economy was doing well. Freeter numbers had even declined slightly. But given that I had freeter contacts in the city I was confident I would meet many people. On arriving, I set out to explore the connections I already had in Hamamatsu. I met up with old students, colleagues and friends to see if any of their friends or acquaintances were (or knew) freeters. Over time I managed to get introductions to freeters through these channels, however, by mid-October I realised that snowballing as a tactic – contrary to Smith's (2006) experiences in Tokyo – was not a very effective way to meet people because the freeters I had met were not willing to introduce me to other freeters. Almost all of them kept their work lives and personal lives largely separate and as a result I was unable to gain introductions to close friends or family members in all but a very few cases.

Simultaneously, I started to look for support groups for freeters, or any other kind of group that would get freeters in the same place at the same time. One of the biggest problems (I felt) at the beginning of fieldwork was not having a bounded site (cf. Steinhoff 2003). I was not working in a village or an institution, but with people belonging, or feeling that they belonged, to a particular category of worker. I found one promising lead in the area, a Non-Profit Organisation (NPO) that stated on its webpage that its aim was to support and help freeters and NEETs (people Not in Education Employment or Training][16] find secure employment. After making contact and explaining my research I was told unequivocally by the head of the NPO that they only helped NEETs and therefore would probably not be relevant for me,[17] but that I could attend their sessions as an observer on the condition that I would not ask to interview any of the participants and that I would not publish details of those sessions. I gained many insights from attending these seminars, sessions and meetings and these inform my thesis, though indirectly. I also tried the local Hello Work centre (a government job

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[16] Derived from a British term, NEET (in the UK context) refers to youth between the ages of sixteen and eighteen, who are Not in Education, Employment or Training. The Japanese government altered the ages for the Japanese context: they are, like freeters, defined as being between the ages of fifteen and thirty-four.

[17] However, given that most NEETs initially go into part-time work I anticipated that some of the NEETs would become freeters. Furthermore, I was interested in how these NPOs worked, the attitudes of staff and volunteers towards young NEETs, and the ways they were helping youth into work.

centre) and a relatively new local initiative called the 'Young Job Station'.[18] However, these yielded little information. The vast majority of time and money was being spent on organisations designed to help NEETs – the new 'problem' group.

What I was looking for had seemed very clear to me, prior to fieldwork in Japan, and I thought that freeters would consequently be very easy to find. I was essentially looking for people who were between the ages of fifteen and thirty-four, who were engaged in part-time work, and doing *arubaito* style jobs.[19] As already mentioned, I knew a few people who were in this type of employment after having lived in the city for four years and I did not think that I would have any difficulty in finding people. The biggest problem, I thought, would be that there was no particular fieldwork site, but rather a group of people situated in different places, doing different jobs. Finding them, I thought, would surely be a breeze, but finding ways to spend time with them would be, I anticipated, more difficult. However, after returning to Japan for fieldwork, the issue of just who a freeter was became much more murky and complex. Everyone with whom I spoke had a different idea of what a freeter was; most said that *haken* (temp) workers, who work on temporary contracts, were not freeters, others said they were. Some people suggested that only workers in the service sector were freeters, whilst others maintained that this was not the case. Still others suggested that people who were unemployed were actually freeters.

I also got reactions spanning from: "Oh, I don't know any freeters, everyone I know is 'working properly' (*chanto hataraite iru*)," to: "There aren't any freeters in Hamamatsu. It would probably be better to go to a big city like Tokyo or Osaka." I realised as fieldwork progressed that it was not, of course, that there were no freeters in the city, but that my contacts' ideas of freeters were generally people who work two or three days a week, take long holidays, and were maybe chasing a dream, such as making it in the music business or being an artist. The people that my friends knew who were working 'properly', Monday to Friday (or Saturday), did not fit this image and therefore they did not consider them to be

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[18] This was also aimed at getting young people into employment. Their webpage can be accessed here: http://youngjob.pref.shizuoka.jp/

[19] Whilst the word *arubaito* is also used to describe people working in part-time or seasonal jobs, it is now, according to my contacts, used more often to denote students who are doing part-time jobs ('doing *arubaito*'), whereas freeter has come to stand for those people doing similar irregular work, who are not students or housewives.

freeters, even if their jobs were temporary or part-time. They were more likely to call such employees *haken*. Overall, freeters (who were working or wanting to work at least) were considered by many people I knew to be closer to NEETs (who were not working) than to *haken* workers who were on temporary employment contracts.

At times I felt that I was chasing my proverbial tail and this led me to question why it was so difficult to find what, prior to fieldwork, I had thought of as a seemingly clear and broadly defined group. It also led to my questioning the use of the definition; if I could not find freeters, if people were not outwardly saying 'I'm a freeter!' then was there any point in looking for them? I came to the conclusion that there was merit in the search; it was not that there were no freeters, it was just that there was a great deal more ambiguity surrounding the term than I had anticipated. Furthermore, this initial difficulty led to some rich discussions with informants about what a freeter is and is not, and what the images of freeters are, both from non-freeters, from self-defined freeters, and from those reluctant freeters who were unhappy about labelling themselves in such a way. I will consider these definitions later in Chapter 3.

In November 2006, after having worked through my list of friends and acquaintances and having met a few freeters along the way, I set out to find a job that would enable me to work as a freeter, to meet more people in a more bounded setting, and to undertake participant-observation. I hoped that this would enable me to gain added access to freeters' lives, to be able to observe interactions as well as participate, and to gain a more diverse understanding of other peoples' views of freeters. Furthermore, working would give me the opportunity to do the kind of work that many freeters do, and to experience their conditions of work from the inside.

Toho Cinema and Participant-Observation

Many friends suggested that I should focus on the service industry. Freeters, they said, work in the shops (*izakayas*,[20] clothes shops, convenience stores) whereas *haken* (temp) workers more commonly work in factories and offices. Moreover, people (excluding students) working part-time in the service industry were perceived to have fewer transferable skills and fewer opportunities to be taken on

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[20] A bar serving food as well as alcoholic drinks. It's not a bar and not a restaurant, but somewhere in between.

as regular salaried employees and therefore considered them to be freeters.

I considered a number of places as possible sites to work – local factories, convenience stores, petrol stands, cafes, supermarkets and the local nine-screen cinema. Many I ruled out – I did not want to work in one of the factories as although there are many workers I considered that it would be likely that I would be placed on a line with women (cf. Roberts 1994), and my aim was to focus on men's lives. Furthermore, many workers in factories are employed full-time or they are recruited via temping companies (*haken kaisha*). From hanging about in convenience stores at various times there seemed to be relatively few workers (just two or three per shift) and a number of these, especially during the day-time, were older women working as *pāto*.[21] I did not want to limit the study to so few people at such an early stage. The same was my reasoning for coffee shops and petrol stands. An *izakaya* was a real possibility, but I decided to try first at the local nine-screen cinema. I knew it had a large staff, and that most of them were young; in their teens and twenties. Moreover, I had seen how during quieter times workers stood around chatting to each other, so I thought that there would be great opportunities for talking as well as working. The cinema therefore seemed like it would provide a high chance of meeting a variety of young people. This also gave greater flexibility because if some individuals were not interested in participating there was room to find others, whereas at smaller work places this would prove more difficult. It also offered the scope to explore non-freeters' views of freeters. Thus, while this is not an ethnography of the cinema and its part-time employees (as Kondo (1990) used her bakery), the cinema became a springboard for my work and consequently needs to be described.

The Cinema

I had expected to find access to be problematic, but I was very lucky to garner the support of the cinema Manager who seemed very interested in the project. After a brief interview asking about my research he said that if it was solely down to him the job would be mine, however, he needed to correspond with Head Office in Tokyo. In December he emailed me with the all clear and asked me to come in for

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[21] Older, married women – usually with children – who work part-time are termed *pāto* (cf. Broadbent 2001). It is important to note that part-time work in Japan is not limited to a twenty-hour week. Many part-timers work essentially full-time hours – it is the contract that differs. Whilst they don't have to do mandatory overtime they also receive no paid holiday or sick days, no bonuses, no pension or social insurance coverage, and they can be fired very easily.

a formal interview with him and the Assistant Manager whereupon they assigned me a section to work in – the floor (to be discussed below). Pay was to be the same as all other part-time workers - 800 yen (£3.33) an hour. After all the formalities were through it was decided that I should start working in early January 2007.

When I began working at the cinema there were eighteen male and female freeters at the cinema alongside sixty-six students and seven managers. During my time there the number of freeters rose to twenty-five. All members of staff were on part-time contracts (renewable every six months) with the exception of the managers. The cinema was split into five sections. Projection (on a different floor with different locker rooms), Box (dealing with ticket sales), Concessions (food sales), Store (selling film goods) and the Floor: taking tickets, guiding people to their seats, helping customers with queries, cleaning the inside of the cinema after each showing, putting out leaflets and posters, and checking the toilets etc.

Being placed in the Floor section was ideal because I had more freedom to move around the cinema (and to visit other sections) during the day. It was quite difficult to get to know people outside of the assigned section because people tended to keep within their groups. Invitations to gatherings were not just split according to section, but were also split according to individual friendships and internal politics. This proved interesting when trying to get to know as many people as I could. People knew that I was there for a limited amount of time, so I was never really accepted 'into' the action, but I generally was not overly excluded either. In addition, I got a certain amount of status for being the first foreigner to work there; apparently my being there generated much excitement and some trepidation, especially in my section, in the first couple of weeks.[22]

Occasionally I was invited to parties, but I was able to be social and have many conversations in the locker room during breaks. Because the locker rooms were gender segregated my break-time conversations were usually limited to women. I therefore had a great many conversations with women during breaks, and in quiet times I focused my attention on chatting to my male co-workers. Topics

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[22] Many workers were unsure how they would communicate with me, both linguistically and culturally. The majority of them had only met foreigners who were English teachers with limited Japanese; therefore they were quite worried as to whether I would be able to speak enough Japanese to be able to work together smoothly.

such as gender roles, what women wanted from men, boyfriends, idols etc came up quite frequently among the women. All of these conversations feed into my argument regarding women's integral involvement in the construction of masculinities, gender roles and ideas of appropriate adulthood. Masculinity is not, after all, just about men, for men only, or made only by men. The role that women play is significant (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994; Smith 1987) as shall be shown throughout the following chapters.

I managed to get to know people in all sections except projection, which was particularly frustrating because there were four male freeters there. I tried to arrange to be introduced to them through friendships in other sections, but though the projection freeters said to my colleagues that they would be interested to meet, the meetings never came about and I was never able to get their contact details directly. Because the film schedules were very tight and staffing was usually an issue with only a few people having to juggle projecting the films each shift, plus the sheer level of noise from the whirring of the projection machines, conversations were difficult. It was therefore not possible to go up during or after my shift, as they had no chance to talk anyway. Frustratingly the only time that I met any of them was at the end of summer *zen sekushon nomikai* (all section drinking party): I was due to leave just two weeks later.

The job I was given involved 'opening' and 'closing' the screenings: basically facilitating customers into the correct screen, taking tickets and cleaning up afterwards. Opening and closing screens entailed doing things in a certain order and at a certain time. In the case of the former the cinema needed to be checked before opening to customers – this involved checking the safety lights on the stairs and emergency exits, ensuring that the bright overhead lights were off, and a number of other small checks. After this was done we announced over the wireless radio that this had been completed (*sukuriin [nan]ban sugin to seijō kakunin shimashita*). The doors were then opened and an announcement to the customers was made to the effect that the screen was open. This was followed by taking people's tickets and directing them verbally to their seats. Once the lights went down we made another announcement that the film had started (*sukuriin [nan]ban [eiga namae] jōei sutāto*). The doors were then closed. We usually (unless very busy or understaffed) waited a further five-to-ten minutes at the door to welcome any stragglers. If any customers came after the film had begun, staff who sold the tickets in the Box office would announce it over the radio to let us know that they were coming and we would respond and head back to the

screen doors to take their tickets and let the customers in. In busy times such as school holidays, two or three of us would open screenings together, but usually we each were responsible for our own screens.

Closings were similarly formulaic. At a set time before the end of the screening (which differed for each film) we would go to the screen, put up the door lights, open the doors and wait for customers to come out. At that time we would take their rubbish, thank them for their custom and say we looked forward to them coming again. After all the customers had left we went in to clean the cinema and prepare it for its next opening. There was normally a gap of around twenty minutes to close a screen and open it for the next showing. At busy times this meant rushing around like headless chickens: more customers meant more time waiting for them to leave, more mess to clear up thus taking more time. When leaving after cleaning we then had to turn off the main light and lock the light case, turn off the entrance lights, and lock the light box.

Speed and precision were essential in the whole process of opening and closing screens - being able to read the screen schedules to check opening and closing times and knowing how many people were working and who was to do which screens meant a great deal of communication and accuracy were needed. After a day of on-the-job training I could understand why some of my section co-workers were initially concerned when they heard a foreigner was about to join their ranks. The work was busy enough. They were relieved when they learnt that communication was not generally a problem and that I could hold my own in the job. A couple of people remained consistently helpful, however, and would check, even a few months later, that everything was fine and that I wasn't having any problems.

Shifts normally fell into four patterns: 1) 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. – usually worked by *pāto*; 2) 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. – often staffed by freeters, though occasionally students – especially in the holidays; 3) 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. – made up of students and freeters; and 4) 3 p.m. to 10 p.m. (or 4/5 p.m. – 1 a.m. on weekends) – again made up of students and freeters. Shift times did, however, vary. At times my manager would call and ask me to cover a shift last minute from, for example, 12-8 p.m. I (and other freeters) would regularly be asked to do a ten hour shift with two thirty-minute breaks in the day. These longer shifts were normally necessary when there was a gap between the day and evening staff numbers – for example, if no-one was available to do the 10-7 shift. With the *pāto* leaving at 4 p.m. and at times no-one due to start until 7 p.m. these longer shifts were necessary to enable

the section to keep running smoothly. Each week we were asked to mark down our availability for two weeks ahead and the manager worked out the shift timetable accordingly. Generally most employees worked a range of shifts with the exception of the female *pāto* who only ever worked the 8-4 shift. I worked a variation of shift times in order to meet as many different people as I could, though for a couple of months, due to understaffing, I was on day shifts for the majority of the time. The only shift I did not work was the 4 p.m. to 1 a.m.: women had been banned from such late shifts due to a member of staff having been attacked on the way home the year before. Consequently, the latest I could finish was 10 p.m.

Throughout the day, where possible, I would jot down notes of what had happened; conversations in the locker room, the floor's storeroom, or when out and about 'on the floor'. I observed general cinema politics, who was friends with whom, working relationships, and attitudes of students and managers to freeters, and vice versa. Returning home after each shift I wrote up extensive fieldnotes on all the happenings and conversations of the day. Working in the cinema with freeters, *pāto*, and students was invaluable. It gave added insight and lived experience to working conditions, expectations, and responsibilities. I was able to gain friendship and trust that enabled me to set up interviews with people that would likely have refused had we not worked together. Moreover, it enabled me to have a more nuanced view of each person due to having knowledge of their interactions, friendships and the workplace politics. Importantly, it also made people (inside the cinema and out) much more interested to know what I was doing and why, and helped secure interviews that may not have been possible otherwise.

Although I worked with a variety of people in the cinema the majority of freeters were in their early twenties. I sought, however, to explore the lives of freeters of different ages. The negative discourses surrounding freeters (which is explored in Chapter 3) are far more about those who are in their late twenties and early thirties, rather than those in their early twenties, who, as I show in Chapter 4, are given the space, due to their young ages, to try out alternative lifestyles. The cinema, then, gave me first-hand experience of working styles and challenges; of workplace politics; of interactions between freeters, students, and managers; of gossip; and an embedded bounded location, but it did not give me any contact with older freeters nor many experiences outside of a working situation. I wanted to get to know freeters in different arenas of life and spend time with people in

varying situations, and the cinema, though with the potential to allow me to do that, was not sufficient – partly because I was not there long enough in order to get access to alternative areas of many of the freeters' lives, but also because, as already mentioned, many of them kept work and their private lives largely separate.

Other Encounters and Interviews

Though I spent a considerable amount of time in the cinema this thesis is not, then, an ethnography of the cinema. I met other people (specifically older freeters) through friends and chance encounters, some more unexpected than others. For example, I met two men through a Japanese language NPO that recruited volunteer Japanese teachers to teach children at a local primary school that had a high number of Brazilian children with limited Japanese language skills. This was unexpected, but they were adamant that they were freeters, so I took them at their word. They identified with being a freeter, they characterised themselves as such, so I spent time with them learning about their lives, experiences and aspirations. I also met a couple of men through a chance encounter at a public seminar aimed at helping young NEETs get into employment. They had gone along to hear what was being said because they felt they were not far off being NEETs themselves. These men are also key players in the thesis. I socialised with them, accompanied them on their volunteer works and met up for drinks and coffees or on walks around the city.

In the end I (formally) interviewed thirty-eight freeters – twenty male and eighteen female, plus nineteen non-freeters of varying ages. Interviews were loosely structured. I had a list of topics that I wanted to cover – their life histories, their present lives, work, relationships, marriage, friendships, their feelings about freeters and being a freeter, and their future aspirations. In all the cases except two I had known the people I was interviewing for at least five months before an interview. Interviews normally lasted two hours, sometimes more, sometimes a little less, and took place in coffee shops, bars, and parks. I interviewed everyone at least twice and in most cases met up with them on other more informal occasions or at work in the case of cinema interviewees. The vast majority of interviews I recorded. When I recorded them I did not take additional notes at the time, but sought to keep the atmosphere friendly and as informal as possible to put people at ease. After each meeting I wrote up extensive fieldnotes, detailing not only conversations, but body language and atmosphere.

I also had numerous other informal conversations over the course of ethnographic research with a number of other people at the cinema and outside, including with freeters who did not commit to a 'formal' interview, but were happy to chat with me whilst at work or at play. These conversations were not recorded, but they did cover a variety of topics including gender roles, future expectations, marriage, division of labour, education, finding employment, aspirations, familial and societal expectations, etc. These conversations also inform the thesis.

Other Issues

Visweswaran (1996) notes that questions of positionality often confront female ethnographers more than men. Kirschner (1987) suggests that this is due to the fact that women are often placed in more vulnerable positions like that of the daughter. Whilst not positioned within a family group, being a woman engaged in research on men's lives meant that there were a number of issues that came up as a result of my positionality. I knew before fieldwork that listening intensively to men, giving full attention etc, could lead to some people potentially mistaking my interest in them (Allison 1994). I therefore made it clear at the beginning of each initial meeting what my research was and why I wanted us to meet and talk. Of course, over the course of the year, these boundaries often blurred into friendships.

For many of the men I knew, whose friends were predominantly all male, having a woman (of a broadly similar age) listen so seriously to what they were saying, giving importance to their words and stories and in some sense giving some status (in that I wanted to interview them for the project) was a new experience. For some I seemed to take an almost big sister (*Onesan*) role. For example, when asked about my life and events in my past a couple of young men found new affinity with me. One of them told me all about his family background only after he had asked about mine and found out that some of our experiences were similar. He later said that he would never have told me about that side of his life if I had not had similar experiences that he could relate to. Indeed, the feminist scholar, Sandra Harding (1987: 9), suggests that interviewers appear: "not as invisible, anonymous voices of authority, but as a real historical individual with concrete specific desires and interests." Furthermore, Miller and Glassner (2004: 127-128) observe: "The issue of how interviewees respond to us based on who we are – in their lives, as well as the social categories to which we belong, such as age, gender, class and race – is a practical concern as well as an epistemological or theoretical

one."

In one case, however, despite my efforts to maintain relatively clear boundaries, one man, who had been acting as a gatekeeper with a group of musicians, artists and poets, became romantically interested and quite insistent. Feeling vulnerable as a result of his advances I decided to break off contact and let this group go (cf. Kulick 1995: 7). My positionality with women was often much easier to negotiate, developing more easily into casual interactions, shopping trips and days out visiting family and visiting famous tourist spots nearby. Gender was consequently one of the ways my positionality was negotiated among the groups of men (and women) that I worked with (cf. Visweswaran 1996).

In addition, making it known that I lived with my partner was a conscious positional choice, but it was also a double-edged sword. Although it generated a number of interesting conversations regarding relationships, gender roles, and norms, it also meant that I ended up not being invited to many things. This only became apparent when I did get invited out. People, especially men, but not always, would ask me (at around 9 or 10 p.m.) if I was okay for time. Didn't I need to get home? "Is your boyfriend/husband okay with you being out late?" (people would often refer to him as my husband). On one occasion I was asked if I needed to get home to run the bath, something that wives often do in Japan. Being expected to hurry home was not limited to these occasions but came up repeatedly throughout fieldwork (cf. Fernea 1969 on having to ask permission to go out). Although on the whole it was a valuable position to be in – I learnt much about the gendered assumptions of people in their twenties – it was also frustrating as it limited the amount of time I had to socialise outside of work hours. Convincing people that my partner did not mind my being out and that I did not need to get home to cook or run the bath for him was an uphill struggle and one that I did not convincingly succeed at. However, this added other perspectives that a single researcher may not have had (Matsunaga 2000b), and as Visweswaran (1996: 99) notes: "[O]ur failures are as much a part of the process of knowledge constitution as are our oft-heralded 'successes.'"

Thesis Methodology and layout

This thesis is, as already described, an amalgamation of different sites of access. Due to the generally unbounded nature of the project, and the heterogeneous nature of the category of freeter, I have chosen to situate the ethnography around key case studies which were largely representative of the lives of other freeters I

knew. To explore how these men considered their lives, their choices, their futures, how they appropriated (or sought to shed) the label of freeter, why they became freeters, or why they sought to escape being a freeter, short vignettes are not sufficient. Indeed, personal narratives are important in creating and buttressing notions of self and self-identity (Giddens 1991; Taylor 1989). I have therefore chosen a number of men who are generally representative of the stories of other men I knew. Of course, the details of their lives are different, but there were key similarities in many of the narratives, particularly when exploring gender, social and self expectations, and their reactions to them. The ethnographic chapters thus focus on core case studies with supporting and counter views provided in the discussion sections towards the end of each chapter.

My theoretical approach has unfolded from the ethnography itself and has thus led outwards towards theory, rather than the other way round. I seek to let the ethnography speak (so-to-speak), or as Ivy (1995: 27) suggests: "to unfold through reading...the promises and possibilities of a text – without undue authorial interruptions, apostrophes, and proclamations." Consequently, when presenting the case studies, I have sought to keep the analysis separate – in a discussion section towards the end of the chapter – in order to let readers get a feel first for each of the people I present.

The thesis is split into two main parts. The first is a look at gendered norms and values that are prominent in Japan and to explore how the freeter discourse fits in. This is necessary to contextualise much that is to come in the ethnographic chapters. Chapter 2 is thus a largely historical chapter exploring gender and the creation of the salaryman as the dominant model of masculinity in post-war Japan. Chapter 3 looks more closely at the discourses surrounding freeters and normative ideas of masculinity. It also explores, ethnographically, images and ideas of freeters and men today. Freeters were described as weak and unmasculine by women as shown through their illustrations of what a masculine and un-masculine man are. I show how hegemonic models of masculinity essentially negate the possibility for men to be freeters and still be considered proper adult men in Japan.

The second part of the thesis is devoted to the ethnographic chapters. Class, age and educational background all came into play in freeters' lives and how they made sense of their choices. However, age, for male freeters, was a vital part of the story. Their identifications with being a freeter as well as their views of what they were doing and what they felt they should be doing, were clearly demarcated

by rough age grades and the ethnographic chapters consequently reflect that.

Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 look at the lives of men in their early and late twenties respectively. I have split the twenties into two chapters due to the very different ways that men conceived of their choices and futures, largely as a result of their ages. The men in their early twenties still felt as if they were children; they existed in a somewhat liminal state where they were given, and gave themselves, the space and time to experience different jobs and lifestyles. The men in their late twenties were under considerably more pressure to start making important decisions: to find a full-time job – the door of which was inexorably beginning to swing closed as they aged – and to begin to get serious with girlfriends (if they had one). Peers were beginning to marry and were starting to conform to dominant ideals of man/adulthood.

Chapter 6 explores the lives of men in their thirties. These men often had more complex and ambiguous feelings regarding their status as freeters, their futures and their acquisition (or lack of) full adult status. Some were still ostensibly striving to conform to social expectations whereas others had turned their backs and were carving out meaningful lives irrespective of normative expectations.

Chapter 7 explores the lives of female freeters. It shows how differently women conceived of work and being a freeter and how, in contrast to the vast majority of male freeters, they felt that being a freeter had no particularly negative affect on their lives and life chances. Their lives and choices are then juxtaposed with those of the men's in the discussion section at the end of the chapter. This provides a counter-balance to the chapters on men and shows how the discourses of work and adulthood are clearly gendered.

Chapter 8 seeks to draw together all the strands of the ethnographic chapters and conclude the thesis.

Chapter 2: Gendering Japan

To contextualise this study of male freeters it is necessary to situate them in post-war Japanese society and its (gendered) discourses. To understand post-war gender ideals it is, however, first necessary to explore certain key institutions such as the family structure since the Meiji era, given that the post-war ideals to be discussed have clear links into pre-war Japan. This is followed by a brief look at the rapid changes that took place in Japanese society after World War II, the ways in which Japanese citizens' lives have been gendered and the role the Japanese state has played in this. Following this brief historical contextualisation the remainder of the chapter looks at mainstream ideals of masculinity in contemporary Japan, and three other 'types' of masculinities commonly discussed in the literature on Japan; that of the 'New Man' which is directly derived from the salaryman discourse, and that of working-class masculinities. These 'typical' representations of masculinity are followed by a brief look at 'sporting' masculinities. This section seeks to move away from gendered stereotypes and illustrate instead how various *themes* that are said to make up a masculine man – for example, the ability to endure (*gaman*) – cross-cut both class and occupation, and are also key concepts in what it means to be an adult man in Japan.

The Meiji era (1868-1912)

After being forced to open its shores to the West in the late nineteenth century Japan undertook a policy of rapid modernisation (and industrialisation) and set about writing a new constitution for the Japanese citizenry (Iwahori 1999; Iwao 1993; Lock 1999; Mackie 2003; Sand 1998). Kondo states that: "Japanese political leaders energetically embraced the task of fundamentally recreating the Japanese state" (1990: 264). It was during this time that Japan was transformed from a feudal state, which was characterised by strict status-based relations between the four-strata groups[1] – *samurai*,[2] peasants, artisans, and merchants

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[1] Nakane noted that at the time 80% of the population consisted of peasants, 6% of samurai (including feudal lords and their retainers), and the remaining 12% split between the remaining groups (1970: 146).

[2] Samurai were actually the lowest rung of the aristocracy, but the word has now come to be loosely applied to the entire military caste including the *Daimyō* (lords) and their retainers (Lebra 1993; Meyer 1993).

(Dasgupta 2004: 72-73; also cf. Mason and Caiger 1997; Meyer 1993; Reischauer 1964) – into a modern unified nation where relations were based on class and gender (Kaneko 1995; Mackie 2003). Kondo (1990) states that:

> The abolishing of the four-class feudal system – including the bestowing of surnames on commoners; the repeal of sumptuary regulations; tax reform; and the adoption of the constitution, among other epochal changes – dismantled the structures of the *bakufu*.[3] In this atmosphere of change and ferment, the Meiji bureaucrats and politicians dedicated themselves to the forging of national unity and a national identity.

(ibid.: 264)

Three major slogans epitomised the times: *fukoku kyōhei* (rich nation, strong military), *bunmei kaika* (civilisation and enlightenment), and *wakon yōsai* (Japanese spirit, Western learning) (Dasgupta 2004: 76). Central to the cause of creating a new strong state was creating and disseminating to the masses a discourse of "civilised morality" (Pflugfelder 1999: 149). Values considered to be desirable within this discourse – such as loyalty – were incorporated, whilst other behaviours such as male-male desire and mixed bathing were deemed to be part of the feudal (and therefore backward) past with no place in the 'civilised' present of Meiji Japan (Dasgupta 2004).

One of the consequences of the development of new nation-states is the subjection of individuals and the family to increased control and surveillance (Foucault 1979; Hewitt 1991; Lock 1999). This takes place through self-discipline/self-policing (Foucault 1979) and through what Althusser (1971 (1984)) terms Ideological State Apparatuses. In his analysis of Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses, Althusser (1971 (1984)) distinguishes between State Apparatuses (the government, administration, army, police, prisons etc) and Ideological State Apparatuses (education, religion, law, political systems, and communication apparatus such as the press, television and radio etc). He suggests that the difference between the two is that the State Apparatus is repressive, part of the *public* domain, and functions through violence (or through the possibility of violence), whereas the Ideological State Apparatuses are part of the *private* domain and function through ideology primarily, and repression if needed. Whilst I am aware that post-Foucault Althusser's theory can be seen as

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[3] The *bakufu* was a system of military government first set up in the twelfth century. It was presided over by the shogun – who was effectively the emperor's military deputy (cf. Hunter 1989: 3; Mason and Caiger 1997: 129).

problematic in a variety of ways, I think it remains somewhat useful to use in the Japanese context to understand the *structures* of power. After the opening of Japan, intellectuals and ideologies played a large role in the modernisation of the nation. Indeed, ideologies are necessary in the development of hegemony. I follow Hall's use of Gramsci in thinking that:

> It requires an extensive cultural and ideological struggle to bring about or effect the intellectual and ethical unity which is essential to the forging of hegemony ... Major agencies in this process are, of course, the cultural, educational and religious institutions, the family and voluntary associations, but also, political parties, which are also centres of ideological and cultural formation. The principle agents are intellectuals who have a specialized responsibility for the circulation and development of culture and ideology and who either align themselves with existing dispositions of social and intellectual forces ('traditional' intellectuals) or align themselves with the emerging popular forces and seek to elaborate new currents of ideas.

(Hall 1996: 433)

My understanding of ideology here is thus not one of brainwashing, nor do I think that that is what Althusser was alluding to. Rather, given that he was deeply influenced by Gramsci, I instead favour a more nuanced view of ideology:

> There is never any one, single, unified and coherent 'dominant ideology' which pervades everything... Ideas, [Gramsci] argues, 'have a centre of formation, of irradiation, of dissemination, of persuasion...' (*PN*, 192). ...They are sustained and transformed in their materiality within the institutions of civil society and the state. Consequently, ideologies are not transformed or changed by replacing one, whole, already formed conception of the world with another, so much as by 'renovating and making critical an already existing activity'. ...It conceives ideological change, not in terms of substitution or imposition, but in terms of the articulation and the dis-articulation of ideas.

(Hall 1996: 433-444)

Given this tack, ideas of hegemony and ideology are not mutually exclusive, nor are ideologies rigid and unchangeable. They, as much as hegemony, allow for change, for resistance, for alternative ideologies.

It is only really through looking at the policies, laws, and legislation, however, that we can understand *how* the nation and its citizens become gendered, hence my interest in Althusser. Policies with obvious relevance include family law, labour legislation, education policy and conscription (Mackie 1995). I shall, however, only touch on two main arenas here to highlight changes in the family and the creation and sustenance of the 'good wife, wise mother' ideology, which had the complementary idea of the protector, provider male as its counterpart. Both of these continue to exert considerable power over men and women, and are

crucially linked to conceptions of adulthood.

The Family and Ie

It was during the Meiji era that the family became a topic of debate among Japanese intellectuals. Mackie (2003) states that the relationship between the individual and the state was thought to be crucially mediated through the family. Consequently the family became one of the major points of focus of what was to become the new Meiji Constitution.[4] Attempts to restructure the family had the most far-reaching affect on women's status in Japan (and thus by extension also considerably affected men and their roles as well) (Kondo 1990). In 1871 the Household Registry Law was enacted. Whilst the previous law had been based on the feudal system, the 1871 law used place of residence and the *ie*[5] as its basic structure. Furthermore, it: "created and buttressed patriarchal authority precisely by designating a single head of household: the man. All rights and responsibilities fell on his shoulders, including rights to property" (ibid. : 265).

It was in the Meiji Civil Code of 1890, during a time of modern nation building, that the *ie* was conceptualised and the family unit as *ie* defined. It was a compromise between the traditionalist and non-traditionalist positions – some intellectuals maintained that the traditional family would impede on modernisation, whereas others stressed the importance of keeping traditional family structures (Hendry 2003). Pflugfelder states that: "it was the samurai-based model of strong patriarchal authority over household (*ie*) members and succession by a single heir, usually the firstborn male, that prevailed over nonelite patterns to form the cornerstone of the 1890 Civil Code" (Pflugfelder 1999: 148-49; also cf. Ueno 1996). Consequently, elite values which the samurai subscribed to (and which were heavily based on Confucianist thought)[6] were instituted into the *ie* and disseminated through society via the household (Hendry 2003; Low 2003; Mackie 2003; Sand 1998). However, the changes in the Code were not just derived from elite samurai ideals, but were also drawn from the

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[4] Of course, a focus on the family and women's role in nation building and modernity is not something specific to Japan (cf. Donner 2008; Hodgson 2001; Kandiyoti 1991; Osella and Osella 2006; Yuval-Davis 1997).

[5] This basically describes a household/'family system'. Further discussion of this comes shortly.

[6] The *bushidō* code that samurai followed was a blend of Shinto, Zen and Neo-Confucian concepts (Plath 1980).

influence of Prussian family codes and Western Victorian ideas (from upper-class Victorian lifestyles) which had come into Japan after the opening of the nation.[7] These Victorian ideals were consequently melded with Confucian ideals with regards to family, marriage, divorce, inheritance, and family headship in the creation of the 1898 Meiji Constitution (Mackie 2003).

All families were required to be registered with the state and although this was a common form of registration prior to the Meiji era, it was not until this time that it was made mandatory for all people to be registered. Relations between members of the family were hierarchical and men had all legal rights over their wives and priority in all areas of social life (Kaneko 1995; Yoshizumi 1995). An heir was chosen each generation who was responsible for continuing the family line and other siblings were expected to move out and set up 'branch' houses. The duty of all living members of the household was to ensure that the house continued after their death. The survival of the household (and increasing its prosperity) was therefore considered more important than blood relations (Kitaoji 1971; Kondo 1990; Nakane 1970).[8] Blood related kin could therefore be passed over in preference for someone who, for example, showed competence at the family trade (Bachnik 1983; Kondo 1982, 1990). As a consequence, servants and clerks could be incorporated into the family and subsequently treated as members of the household, and even lower class men, such as clerks, could be married into a family to ensure the continuation of the *ie* (ibid.).

The *ie* system thus served to legally put men in control of the household and all those within it. As Kondo notes: "Women were not full legal persons according to the Code; the permission of the household head was necessary in order for them to undertake legal action" (1990: 266; also see, Sievers 1983; Smith 1983b). Adultery was only grounds for divorce if the wife had committed it. Although wives could gain a divorce, it was only possible if the husband had been convicted of the offence (Kondo 1990; Smith 1983b): "In short, the Meiji Civil Code raised to the level of national law a subordinate status for women, and it legitimated a male-centered household" (Kondo 1990: 266). Confucian gender ideals that asserted that women's lives should be bounded by the 'three obedience's': obedience to fathers when young, husbands when married, and to their children

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[7] A similar process happened in India during the colonial period (cf. Donner 2008).

[8] It should be noted that this is an ideal that has been argued about (see for example, Bachnik 1983).

in old age, was clear to see in the code.[9] Men, meanwhile, were expected to display the five virtues: generosity, self-respect, benevolence, sincerity and persistence (Iwao 1993; Martinez 2004; Taga 2005).

Good Wives, Wise Mothers

What served to most strongly associate women with the household and domestic sphere, and men with the outside, was the promulgation of the 'Good Wives, Wise Mothers' (*ryōsai kenbo*) ideology. Taga (2005: 131) notes that this was "formed through a reinterpretation of Confucian virtue." Though many authors (e.g. Hendry 1993; Kondo 1990; Sugimoto 2003) write mostly about the effect that this predominantly had on the lives of women, the changes in law, though patriarchal in nature and argued to ostensibly serve in men's best interests, also changed the lives of individual Japanese men. It put greater responsibility into their hands, put the burden of providing on them, and served paradoxically to sever their connection to the *uchi* (inside) and place them permanently in the *soto* (outside) sphere, which is a state of affairs that still exists for the majority of men to this day and is a crucial part of their attainment of adulthood (cf. Osella and Osella 2006).

The Meiji era was a time when *all* women (not just aristocratic women) were linked and associated with the domestic and private sphere and men to the outside, public sphere (Iwahori 1999).[10] This can be seen to correspond with concepts of *uchi* and *soto* which are often used to distinguish between different groups and also between the 'safe' inside world of the home and the 'dangerous' outside world (cf. Chatterjee 1993; Osella and Osella 2006; Yuval-Davis 1997).[11] Interestingly however, although women are said to 'naturally' belong inside according to the ideology, they are technically outsiders who marry *into* families and thus they have to be socialised into the household and the domestic sphere. Men, on the other hand, who are of the household and thus of the inside, have to

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[9] However, women, especially in rural areas, often held a much stronger position than Confucian values would suggest (Hendry 2003).

[10] Interestingly it was during this time that feminism and other civil rights movements arose, largely due to the liberal ideas that were being disseminated at the time (Garon 1997; Iwahori 1999; Mackie 2003).

[11] It is a concept which remains important in the study of Japan, not only in the literature on Japanese selfhood discussed in the Introduction. Hendry (2003) notes that the division of *uchi* and *soto* is used in a variety of ways; with regards to establishing group affiliation (between 'us' and 'them'), for example.

make their mark on the outside world (Martinez 2004). Consequently, women cross the boundary to the inside when they are socialised into a household and become *uchi*, whereas men become *soto* by going outside to work. In tandem with this ideology, Dasgupta suggests that it was at this time of early industrialisation that ideas of a 'salaryman' masculinity (which I shall discuss later in the chapter) began to take form. He traces it back to the *gekkyū-tori* (monthly wage recipient) of the early Meiji era, who worked outside the home for a wage (2004: 78).

From the Meiji period through to the early Shōwa period (1926-1945)[12] boys were taught that they should maintain the strength and wealth of the country by becoming brave soldiers and hard workers (Hara 1995), and schools were built specifically to teach women how to be good wives and wise mothers (Iwahori 1999; also cf. Kameda 1995). At the same time the Meiji government set about persuading the citizenry that the good wife/wise mother ideology was an old traditional Japanese idea and not a new invention that was based on western Christian models of the upper-classes (Hobsbawn 1983; Iwahori 1999). The historian Iwahori states that in her opinion the good wife/wise mother principle was a reflection of the ideals that women themselves wanted in the new regime (: 393). Women's role of protecting the family and maintaining the home was considered as great a responsibility as the husband going out to work, thereby the two spheres, domestic and public, were seen to work in harmony with one another, with men and women's work considered to be equal, but different (Iwahori 1999; Ueno 1998).[13] This corresponds to Japanese folk ideologies in which masculinity is constructed in complementary contrast to femininity, where men are considered good at some things, and women at others (Roberson and Suzuki 2003a). The good wife/wise mother ideology gradually became accepted in wider society, initially through education in the girls' schools, and, as the number of literate women grew, through women's magazines (Sand 1998),[14] and

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[12] The Shōwa period extends from 1926-1989, however the early Shōwa is normally categorized as being from 1926-1945 (Anon n.d.).

[13] These principles continue to exist today with many women giving up full time work on having children. A large number of women return to the workforce (usually part-time) after their children are at school, but they continue to be responsible for the domestic sphere of housework and children, even if they work full-time (Fujimura-Fanselow and Kameda 1995; Mathews 2003).

[14] Manuals of woman-, wife-, and motherhood in the late 1800s were also common elsewhere in the world. See Donner (2008) and Walsh (1995) with respect to India, and Mitchinson (1991) on health manuals and the female body in Canada. A whole host of

it came to be the mainstream model of womanhood. Dasgupta nicely sums it up when he states: "[O]fficial and popular discourse, working through institutions like the military, the legal system, the education system, and official and semi-official popular culture media, worked to inculcate and reinforce these hegemonic ideals of masculinity and femininity" (2004: 77). The idea of the Good Wife, Wise Mother remains strong within contemporary discourse of gender roles.[15]

A broader issue at the heart of this is that the modern Japanese nation-state relies on the housewife and mother to be the biological and social reproducer of the nation (Yuval-Davis 1997). Althusser's (1971) ideas of the family as an 'Ideological State Apparatus' (ISA) are relevant here. The Japanese state plays an active role in family life through both ideology and repression. As Althusser notes: "No class can hold state power over a long period without at the same time exercising its hegemony over and in the State Ideological Apparatuses" (Althusser 1971 (1984): 20). The Japanese 'family' which operated through the ideology of the *ie* clearly functioned in this way,[16] and the family continues to play a crucial role in the socialisation and reproduction of productive citizens (cf. Hook and Takeda 2007).

However, the good wife/wise mother ideology was not the only discourse of womanhood at the time, nor was there only one discourse of masculinity. A capitalist urban, industrial, and modern Japan had developed, creating along with it a new urban middle-class culture. This brought with it tensions and debates about Japanese-ness and the future of Japan at a time of increasing inequality and change (Dasgupta 2004). Furthermore, debate about 'new' expressions of gender and sexuality intensified (ibid.). Although much of the

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manuals were available in England depicting Victorian values and morals for women, with titles such as: '*A Wife's home duties: containing practical hints to inexperienced housekeepers*' (1859); '*Girlhood and Wifehood, Practical counsel and advice*' (1896); and '*The Mothers' thorough resource-book*' (1860).

[15] These ideas are middle-class conceptions of gender roles. Although polls in the late 1990s revealed that 98% of Japanese regarded and described themselves as middle-class (Gluck 1998), it can be suggested rather that these figures are more representative of perceived status groups (in the Weberian sense). Nevertheless, with so many people representing themselves as middle-class, the good wife/wise mother ideology remains important in contemporary discourse.

[16] Other Ideological State Apparatuses in Japan were the state-sponsored religion, Shintoism, and the education system. Centralised universal education was introduced in the Meiji era, and for over one hundred years the school attendance rate has been above 98 per cent (Hendry 2003). Education continues to be carefully regulated by the government, and this has been highlighted in recent years with the ongoing controversy of Japan's representation of its war-time activities in school textbooks, which have to be approved by the Ministry of Education before being used by schools.

debate revolved around women and their sexuality, which largely focused on the 'Modern Girl' (*moga*) (cf. Robertson 1998; Silverberg 1991, 1998; Tamanoi 1998),[17] the 'Modern Boy' (*mobo*) was also not exempt. The *mobo*, described by Dasgupta (2004: 81) as a "foppish, dandy figure" was "the site for articulating many of these concerns about the corrosive effects of modernity on notions of 'proper' masculinity."[18] Roden (1990: 45) notes that at the time young men were critiqued for not having any "unifying sense of character, settling instead for divergent shades of materialism, anguish, debauchery, and colourless nonchalance"[19] (also quoted in Dasgupta 2004: 81). Yet at the same time there was:

> societal fascination with androgyny and gender ambivalence as embodied in figures like the female actors who played the part of the *dan'yaku/otokoyaku* (male role) in the all-female Takarazuka troupe, or the *nimaime* male movie actors who specialized in playing the role of the weak, indecisive, even effeminate male opposite a strong, domineering female character.
>
> (Dasgupta 2004: 81; see also Robertson 1998; Roden 1990)

Thus gender, and appropriate forms of masculinity/femininity, had become a site of contestation within a wider debate on the effects of modernity.

The Meiji era was consequently a time of great change in Japan. Not only had the country reopened to the outside and started an era of rapid modernisation and industrialisation, but social relations were being reconfigured. Moreover, large changes to the family and gender roles were enacted through both the institution of the *ie* and through ideologies such as the 'good wife, wise mother' which served to place women in the domestic sphere. Men, meanwhile, were made to be legal heads of households and main breadwinners linked to the public sphere. The Japanese state was thus directly involved in the gendering of its citizens though institutions such as the legal system, schools and the military, and this influence did not end.

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[17] These debates were happening in other places as well. For a discussion of flappers in America in the 1920s, for example, see Latham (2000).

[18] Similarly, in the late nineteenth and first decade of the twentieth century, dandies in America: "alienated and defied mainstream culture" (Todd 2005: 171). Associated with homosexuality they were often "spoofed at best and vilified (or imprisoned, like Oscar Wilde), at worst" (ibid.).

[19] This is much like contemporary male freeters have at times been viewed. See Chapter 3 for a discussion of the diverse representations of freeters.

Pre-war Japan - Gendering Citizens

The time between the death of the Meiji emperor in 1912 to the end of the Second World War was a period of expansion and imperial ambitions in Japan (Meyer 1993; Reischauer 1964). Mackie (2003) notes that the relationship of women to the state gained a new dimension at this time as supporting the state meant supporting imperialist policies; this idea also applies to men. A variety of laws were passed regarding women and children; for example, the Mother and Child Protection Act (*Boshi Hogo Hō*), which provided economic assistance to mothers or grandmothers if a father died, deserted the family or became ill. The Military Assistance Act (*Gunji Fujo Hō*) was implemented to give assistance to families of soldiers who were sick, wounded or killed in combat. Essentially, in the place of absent fathers the state, as patriarch, stepped in to 'look after' the women, positioning them as "weak supplicants in need of protection" (Mackie 2003: 106). Men were not, however, just constructed as soldiers, but also as providers. Due to rapid industrialisation in this period the number of salaried workers was on the rise. Consequently a number of books were released in the late 1920s discussing salarymen's lifestyles and detailing the salaryman's 'heaven' (long weekends, business trips), and 'hell' (the commute in overcrowded trams, being gossiped about, and long working hours at the end of the financial month) (Dasgupta 2004: 82).

This gendering continued into the 1930s and 1940s, when a large number of books, essays and poems were written on the theme of 'mothers of the nation' (Mackie 2003: 109). A discourse of preserving women's chastity, fidelity, and purity became: "part of a gendered division of wartime labour, with men's military activity being justified on the grounds that they were protecting the faithful women on the homefront" (ibid.: 110). Men were also, however, not exempt from state attention. For example, the management of their sexuality was a matter to be regulated and men were socialised: "into a particular form of masculine sexuality" (ibid.). This was managed through military brothels which were in turn regulated by the army bureaucracy. Male and female behaviour was thus controlled in different but gendered ways – women as the biological and social producers of the nation, as mothers to be protected; and men as the fathers, breadwinners, soldiers, and protectors whose sexual activity was, in contrast to women's, encouraged. At a time of imperialist ambition the gendering of the nation was therefore clear to see, not just through laws of the time, but also through popular culture. As Dasgupta notes, how to 'correctly perform'

hegemonic gender ideals was further reinforced through "magazines (and other popular culture media)" (2004: 84). These ideals remained based on elite ideas of appropriate (adult) behaviour of men and women.

What is striking is that regardless of the economic and employment upheavals of the past twenty years these gender ideals continue to retain their normative strength. Part of this strength comes from their association with what it means to be an *adult* man or woman in Japan. However, before moving onto a closer look at contemporary masculine ideals it is important to first set the post-war scene.

Post-war Japan - Setting the Scene

Prior to World War II, in the early 1930s, Japan was a largely agrarian society. The majority of people worked in farming or as small business owners. Families usually consisted of three generations living together. Working hours were long and leisure time was scarce (Allinson 2004; Fukutake 1981; Hendry 2003; Hunter 1989; Shuzō 1989). Since the end of World War II Japan has undergone momentous change. Both the legal codes and constitution were completely overhauled, with liberal ideology the hallmark of the new constitution. [20] Confucianism was officially considered to be outmoded as a feudal idea (Taga 2005) and Japanese people were positioned as citizens with inalienable rights rather than as subjects whose rights were granted by the Emperor (Hunter 1989; Mackie 1995; 2003: 127).

Much of the working population shifted from rural farming work to urban jobs, and a rural to urban exodus began – initially in the late 1930s, but gaining pace and momentum in the 1950s (Allinson 2004; Fukutake 1981; Hunter 1989; Kato 1998; Moon 1998; Sugimoto 2003). This was helped along by increased efficiency in the agricultural sector brought about by greater mechanization, which served to release a great number of young male workers from working the land, and enabled many to move to urban areas in search of salaried work (Hunter 1989).

A high growth rate precipitated considerable social change. Cities expanded to cope with increasing numbers of residents as people moved into urban areas to take up jobs, and people became more affluent: with a more equal distribution of

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[20] The new constitution was largely imposed by the United States. Iwao (1993) states that those people born after the war accept this constitution as their own; however older people born before 1935, who lived during the Second World War, still view this as being imposed upon them by the American Occupation.

wealth, and higher levels of education, subtle change was brought about in social status. In just twenty years job distribution became realigned. Whilst in the 1950s self-employed farmers and small family businesses constituted more than half of the workforce, by the 1970s this had changed considerably, with the majority of the workforce involved in salaried labour at the beck and call of market forces in the national economy (Allinson 2004; Hunter 1989; Kelly 1993).

It was in this context that the image of the salaryman as a status to be emulated for men became entrenched. Although, as mentioned earlier, the salaryman existed in Japan in the pre-war period, it was in the high growth era of post-war Japan that they became symbols of aspiration. It was a time of rapid industrialisation when the possibilities of transcending one's class and moving up into another one (for example, from rural farm worker to white-collar salaried employee) became a real possibility, and something to aspire to. Furthermore, income was high and employment was secure (Vogel 1963). Although great changes were afoot with many white-collar positions being created, the vast majority of workers found employment in lower status work, and blue-collar work in factories was far more prevalent. Yet, even so, the allure of the salaryman exerted its influence on many: "Indeed the symbol of sararii-man status became so potent that many blue-collar workers took to wearing white shirts and ties while commuting to and from work, hoping that others would smile on their apparent good fortune" (Allinson 2004: 111).

The chance to move up a class was, however, limited to this exceptional era and facilitated by the rapid changes of industrialisation. As I have noted in the Introduction, class mobility in Japan is now actually very low, much like in the USA and UK (Ishida 1993). Education (the level and prestige of the school) continued, and continues, to play an important role in the kinds of jobs that a person could get after leaving school, and in reproducing gender inequalities (Dore 1997 (1976)). The best (and most prestigious) jobs were considered to be those white-collar positions in the national bureaucracy, in universities, large banks and insurance companies. Only people who went to the best universities tended to be able to achieve these types of job. Medium sized businesses, large corporations and the public sector all also offered white-collar clerical positions to men who graduated from good colleges and high schools. Women, with university or college educations were able to find work with these types of employers in clerical positions. However, strong social expectations regarding the role of women coupled with a sturdy institutional glass ceiling meant that most

women resigned on marriage. High school graduates and those from good junior high schools found work in large factories, whereas other junior high school graduates entered the least prestigious jobs that demanded little education, but demanded physical labour such as in construction, farming, and smaller manufacturing companies (Allinson 2004).

Whilst the post-war legal reforms that took place after World War II in the creation of the new constitution established equality for men and women, in theory, Yoda argues that: "It was, however, the national mobilization for economic growth that fundamentally transformed the Japanese organization of domesticity and gender relations therein, establishing women at the center of the home as a sphere putatively separated from that of capitalist production" (Yoda 2000: 874-75). He goes on to suggest that this was further reinforced by large corporations by creating a:

> [C]ompensation system that was based on the principle of a "family wage" (or "living wages" as it was called in Japan) for regular male workers, but also through employee benefits (e.g., health care, subsidized mortgages, and benefits for dependants) designed to promote coupling between regular male workers and homemaking wives.

(ibid. also see, Iwao 1993; Mackie 1995)

In the new constitution, the post-war family system was constructed as part of the private sphere and theoretically was less liable to shaping by policies of the state (Mackie 1995), yet this separation of women (ideally) into the domestic sphere (and men to the outside) was further solidified by tax and welfare programs which served to favour families where the wife was either not working, or was in a low-paying job (Iwahori 1999; Mackie 1995; Yoda 2000). This therefore consolidated and maintained a division between women in the domestic sphere and men in the public arena. This is not to say, however, that women in Japan necessarily stay at home. As Kondo (1990) so clearly shows, the expectation to stay at home as a full-time housewife is very much a middle-class ideal. In working-class areas there is, rather, an expectation for women to be active economically outside the home. The ways that gender are actually enacted are thus clearly cross-cut by class (Kondo 1990: 284). Furthermore, many women are choosing not to marry and have children until later in life, or not at all (Nakano and Wagatsuma 2004).

Whilst the post-war constitution sought to engender a break with the past, there were also "widespread and deep-seated continuities" that linked post-war with pre-war Japan (Allinson 2004: 5; Ivy 1993):

> Continuities were carried by individuals and embedded in institutions. Japanese men and women who lived through World War II...found their lives permanently altered by their experiences. Their ideas, affiliations, occupations, status, and life chances were thereafter strongly influenced by what happened to them during the 1930s and 1940s...Continuities were also embedded in institutions...A strong national bureaucracy; political parties; interest groups; elite universities; sexual roles; major industrial, financial and commercial firms; and patterns of business relationships that throve before and during the war often endured after it in remarkably similar forms.

> (Allinson 2004: 5-6)

After undergoing such rapid transformation it is clear that these continuities are important. Post-war gender ideals of the middle-class salaryman and full-time housewife have obvious antecedents both in the pre-war period and specifically from the Meiji era (1868-1912) which I have already discussed. Although Confucianism was officially denied after World War II, elements of Confucianist thought effectively continued into post-war society through, for example, moral classes in schools (Luhmer 1990; Okano and Tsuchiya 1999), and is still seen today. The following section explores in more detail the figure of the salaryman and alternative masculinities in contemporary Japan to provide the context in which freeters are so often discussed.

The Salaryman 'Model'

As noted earlier in this chapter, the economic recovery of Japan in the 1960s was paralleled by the rise of the 'new' middle-classes. Large numbers of the population shifted from being blue-collar workers to white-collar, with many people who were previously engaged in agriculture moving into manufacturing (Allinson 2004; Sugimoto 2003). It was at this time that the salaryman: "[B]ecame the overarching embodiment of hegemonic masculinity, as alternative/competing masculinities such as the soldier and farmer became neutralized as a consequence of Japan's defeat and subsequent social and economic transformations" (Dasgupta 2004: 83). It remains the most talked about stereotype when discussing men, male roles and images and does, I suggest, form the core components of what it is to be a proper *adult* man. For many freeters it is a discourse with which they have rather an uneasy and at times ambiguous relationship. They simultaneously wish to engage in and exhibit this 'type' of masculinity, whilst also distancing, resisting and sometimes rejecting the salaryman model of masculinity outright.

So, what does a salaryman look like? In a 1996 Japan Travel Bureau (JTB)

publication for visitors to Japan, the image of a typical salaryman was a:

> [B]espectacled 'Mr. Everyman'-type with a neat 'seven-three' haircut [the hair is parted neatly to the side in a seventy/thirty section], dressed, according to the accompanying caption, in a dark blue or grey suit with a white dress shirt, carrying a brief-case in one hand and a rolled-up newspaper in the other...Colourful, flashy attire, long hair, or even any kind of noticeably fashionable hairstyle, fashionable clothes and accessories, sunglasses and even 'traditional' Japanese dress [are discouraged].

(Dasgupta 2004: 3)[21]

Defining what the salaryman actually is can be difficult. In its narrowest sense it usually refers to university educated white-collar male employees who work in large private sector companies and institutions. They are expected to be loyal to their employers, diligent, dedicated and self-sacrificing. Outside of work the 'salaryman' is expected to marry at a suitable age and once married perform his role of husband/provider/father appropriately, by providing for the family (Clark 1979; Henshall 1999). A further part of the discourse is based on the idea of lifetime employment, a seniority system where salary and promotions rise according to age and where complete loyalty from the salaryman to the company is expected in exchange for the company's paternalistic concern about his welfare (ibid.). Until relatively recently the idea that a 'true-man' should sacrifice his family life for that of life in the company was a given (Henshall 1999), among the middle-classes at least.

Linked to rapid expansion, the re-building of the nation and a growing economy, and described as 'corporate warriors', they were said to embody the 'samurai spirit' which they evoked through working hard to rebuild the nation. In 1963, Vogel stated that though a salaryman's career rise is not rapid, it offers a "secure path to moderate success" (1963: 9) and that: "The young Japanese girl hopes to marry a salary man even if his salary were lower because his life is steady, he has leisure time, and she can be free of the anxieties and work connected with independent business." (ibid.: 9).[22] After the turmoil of World War II, the

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[21] Whilst I would suggest that this image does not really reflect the current reality for many salarymen (I knew many fashionably dressed salarymen - though they did not have long hair, or particularly 'flashy' attire), this generic image still exerts considerable influence both within Japan and abroad.

[22] What is striking about this statement is that even though economic times have changed and most middle-class women now work instead of being professional housewives, the salaryman as a husband remains desirable (as I shall show in the following chapters), largely because of his perceived economic security and stability.

Occupation, a new Constitution and a country that had been economically and literally reduced to ashes, it is easy to comprehend how the security of a salaryman lifestyle would be so desirable. Furthermore, with many blue-collar workers moving into the white-collar sector, the idea of regular leisure time was likely to have been highly appealing.

The salaryman is the figure that has probably been most associated with Japan's transformation from a devastated nation post-World War II, to the world's second largest economy within just thirty years (Dasgupta 2004). Yet over the years he has also gone from being a desired figure to one of ridicule. With the bursting of the economic bubble, the salaryman image lost its positive sheen. For example, Fujimura-Fanselow and Kameda (1995) describe the salaryman as a workaholic who never sees his family, plays golf with clients, goes drinking with colleagues after work and only spends time at home eating and sleeping.[23] However, Roberson and Suzuki (2003a) state that this change in portrayal illustrates that the transformation of the salaryman from a *desired* position to that of everyday and dominant is complete (Roberson and Suzuki 2003a: 1, emphasis added).

Whilst the salaryman may appear to be symbolic of Japanese men post-war, in recent years the idea that "one should 'live for one's company" (Mathews 2003: 113) has lost ground. Mathews states: "Walk into any bookstore [in Japan] and one will find dozens of titles...[stating]: 'Live as you yourself want! Don't be chained to working for your company!' as the cover blurb for one recent bestseller proclaims (Ōhashi 2000)" (Mathews 2003: 113). Many other books urge people to take alternative paths: "The ideal for many aspiring young people today is to be not a salaryman but an entrepreneur" (ibid.), with the focus being on individual self-fulfilment rather than on self-sacrificing loyalty to a company.[24] Whilst this may well be the case and is the dream of many, people are also aware of the difficulties of achieving this: being a successful entrepreneur is a risky business. Furthermore, although this change from positive image to critique of the salaryman is linked to post-war transformations, Dasgupta (2004: 2) notes: "Even after the unravelling of the 'Japan Inc.' paradigm since the 1990s, the

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[23] However, for an interesting ethnographic exploration of the subjective experiences of contemporary Japanese salarymen, see Sedgwick (2007).

[24] See Yuehong Zhang (2001) for an interesting look at entrepreneurial masculinities in post-socialist China.

imagery of the salaryman has continued to exert a powerful influence on imaginings of Japan, both within the country, and outside of it." Sedgwick (2007) suggests that in a time of economic turmoil it is the security that being a salaryman provides that makes it so appealing in the popular imagination. I concur with this, but would also argue that one of the reasons for its continued dominance in Japan is the role that this discourse plays in post-war conceptions of adulthood, and what an adult man should be like.

Although the stoic, self-sacrificing 'salaryman' has become the dominant masculine discourse, the vast majority of men are not now and have never been salarymen (Kelly 1993). Dasgupta notes that: "the persistence of this salaryman stereotype does not accord with...the reality of many young Japanese males themselves" (2003: 118). Yet even so, this remains the yardstick of Japanese masculinity and one that every freeter (and non-freeter) I met engaged with, negotiated, and resisted on various levels. There are, however, other masculine discourses at play in Japanese society, just three of which I shall come onto now in the following section.

'New' Men

> For many younger Japanese men, commitment to work and the breadwinning role may no longer be the primary sources of their masculine identity. Toyoda (1997), for instance, describes how men who are 'corporate dropouts' seek alternative masculine identities in support groups such as their family and/or by pursuing other work that is not competitive in nature.
>
> (Ishii-Kuntz 2003: 201; see also, Mathews 2003; Miller 2003)

Staying within the terrain of 'middle-class' ideals, it is pertinent to take a short look at 'New Man' masculinities, a 'new' type of masculinity said to be more deeply situated in family relationships than work, but clearly linked to middle-class hegemonic constructions of salaryman masculinity.

As shown earlier in this chapter, the Japanese government has been directly involved in the gendering of its citizenry and in contemporary ideals of masculinity and femininity. In recent years, largely it seems due to the chronically low birth-rate, the government has seen the need to tweak dominant ideals of masculinity slightly away from that of the man who should sacrifice himself *completely* to his company. Men are now being encouraged to spend more time at home with their families, as indicated by a government poster (published in 1999) that shows Sam, the husband of pop idol Amuro Namie, holding a baby with a caption that reads: "A man who doesn't raise his children can't be called a father"

(referred to in both Ishii-Kuntz 2003: 200; and Mathews 2003: 115). In addition, a law entitled the 'Parental Leave Law' was enacted in 1991 allowing one parent (but not both) to take a full year off of work after having children. The policy encourages the shared caretaking of children, in theory at least (Ishii-Kuntz 2003; Kawashima 1999). Whilst these appear to be nice concessions that are reflective of popular opinion and a shift in attitudes since the bursting of the economic bubble in the early 1990s, it can also be seen as a strategic move in response to the ageing population and low birth rate; reports of 2006 placed it at 1.25 (Yoshida 2006). It may also be a response to women's changing demands and a reflection that a growing number of women seem pessimistic about the idea of marriage. The government appears to have altered its policies in the hopes of encouraging young people to marry and have children. The state's attempts, however, can also be seen as a significant reconfiguring of mainstream masculinity to include a more hands-on familial responsibility as part of masculine behaviour and can consequently be seen as a: "...significant transition in terms of the state's attitude toward the family" (Ishii-Kuntz 2003:200).[25]

Whilst many men worry that if they were to take Parental Leave it would affect their promotion prospects and have a negative affect on their work relationships (Ishii-Kuntz 2003), there are men (most often those working as teachers or in academia) who do take parental leave to become the prime caretaker of children. These men are, however, most usually married to women in similarly paid or higher paid positions. Moreover, men in these kinds of jobs were, I was consistently told, less likely to experience promotion blocks as a result of taking parental leave.

'New' men are perceived to be more sensitive and caring than other men due to their active role as fathers and their link to the domestic sphere. Whilst their

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[25] These new policies have not been without their problems, and for the vast majority of men taking parental leave instead of their wives is out of the question for a number of reasons. For example, the person taking parental leave is entitled to just twenty-five percent of their salary. As women often have lower paid jobs than men in Japan, and as the idea that women are 'natural' child-carers remains strong (cf. Kawashima 1999; Mackie 2003), it is usually the woman who takes this leave, thus reinforcing ideas that women belong in the domestic sphere with the children. Furthermore, in the current taxation system the second spouse who is working and earning over 1,030,000 yen per year (approximately £5,034), is taxed to such a level that s/he becomes worse off than a full-time housewife, effectively making it not worth working full-time (Kawashima 1999; Mackie 2003; Mathews 2003). This leaves the burden of full-time work on the partner with the best income-earning potential, which is more commonly the man (ibid.).

masculinities in part correspond to dominant ideals, however, they also somewhat contradict these ideals because their wives may become the main breadwinners rather than themselves.[26] Both 'masculinities' discussed so far are firmly middle-class paradigms, but Japan is not a nation of middle-class people. What of the other 'types'?

Working-Class Masculinities

Whilst it could be expected that working-class masculinities significantly differ from that of their middle-class counterparts, Roberson (2003) suggests that working-class men often position themselves 'against' the salaryman model; effectively engaging in and negotiating this dominant discourse. In his analysis of working-class men in a small factory Roberson (2003: 134) states that they did this by concentrating on the *skills* that were needed in their work and which they felt served to differentiate them from 'pen-pushing' salarymen.[27] He also found that leisure pursuits were different; while salarymen are often portrayed as drinking with friends and colleagues or watching television, working-class men's leisure time was spent in differing ways. For example, some of the men Roberson worked with enjoyed hobbies that involved the skills they used in the workplace, such as jewellery making, whereas others practised calligraphy. Many also professed to spending much of their leisure time with their families (ibid.), something that interestingly corresponds to government attempts to encourage men to be more active within their families.

Whilst the men Roberson worked with appeared to define themselves *against* mainstream salaryman masculinity he concluded that working-class men, largely due to their relations with women: "reproduce a class-based masculinity that in

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[26] This is clearly shown in a drama called 'At Home Dad' shown in the spring of 2004 on Fuji Television. Its main protagonist (played by Abe Hiroshi) was, in the first episode, a high flying advertising executive. He, his wife, and small daughter moved into a new house in a nice neighbourhood. Their new neighbours were, however, not a typical Japanese family. The wife owned her own successful company whilst the husband stayed at home; the neighbourhoods' only househusband. The main protagonist dubs his neighbour to be 'not a real man', but is himself soon laid off leading to his wife working full time and him becoming a househusband himself. Much of the comedy of the series is in watching him fumble and fail and increasingly turn to his neighbour for help, support and guidance. Effectively this 'typical' high-flying salaryman-type man turns into a 'new man', albeit initially unwillingly.

[27] Frühstück (2007) interestingly also found that military men were constructing their masculinities in opposition to ideas of the salaryman in her fascinating look at militarised masculinities in the Japanese Self-Defence Forces.

many ways is different and marginalised from hegemonic middle-class masculinity and yet is complicit with the hegemony of the white-collar middle-class salaryman model of masculinity and the patriarchal system of gendered relations in Japan" (Roberson 2003: 126).

Sugimoto (2003) notes that blue-collar workers often find more satisfaction in community life and family than white-collar workers do, and this is reflected in Bestor's (1989) study of a Tokyo neighbourhood. He illustrates that working-class men were able to determine their local social standing through their participation in local community institutions. He noted that:

> [M]erchants and small factory owners are able to create an alternative social world in which rank, prestige, power, and status are assigned according to criteria they can define and control. They can do so by setting up and playing a game that pretty much excludes the new middle-class sarariiman [salaryman] from the start.

(Bestor 1989: 264)

Salarymen are unable to take part in the community and its institutions because they cannot give the amount of time required. Moreover, because they are not physically in the neighbourhood most of the time (but are in offices elsewhere) they are also not as flexible as community leaders need to be.

What is clear from these studies, and also that of Kondo (1990), is that all these men continue to engage with the discourse of the salaryman. Whilst they may scoff at the salaryman's pen-pushing work and emphasise the skills that they possess and their differing participation in the wider community and in their homes, the discourse remains relevant to their ideas of manhood. They still, in their relation with women, reproduce specific ideas of masculinity, derived from post-war conceptions of adult manhood: they see themselves as main breadwinners and their wives' earnings to be secondary in support of the household. This expectation of women in secondary roles is further illustrated when Bestor (1989) notes that women take largely supporting roles in local institutions.

Although much of the literature on Japanese masculinities continues to examine it through the lens of class (e.g. Kondo 1990; Mathews 2003; Roberson 2003; Taga 2003), I am somewhat unconvinced about examining Japanese masculinity solely through a simple distinction between classes. Whilst it is possible to see different ideas of acceptable masculine behaviour as briefly shown above, the fact that most Japanese people do not consider themselves to be anything but middle-class (or rather, middle-status in a Weberian sense) needs also to be taken into

consideration. Many of my contacts, whether middle-class, working-class or somewhere in-between, engaged with dominant masculine ideals. Furthermore, these dominant masculine ideas of financial independence, breadwinning and heterosexual marriage are clear markers of adult manhood. It therefore seems much more analytically useful to examine *themes* of masculinity that intersect and cross-cut class, occupation, and education. I am not suggesting that we discard class, but just that simplifying it to 'this is middle-class masculinity, and this working-class' is not satisfactory in the Japanese context due to the ambiguity that exists in defining class. This leads me onto one example of a 'type' of masculinity whose themes cross-cut classes and occupations and which can be argued to constitute the core components of adult manhood in contemporary Japan.

Sporting Masculinities

The sportsman, or 'man of action', is a common theme in Japanese masculinities; from the hyper masculinised images of commercials (often for energy drinks[28]) as described by Roberson (2005), to the images of popular sportsman, such as baseball player Ichiro (cf. Nakamura 2005), or sumo wrestlers.[29] The image of the strong, sporting, active man is a common theme in advertising and a number of my contacts tapped into and utilised these images as part of their self-identities. These kinds of sporting masculinities cross-cut classes, with the stress being on both physicality and the ability to focus on and discipline the self in the sporting process, which in turn links back to elite samurai masculine ideals that were heavily influenced by the moral code of conduct, known as *bushidō*. This code (with its neo-Confucian, Zen and Shinto concepts) has also extensively informed contemporary salaryman masculinity. As Dasgupta notes: "At the core of this code [bushidō] lay a very specific discourse of *masculinity* centred on concepts of honour, loyalty (to one's *daimyō* lord, in particular), duty and obligation (*on* and *giri*), and physical, mental and spiritual toughness" (Dasgupta 2004: 73). These traits continue to be espoused today. For example, Henshall (1999), Gilmore (1990), and Buruma (1984) all comment on the existence of hard (*kōha*) and soft (*nanpa*) masculinities in Japan:

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[28] These drinks are very popular and are marketed for people who are tired and need a quick fix. They come in small bottles that look vaguely medicinal, and smell as such.

[29] Recently, however, sumo has been in the media due to scandal over the beatings and subsequent death of a young sumo wrestler (2007f; Hueston 2007).

> The first is expressed in heroic or aggressive action, often warlike, and is recognizable as a variation of "machismo"...The other involves more placid but always "useful" pursuits, or perhaps more accurately stated, the selfless industriousness and moral conformity that Westerners today associate with the Japanese "salary-man"...Both schools, however, reflect the underlying emphasis in Japanese culture on devotion to duty, discipline, collective goals, diligence, and tenacity as primary male virtues.

(Gilmore 1990: 187)

Light (2003: 109), in an illuminating article on sporting masculinities in a high school rugby team stated that when interviewed about the type of men they admired the most, many: "nominated men who set firm long-term goals and who could endure and overcome hardships to achieve them. The characteristics of masculinity that they all admired were also characteristics of their approach to training and the style of play that they preferred to adopt." Although being clever or skilful was admired, putting in constant effort was a common theme of admiration (ibid.: 109). Furthermore he noted that they were expected to control their emotions (ibid.: 111), which is something that resonates with Henshall's (1999) comments about *kōha*/samurai males who:

> [S]hould show selfless *gaman* (endurance), *makoto* (sincerity), and *isshin* (single-minded commitment) in the carrying out of his duties. Traditionally he was supposed to be a man of Zen-like austerity who endured hardship without complaint, a man of action not words or finer thoughts, a man who set about his duties without asking questions.

(Henshall 1999: 2-3)

Furthermore, Dasgupta also argues that in *manga* representations of Japanese salarymen there resonates an ideal of masculinity that corresponds with that of the 'sporting warrior', or as Light states: "[a] clear parallel between the hegemonic masculinity embedded in the practice of sport and martial arts and the corporate masculinity constructed through manga" (2003: 114). Ultimately, it is clear that masculinity is control – both control of others, but also of the self.

Sporting masculinities are cross-cut with themes that resonate both with mainstream middle-class models, but also with working-class ideals of masculinity that stress physicality and the skills needed for their work and leisure pursuits. The themes of endurance, diligence, overcoming hardship, strength in controlling emotions and selves, and sincerity are all attributes considered to be important to the construction of a 'masculine' adult man, which are not based on class or occupation. These ideals can be clearly seen in Chapter 3 when women discuss their ideal masculine man.

This brief look at sporting masculinities highlights that masculinities in Japan are not solely based on types of employment or class, and that it is not necessary to be a salaryman to be a masculine adult man: having these attributes and being recognised to have them is enough, as can be seen in more detail in Chapter 3. Being a salaryman serves to increase status and perhaps to move up a class, but literally *'being* a salaryman' is, of course, not a prerequisite itself to adult manhood.

Conclusion

I have aimed to show in this chapter how Japanese citizens have come to be gendered (how they gender themselves will become apparent throughout the thesis) and how dominant ideals of masculinity have been propagated in contemporary Japan. Certain themes (which also link to older Confucian ideals) such as endurance, overcoming hardship, being diligent, sincere, physically active, sporting, responsible, and decisive are also overarching themes of Japanese masculinity. Whilst men's masculinities are dependant on a number of factors such as class, education, and occupation, they are also significantly affected by their peers, relationships, social arenas and mass media. Rather than conforming to just one 'type' of masculinity, it is possible to see how these core themes are employed at different times and in different ways and how this leads to a complex and at times contradictory representation of masculinities in Japan. Yet, as Taga (2003) notes, though multiple masculinities are becoming increasingly evident, career and marriage continue to be cornerstones of masculinity (and adulthood) in Japan, largely I would suggest, due to gendered expectations of men and women, and of women's own expectations which, I argue, have a great effect on men. It is here that freeters struggle.

But what about freeters? I have already illustrated that although the hegemonic masculine discourse of the salaryman remains steeped in people's consciousness actually *being* a salaryman is somewhat optional. So why is there such negativity surrounding male freeters? The following chapter seeks to tease out the discourses surrounding freeters, and illustrates the link between freeters and ideas of acceptable and desirable adult manhood in contemporary Japan.

Chapter 3: Freeters – 'Real' Men or *Putaro?*

Dominant ideals of masculinity are heavily implicated in both the wider discourses that surround freeters and in male freeters' narratives of their futures and what they felt they were supposed to do, as shall be explored in the following ethnographic chapters. The ways that freeters are viewed, the research that has been done, and the approaches taken to the 'issue' of freeters all feed into, to varying degrees, freeters' own self identifications with being a freeter. Furthermore, male adulthood is correspondingly defined through the very same characteristics and expectations of dominant ideals of masculinity (financial independence, breadwinning, and marriage to name the most obvious ones). In addition, given that masculinity is constructed through its interactions with women and femininity (and vice versa) (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994; Smith 1987) and that women were crucial players in how male freeters created their masculine identities and ideas of adult manhood, this chapter will also explore women's conceptions of contemporary men, and their ideas of freeters.

The previous chapter sought to set the scene by contextualising the gendered discourses of masculinity that pervade assumptions and discussions of male freeters. This chapter will first set out in detail the discourses surrounding freeters. This is followed by ethnographic vignettes focusing on contemporary women's ideas of what constitutes a masculine man and what men are thought to be like today. These illustrate how much of the negative discourse surrounding male freeters derives from the idea that a man should either be a salaryman or, if not, he should at least embody the masculine attributes that adult men are supposed to have.

'Freeters' – Just A Media Phenomenon?

Whilst it is perhaps tempting to view the freeter 'phenomenon' as just a media construction it is now far more complex, having become part of the social lexicon. However, given that the discourses largely began in the media I shall first outline the changing public discourse since the late 1980s as it has played out in the media.

Perceptions of freeters are clearly linked to the economic situation. Since the Japanese economic bubble burst in the early 1990s, representations of freeters have undergone a variety of transformations, from being applauded for leading alternative lifestyles, to being accused of having no work ethic, to discussions of

how the economic recession has caused more people to become freeters, thereby illustrating that it is not their choice (or fault).[1] On the whole, when I was initially thinking up the project in early 2004 the media representations were largely negative; freeters were lazy and they had no motivation to work properly. This contrasted quite strikingly with the freeters I knew at the time, who were hard working, motivated people with goals.

Smith (2006) notes that during the 1980s and 1990s, the flexible labour market exploded, and *From A*, the job magazine that created the term 'freeter', set about making part-time employment appear attractive to young people. They did this by: "creating new meanings of work and associating it with a certain kind of lifestyle and identity for young people" (Smith 2006: 92). They popularised both the term freeter and the style of working in a variety of ways, including the use of celebrities in its advertising. In an interview with the founder of *From A*, Smith notes that at the time, in the late 1980s, there was an abundance of jobs. Graduates were consequently in a buyer's market and did not feel any pressure to accept job offers immediately. An air of confidence abounded; they felt that they would still be able to get a good job after a couple of years of doing what they wanted. The founder of *From A*, Michishita Hiroshi, saw this as a significant business opportunity. By creating a new image for part-time work he was able to bring service sector employers and young people together in the pages of his new job information magazine (ibid.: 94). Michishita states that the word 'free arbeiter' was already in use at the time, and was used to refer to people working in low paying, unstable jobs. It apparently brought to mind images of the *Putaro*, which: "refers to ambitionless, lazy and undisciplined youth, who will never amount to anything, and who have trouble even holding down a job" (ibid.: 95). For one writer, Yamane (1989), the word *Putaro* was reminiscent of men in the 1960s who hung out in Shinjuku[2] in Tokyo, at the margins of the student protests

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[1] It is important to note that similar discourses abound in other countries around the world regarding youth and work. For example, in Italy the economics minister has recently been berated for calling Italian men in their thirties 'big babies' for still living at home. They proposed a tax break to try to entice more male youth to leave home (2007d). Meanwhile in Germany there have been extensive discussions about 'generation internship' who, after graduating from university, are unable to find full-time employment due to labour market changes. Consequently, more youth proceed to do a great number of unpaid internships during the transition from employment to full-time work (Hommerich 2009).

[2] Shinjuku is a bustling area of downtown Tokyo which reputedly hosts the busiest train station in the world. The east side is crammed full of bars, restaurants and also Kabuki-

of the time.[3] They had a reputation for being unreliable and for being unable to make ends meet. However, Michishita decided to turn these images on their head by giving the term a new image. By shortening *free arbeiter* to *freeter* he effectively put the stress on the word 'free' and set about promoting it with a large campaign. This campaign included publishing numerous stories about freeters and their lifestyles – mostly showing people working in part-time jobs by day and then pursuing creative/artistic endeavours by night. The magazine also published a book about celebrities who had been freeters prior to making it big. In addition, in 1988, they also produced a feature length film titled *Furiitaa* (Freeter); the hero of which lived in Tokyo, played in a rock band by night and did various one-day jobs whilst working for an agency named the *'freeter network'*. Part-time work was thus a way of enabling them to do the kind of work that they really wanted to do; e.g. playing music (Smith 2006: 95-97). Michishita's freeters were confident, full of ambition and energy, and living lifestyles that they wanted, as opposed to the salaryman and office lady.[4] They were thus creating: "a new way of relating self to work and company" (ibid.: 96).

Thus, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the word freeter was used to describe young people who *deliberately* chose not to work full-time in order to pursue their dreams (Toyoda 2002). Buoyed by the tail end of the bubble economy, they were considered to be making cool new lifestyle choices and it was thought that they should be commended for exploring new opportunities and looking for alternative ways to create fulfilling lives (ibid.). Interestingly, however, the idea of *free arbeiter* or *freeters* has since gone full circle. Michishita's campaign, though it worked, effectively fell off the cultural map when the economy plummeted after the economic bubble burst. Current ideas of freeters are often much closer to the original ideas of *Putaro* than to the media spin Michishita applied to the bubble-economy freeters.

Freeters may have begun largely as a media construct, but they are now firmly

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cho – one of the main red-light districts in the city. The West side of the station is full of skyscrapers, including the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building.

[3] See Krauss (1974) on the student protests.

[4] Office ladies are women who work in offices and perform tasks such as operating the photocopying and fax machines, doing general administrative work, including basic accounting, and word processing. In addition they answer the phone, serve tea and go out on errands. For an interesting ethnographic account of office ladies see Ogasawara (1998).

entrenched in the general public's consciousness, spawning debate in the mass media, in schools, the government and a contradictory view of who and what freeters are. A taster of media headlines over the past eight years clearly shows the range of views regarding freeters: 'A new breed of workers' (2000); 'Part-timers reshaping Japan's work ethic: When are you going to get a real job and settle down?' (Naito 2000); 'Are 'freeters' result of slump, source of next one?' (Otake 2002); '2020s Dark age of gray-haired freeters' (Kan 2005); 'Weak work ethic is holding back generation of 'freeters' and drifters' (Kitazume 2005). These articles discuss freeters as essentially being to blame for their lifestyle choices. They are represented as irresponsible, ambitionless youth, lacking a work ethic and not contributing to the nation or its economy. They are said to pose a significant problem to Japan's future as concern over both the pension and welfare systems mounts. This has been largely due to a declining and ageing population. There are now (and soon to be) fewer people of working age paying into the health insurance and pension schemes. This has led to concerns over the slowly dwindling amounts in the government's coffers. There is thus concern, as in other developed countries, that the pension scheme may crash; people may pay into it each year but may end up receiving very little or nothing on reaching retirement age (Driscoll 2007).

It is not just, however, newspaper headlines that proclaim the problem of ambitionless youth. Indeed, Smith (2006) contends that it was the publication, in 1999, of a book entitled *'Parasaito Shinguru no Jidai'* (*The Age of Parasite Singles*) that kick-started the negative discourse about freeters. The book was written by a Japanese sociologist, Yamada Masahiro (1999) and became very popular in general readership as well as in academia. It described young people living with and sponging off their parents in order to be able to travel, buy brand name goods, and live a lifestyle that they couldn't have afforded if they were to live alone (Smith 2006). The book described them as lacking ambition, being weak-willed, and wanting to be indulged by their parents. They were also portrayed as a threat to the national economy and social welfare system (Yamada 1999). Academic scholarship on freeters feeds into the wider media discussion on freeters and often lends authority to media accounts. Furthermore, the fact that Yamada's book and other academic volumes on freeters such as Kosugi Reiko's (2003) *'Furiitaa to iu Ikikata'* (*Freeter's Way of Living*) have become best-sellers speaks to the high level of interest in Japanese society about this issue.

Not all newspaper articles focus on freeters' supposed lack of a work ethic. Some

others focus more on the employment environment. For example, 'Freeters: free by name, nature: Exploitative corporate culture breeds nomadic workers' (Hirano 2005) discusses the problematic work culture within companies that expect their full-time (*seishain*) workers to work up to seventeen hour days, week in, week out. Some young people who have become freeters did so as a result of quitting their regular jobs and taking up part-time employment instead. Two of the contacts featured in this thesis had done this; unable to function from working such long hours, and after 'breaking' their bodies (*karada wo kowashita*), they quit and began working part-time.

More recently articles have been focusing on ways to reduce freeter numbers: 'Job-hopping 'freeters' growing in ranks in Japan -- and authorities are worried' (Kageyama 2005); 'Panel mulls hiring 100 'freeters' in civil service' (2006b); 'Support clubs to make 'old freeters' into full-timers' (2006c); 'New plan aims to reduce 'freeters' by 110,000' (2008b); 'Rescue Youth: Hello Work's 'Man-to-Man' Strategy' (Anon 2009). These articles concentrate on the various ways in which the Japanese government and old-boy networks are trying to decrease freeter numbers by both encouraging youth into full-time work (hence the emphasis is put on youth and work attitudes), and by trying to increase the opportunities available to freeters to get into such full-time work.

Positive headlines about freeters tend to be in the foreign press, such as in the BBC which had one short series on freeters titled *Japan's free spirits* (Buckley 2004) which exhorts how young Japanese are creating new lifestyles and ways of working. The Japanese press tend to take a rather more pessimistic view, as illustrated in the above headlines, discussing them either as victims of the recession and changing employment practices, or seeing them as lazy unmotivated slackers with no work ethic who are not contributing to the state. Male freeters are most often the most critiqued for not being responsible workers and not being able to become the family breadwinner since they often experience difficulties marrying because of their financial instability (JILPT 2007). Although there have been drastic changes in the Japanese economy and job market in the past twenty years the difficulties many freeters face in finding regular employment is placed in the background whereas the idea that most freeters are chasing dreams and not wanting to lead 'responsible' lives is pushed to the foreground.

As outlined in the previous chapter the Japanese state has clearly played a considerable role in the creation and dissemination of gender ideologies, yet tied

in with this is the notion of *productive* citizens, discourses of morality, self-responsibility (*jiko sekinin*), and the fact that freeters are not considered to be fulfilling their social responsibilities (JILPT 2004). This highlights what citizens' rights and obligations vis-à-vis the state are supposed to be. Interestingly, in a case taken to the Supreme court in the 1950s and 1960s an unemployed citizen who was seeking state benefits because of ill health wanted to define what the 'appropriate' standard of living was that had been stated in Article 25 of the Constitution.[5] The Supreme Court effectively stated that the state's obligation was to rule *itself* in order to secure "the minimum standards of wholesome and cultured living":

> It was, in essence, a position that strengthened substantially the discourse on the duty of all citizens to provide for their own (or their family's) "wholesome and cultured living," weakening the idea of a right to social security for all. Conversely, the Asahi case bolstered the idea that the citizen had the right and obligation to work, as stipulated in Article 27 of the constitution and given legislative strength through the passage of a range of labor laws.

(Hook and Takeda 2007: 101)

Not only do Japanese citizens thus have an *obligation* to work (either in the economic sphere or the domestic sphere), but they also have little recourse to state help. Rather, they should have 'self-responsibility', which is deemed lacking in freeters as much of the discourse so clearly shows (cf. Driscoll 2007). However, the negative discourse surrounding freeters incorporates more than the relationship between state and individual. It is not just about young people having less self/social-responsibility than previous generations, or only about concern over the future of the economy, the welfare and pension system, though these are all things that people (and the government) are genuinely worried about, but rather appears to be imbued with a moral discourse, a sense of what it is to be an adult Japanese man. Male freeters especially are publicly and in a high profile way bucking the general stereotype that Japanese men work all hours to build and sustain the economy and the nation whilst women are at home reproducing the nation through having children and raising them.

Though looked at positively in some cases (in the foreign press), for example the

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[5] In English, Article 25 reads: "(1) All people shall have the right to maintain the minimum standards of wholesome and cultured living. (2) In all spheres of life, the State shall use its endeavors for the promotion and extension of social welfare and security, and of public health" (Hook and Takeda 2007: 100).

BBC article mentioned above, and another article, in The China Daily titled, 'Quit your job to become a freeter' (2007g), they are also the symptom of an increasingly neoliberal economy, and they glaringly show that lifetime employment is not only unsustainable, but increasingly a myth.[6] This is perhaps not good for a country whose working and life course *ideals* revolve around men gaining lifetime employment and working as breadwinners. Freeters thus challenge normative notions of working, of expected life courses, and they challenge a source of Japanese pride in post-war Japan. In addition, they are a very visible symptom of the bursting of the economic bubble and the slow slide from the top that Japan has experienced since; they represent an ever widening gap between rich and poor in a nation that just twenty years ago proudly proclaimed that upward of 90% of the population were middle-class. In addition, with concerns over China's economic and political rise, a reluctance to accept immigrants to boost the work force, and a working ideology that does not fully encourage/support women in the full-time work force, freeters (and NEETs) are, it seems, a visible reminder of all that is 'wrong' with Japanese society today and make for uncomfortable viewing.

The freeter research...

Academics, always looking for new topics to explore, were quick to take up the freeter phenomenon after the bursting of the economic bubble, and after Yamada's (1999) scathing critique of parasitic youth. By far the most prolific writer on freeters in Japanese academia is Kosugi Reiko,[7] the research director of the Japan Institute for Labour, Policy and Training.[8] Within her extensive research she has identified three broad (and widely accepted) categories of freeters; the *dream chasers*, the *moratorium* type (who are waiting to find the right job), and those with *no alternative* (who have been unable to find regular work and therefore have to work part-time) (Kosugi 2005a). Many researchers on freeters utilise these broad categories in their own research (Tarōmaru and Toshirō 2006).

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[6] Conversely, in China, individuals' aspirations and desires are not looked on particularly negatively. Rofel (2007: 3) argues that: "In official, intellectual, and popular discourses, this desiring subject is portrayed as a new human being who will help to usher in a new era in China."

[7] See Kosugi (2002, 2003, 2005a, b, c, 2008) just for starters.

[8] This Institute is affiliated with the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare.

Two sociologists, Tarōmaru and Toshirō (2006), state that they follow Kosugi's (2003) definition to prevent confusion because ideas of who and what a freeter is differs according to each person due to the fact that it is now an everyday word. Though definitions could be expected to differ across academic disciplines somewhat, it has been noted that even *within* disciplines (and within even edited volumes) definitions of freeters differ (Murakami 2006: 77; Tarōmaru and Toshirō 2006: 4). All authors appear to agree that freeters are between the ages of fifteen and thirty-four, and are not housewives or students. Most agree that people who are not in employment, but who are looking for work, are freeters. However, the main point of contention appears to be whether *haken* (temporary) workers can be included as freeters. Murakami (2006), also a sociologist, states that because *haken* and *keiyaku shain* (contract workers) are not 'official' workers they are usually put into the category of freeter. However, he thinks that *haken* and *keiyaku shain* have the same *intention* as full-time workers – that they think of themselves as full-time workers – so he categorises them as non-freeters (Murakami 2006: 82).

Whilst I appreciate the discussion of whether a *haken* worker constitutes a freeter I am at a loss as to concretely explain why people who are unemployed and ostensibly *not* looking for a job (NEETs) are now being included, by some, in the term. My only explanation is that these categories are not really actually about work, but are rather about the issue of problematic (male) youth who refuse to get *'proper'* jobs. Thus, the term freeter has more capital as a social phenomenon than as an employment type and it is indicative of the 'demise' and problems plaguing contemporary Japan. This can be clearly seen in some of the scholarship that has been coming out regarding freeters and NEETs. There appears to be two major views of freeters in scholarship (echoed in the media); the first that, as per Yamada, youth today are parasitic, ambitionless, irresponsible, plagued with little perseverance, and lacking a work ethic. Their indulgent parents (the post-war baby boom generation; the *dankai sedai*) are said to have worked hard to pull Japan out of the ashes and to create an affluent society in which these soft ungrateful youth have grown up in and take for granted. In this view parents are also held accountable (cf. Yamada 1999). The second is that freeters are not actually to blame for their current predicament (or that of Japan), but are rather victims of the economic recession, company restructuring, and the increasingly neoliberal economy (cf. Genda 2005; Kosugi 2005a; Miyamoto 2005; Tarōmaru and Toshirō 2006).

So much has been written on freeters in Japanese that it is impossible, within the scope of this thesis, to present an exhaustive survey and analysis of it. Fields most prominently working on this 'group' are psychology, education, and sociology (Murakami 2006; Tarōmaru and Toshirō 2006). The focus in all of this research is on defining, understanding and ultimately preventing others from becoming freeters. Much of the stress is on individual choice, and on how individuals become freeters (cf. Goto 2003). Each area, though contributing interesting research, seems somewhat blinkered to the others. Freeters do not become freeters just because they come from disadvantaged families (BurakuKaihō and JinnenKaihō 2005), *or* because the school-to-work transition is failing (Kariya 1991; Kariya, et al. 2000), *or* because of the changed economic environment (Genda 2005; Higuchi 2001; Ōtake 2005; Tachibanaki 1998), *or* because of a hostile employment environment (Miyamoto 2002), *or* because they are indulged by their parents (Yamada 1999). It is rather more complex and may be the result of a combination of many of the above. My research shows that a myriad of reasons and circumstances leads people to become freeters, not just one factor.

Freeters, as the preceding sections have clearly shown, have come to the fore as an issue in contemporary Japanese society. This is in large part due to the media and to increasing public concerns about the economy and pension/welfare system. Of course, media and popular academic scholarship has great purchase on popular imagination, but the Japanese government has not been without its say.

The Japanese Government's position

At the turn of the twenty-first century, with public concern mounting over the freeter phenomenon, increased media coverage and prolific academic scholarship on the matter, and with research being carried out by the affiliated Japan Institute of Labour, Policy and Training (*Rōdo Seisaku Kenkyū Kenshu Kikō*), the Japanese government effectively had to acknowledge and define the 'problem'; for without a definition, neither management, nor a solution is possible (du Gay and Pryke 2002). Moreover, as Hook and Takeda (2007: 121) note: "The government's intervention into the freeter issue took place at the exact point where the internal risk to the present and future economic and social structure of Japan became salient."

Over the course of five years, the Japanese government has had three definitions of what a freeter is. The first definition, from the White Paper on Labour Economy (MHLW 2003a), defines freeters as young people (15 to 34 years old)

who are not housewives or in education, who work as temporary, dispatched or part-time workers and who, if jobless, want to work *in any capacity*.[9] By this definition there were estimated to be approximately 4,170,000 freeters in 2003. The second definition, from the White Paper on Labour Economy (MHLW 2004), was essentially the same with only one difference. It stated that freeters are 15 to 34 years old, not in education or housewives, and either work as temporary, dispatched on part-time workers from a temporary labour agency or who *want* to work as temporary, dispatched or part-time workers. By this definition the estimated number of freeters from the 2003 report was reduced to about 2,090,000 people (Inui 2005). The third definition was released initially in the White Paper on Labour Economy (MHLW 2007e) whilst I was in the field. This defines them as:

> "freeters" [are]... those aged between 15 and 34, graduate in the case of male, graduate and single [unmarried] in the case of female and, (1) for those currently employed, who are treated as part-time or *arbeit* worker by their employers, (2) for those currently unemployed, who seek the part-time or *arbeit* jobs and (3) for those not currently employed, who are neither engaged in household duties, attending educational institutions nor waiting to start a new job, and wish to find part-time or *arbeit* jobs.

> (MHLW 2007a; MIAC n.d)

This newest definition is by far the most detailed, which may be seen as an attempt to clear up any confusion of what a freeter actually is.

The earliest two definitions stated explicitly that *haken* workers were considered to be freeters, yet this latest definition, in contrast, ambiguously states: "(1) for those currently employed, who are treated as part-time or *arbeit* worker by their employers" (ibid.). As *haken* workers are treated more like contract workers than part-timers they have effectively, it seems, been removed from the category. As I noted earlier, academics are divided on this point. Some think *haken* workers *are* freeters because they are not on *full-time* contracts. Others, like Murakami (2006), state that *haken* workers do not have the same *intention* towards work so they should *not* be included in the definition of freeter. This, though, is a problematic statement. Many of my informants stated categorically that there were only small differences between freeters and *haken* workers. For example, Satoru (a twenty-two year old temp worker who identified himself to me as a

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[9] Also quoted in the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare's White Paper on National Life 2003.

freeter), stated that freeters and temps were basically the same. The only thing that differentiated them, in his eyes, was the way of finding employment. This difference was not enough to put the two groups into separate categories, and other informants expressed similar sentiments.

Both *haken* and freeters constitute 'irregular' workers; they work on short-term contracts, are paid hourly, receive no bonuses and can be laid off at any time. If the definition of freeter includes both the employed *and* unemployed it seems faintly ridiculous to exclude *haken* workers by dint of their supposed 'intention' towards work which is both highly subjective and difficult to generalise for such a large group of workers. It seems then that what differentiates freeters from *haken* workers is the discourse that surrounds freeters. The focus on 'freedom' remains, with the popular idea that freeters want to work 'freely' (and by extension, little). The fact that many freeters work long hours five or six days a week is generally overlooked. Thus it would seem that it is this emphasis on the 'free' that has served to exclude *haken* workers from the definition, and, I would suggest, led to including the unemployed who want to work in part-time jobs. Throughout fieldwork this issue remained unclear to me and therefore my approach was broad. I included everyone who self-expressed themselves to be 'freeters', those who were working part-time (*arubaito*) jobs (who were not students or housewives), and those temp workers who thought that freeters and temps were the same thing and should be in the same category.

Wakamono Jiritsu Plan

Government reactions to freeters have not ended at periodically altering the definition. They have also written various policies to address the issue of growing numbers of young freeters and NEETs. In 2003 the Japanese government instituted a policy that was directed specifically at youth. It was called the '*Wakamono Jiritsu Chosen Plan*' [Plan for Youth Independence and Challenge] and was created by a strategic council made up of four government ministries. The focus of the policy was to improve youth's attitude to work (Hori 2005) and to reverse the trend of increasing numbers of *freeters* and jobless youth. In the policy the government concentrated their efforts on the time of transition from school to work. The plan incorporated three main approaches: The first was to set

up Job Cafes and Youth Job Spots[10] to provide employment related services to young people. This was to help "foster skills fulfilling local needs and to promote job-seekers' employment" (Hori, et al. 2006: 41). Forty-three job cafes were set up. However, from research carried out by the Japan Institute of Labour Policy and Training in 2005 these were found to be used mainly by people with a higher level of education (Hori, et al. 2006; JILPT 2005). Given that there is a tendency for people from lower educated backgrounds to become freeters (JILPT 2007) if the job cafes are being mainly used by more highly educated graduates they are not fulfilling the aim to help *disadvantaged* youth into employment. The second approach was to institute the 'Japanese Dual system'. This was modelled on an education training program from Germany. It promotes learning technical skills at schools in tandem with doing On-The-Job training in corporations. In 2004 approximately 30,000 people had taken part in the program and about half of those who completed it went on to find stable employment (Hori, et al. 2006). The third approach of the plan was the *Wakamono Jiritsu Juku* [School of Youth Independence], a three month camp which aims to help participants experience different aspects of life and labour. These camps are located in twenty areas of the country and approximately twenty participants can join at any one time. However, this program has been troubled by a low number of participants and its cost; roughly 300,000 yen (about £1500) per participant (Hori, et al. 2006; Toivonen 2008).

The idea, however, that youth have a bad attitude to work is over-simplistic, if not inaccurate. In 2003 the government's own White Paper on the Labour Economy reported that only 14.9% of the people that fitted the profile of freeters wanted to be a freeter initially, with 72.2% wanting a regular (full-time) job. Of those freeters unemployed, 64.3% wanted a regular job, but of those who found a job within a year 51% of them were working in temporary or part-time work. Those people who had strong job preferences were shown to be unemployed for longer (Inui 2005: 245). Moreover, Kosugi (2005b) notes that many freeters want to become regular employees, the most popular reason being because of the better opportunities and financial stability that regular work offers.[11] This shows that the

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[10] Youth Job Spots were also set up in 2003, but the majority were closed in 2007 (Toivonen 2008).

[11] However, since Japan continues to have rigid age norms, she also notes that it becomes increasingly difficult for freeters to find regular employment after they reach their late twenties and thirties (Kosugi 2005b).

work ethic of youth has not necessarily deteriorated, and indeed my own research supports that work ethic is not the issue. Many young people are getting choosier about the types of jobs that they want to do, but that is related more to an awareness of the current job market and to perhaps a culture (and economy) of increased individualism.

The government, in their policymaking, appears to have not really taken into consideration changing company employment practices of the last couple of decades. Instead they seem to want youth to be working full-time in companies as per post-war ideals, with little regard for changing employment practices and the realities of an increasingly neoliberal economy. But, what of peoples' ideas and images of freeters? The rest of this chapter ethnographically explores views of freeters and illustrates how and why it is male freeters who are most heavily critiqued.

Images and Ideas of Freeters

Throughout fieldwork, at every opportunity, I would ask people about their images of freeters. I wanted to know what came to mind when they heard the word. Perhaps unsurprisingly negative images were by far the most common, largely following images represented in recent years in the media, though some people also spoke of positive aspects of freeters. Freeters' own take on the images was also illuminating, showing, as they did, how they engaged with popular images of freeters and how many of them consequently positioned themselves outside of the discourses. This section will explore the images that contacts had about freeters and illustrate how closely linked they are to popular media images and the general discourse that surrounds freeters today.

It seems pertinent to begin with the negative images, not least because this is what is so often stressed in the media and in people's own images of freeters, but also because the positive images that people said often came up only *after* they had described the negatives.

The Negatives:

Sitting in a small fashionable cafe on a hot July day, sipping an iced cafe latte, Sayuki, a married female part-time worker in her thirties, sat with a slight frown puckering her forehead as she considered how to answer my question about her image of freeters. She began with her husband's view that one out of every two freeters are strange (*hen*): "For example, Maru-san [a co-worker] is often late, he

takes holidays with no prior notice, and he sometimes doesn't show up for his shifts ... I think my husband is correct – one out of every two freeters are strange." However, with another small frown she quickly said that that is not true for every freeter, and she also knows some who 'make efforts/persevere' (*ganbaru*) and who 'try their best' (*issho kenmei*) at their jobs, though these were mostly women who she felt some affinity with.

When I asked if, other than the colleague she had already mentioned, the freeters she worked with were 'strange people' (*hen na hito*) or 'regular people' (*futsū na hito*) she put her head to one side, eyes down and said with a slight laugh, a pause and a rise in intonation: "Regular, I guess... ...Yes, regular," as if to convince herself that this was the case. After another slight pause: "Everyone tries their best at work. They are not late for work and they work their assigned shifts. ... But, how should I say, they're a bit different. Of course, salaried employees are different..." When I expressed some surprise at this, she replied, "How do I say... erm... they [freeters] don't have the feeling to say, 'because it's my job, never mind'." In her experience, freeters voice their complaints rather than just accepting that they have to do some things that they don't like because it's part of the job. Even if they are paid for overtime they don't want to do the extra hours. The difference, Sayuki thought, might be related to 'responsibility' (*sekinin*). I asked her to clarify what she meant:

> Responsibility, they have it, but less than full-time workers...I think this is because they are young, and because their motivation is different to full-time workers; that they put more emphasis on their private lives than on work ...For example, when there is a coffee tasting session sometimes the store manager asks us to work an extra (paid) thirty minutes. However, often freeters' say 'Erm... because I have plans already...I can't'. It looks like they don't want to do it and that it is 'troublesome' (*komaru*).

However, when the store manager presses on and says 'please' (*onegaishimasu*) they stay behind and work: "But they always seem to have to say to the manager first that they cannot work because of their plans." In Sayuki's view a full-time worker would not do this, but would rather think that it could not be helped (*shōganai*) and would work the extra time without comment. If the appointment that a freeter had was serious, such as a hospital appointment, the store manager would himself think 'never mind' and let them go, but if it was just a plan to meet friends then she thought it was not too much to ask for them to stay an extra thirty minutes or hour.

Although Sayuki considered that there were many ways of thinking about work and freeters' lifestyles she wondered if those freeters who were over the age of

thirty were acceptable: "Socially… are these people ok? … I have this sort of feeling about them. However, when young freeters do many jobs, because they do various jobs, they can have various experiences and that is really good I think." When I asked if she considered that this was really the case: "Yes, but… erm… it's said they [freeters] cannot continue for a long time in one job, they cannot make efforts, maybe. Do you understand?" I replied: "Maybe I understand," so she continued:

> Even if something is not good, freeters try their best, but, that kind of aspect, spiritually/mentally, they depend on others (*amae*). They don't do it strictly, but they do it, without meaning to I guess … There is a good side too [to freeters] but of course, in Japanese society, now there are many freeters. As they get older… They have not much sense of responsibility I suppose. More often than a regular full-time employee they tend to think it is ok to quit…

Thus Sayuki had quite definite views of freeters as generally being less responsible and reliable than regular workers. At the same time she wanted to stress that she knew highly motivated responsible freeters, who were women, that she liked and got on well with.

Other contacts stressed similar views. Ai, a twenty-two year old new employee at a local travel company, stated that:

> Freeters don't work much; they work only when they want and however much they want… … I would not want to date or marry a freeter … … Freeters are okay when they have an aim they are trying to achieve. I suppose if I met a freeter who had a very strong drive to achieve his purpose I would date him, but if he did not know what he wanted to do that would be impossible (*zettai muri da yo*) … working properly (*chanto*) is important (*daiji*).

Marrying a freeter, in Ai's opinion, would mean that there would be no stability (*antei shinai*): "I would always be worried about money and whether he would still have a job from one month to the next." Inherent within her view was that men should be responsible breadwinners who should be able to provide stability.

Continuing on the topic of dating and marriage, Aya, a married thirty year old full-time employee at a large electronics company, stated that although she would consider being with a freeter who had strong motivation she would worry about what the people around her thought. This, she suggested, was due to pride:

> I would compare my freeter husband to my friends' husbands and I would be worried about what they would think … If I had to say my husband was a freeter, I would feel embarrassed … … also, if I was with a freeter there might be problems because I am a full-time salaried employee at a good company. So a male freeter would probably feel inferior (*hikeme*) because my salary would be higher than his. … If we got married we might not be

able to do well in the relationship because I could earn a lot and feed him (*tabesasete*), and I think I might bring up in arguments that his wage was lower than mine, and that would cause problems in the relationship. I would be holding back. It seems like various things in the relationship would not go well.

Thus, although already married and just a hypothetical she effectively ruled that male freeters were unsuitable for marriage with a woman of higher economic means.

Akane, a thirty-something nursery school teacher who had recently quit her job and was doing a Hello-Work supported computer training course, [12] was disdainful and disapproving of freeters and said that she wanted to shake them and tell them to grow up and take responsibility for their lives. When I questioned her further, there emerged a clear gender divide. The ones she wanted to shake and tell to grow up were the men, not the women, who she thought would likely get married and have children and work part-time anyway. Again, here was the view that adult males are supposed to work properly and be responsible in particular ways to fulfil their adult roles. She had no problem with female freeters, due to her assumption that they would marry and have children, and thus fulfil their adult social obligations.

Tetsuya, a twenty four year old man (an ex-full-time cram school teacher who quit due to a stress-related illness from working too much) was also on a Hello Work computer course. He was seriously involved with his girlfriend, whom he was hoping to marry and was actively and aggressively looking for full time employment: "Male freeters who get married are not responsible - they cannot earn enough money to support a family ... They should make efforts to find regular work or they should not get married." For Tetsuya men should be breadwinners. Consequently he was himself making a concerted effort to find another full-time job and to thus be able to conform to ideas of being a responsible adult male.

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[12] Hello Work is the national employment service centre, much like Job Centres in the UK. They provide information services, employment consultation, offer job training, and is also the place where people can apply for unemployment benefit. In Hamamatsu, many local computer training schools (but not limited to these) gain students through Hello Work, and citizens who had been employed full-time for a certain number of years were entitled to discounts for further education; for example, some friends used this to study English at language schools at a discounted rate. Akane had enrolled in a full-time three month course to learn Microsoft Word, Excel and Access. When students successfully complete the course and gain employment the school gets a financial bonus from Hello Work.

Ishi, a full-time employee in his late fifties, was working as a volunteer job coach and supporter at a local NEET support organisation. He suggested that the freeter and NEET 'problem' was in fact due to mothers not wanting to be parted from their children when they are grown up.[13] According to Ishi, this was due to a lifetime of looking after children and then not knowing what to do after their children leave. Thus mothers try and keep their adult children at home, or try and stay involved and give them money if needed instead of telling them to be independent. This was, for him, the crux of the issue. Ishi therefore felt that it was important to work with youth to help them become more confident and independent, and consequently to help them get into employment (much like the government's policy approach).

Almost all the negative comments regarding freeters were aimed at male freeters. There was thus a very clear gender divide in the negative discourse that occurred about freeters, and this was very much due to gendered notions of appropriate work, life course and adulthood. Male freeters were seen to be most spectacularly veering away, according to most of my non-freeter informants, from acceptable male (adult) roles. A number of overlapping ideas are incorporated in these negative views. Male freeters apparently lack motivation, responsibility, and work ethic when compared to full-time employees. They are not good marriage material and according to some, are the result of mothers who do not wish to let go of the apron strings. These views were clearly shown in the media images and in academic scholarship. The media discourse in particular has fed into public consciousness. Indeed many of my non-freeter contacts knew no freeters at all, thereby reinforcing stereotypes that have come to describe freeters. Those people that did know freeters tended not to associate them with the images they themselves described, which often echoed those views spouted in the media.

The Positives:

Positive images of freeters were relatively few and far between. Generally, the only positive things said about freeters were about those who had a clear ambition. For example, Ai stated that those freeters who have a strong drive to achieve a purpose are 'ok' (*daijōbu*). Aya said that she doesn't think that freeters are bad because she thinks that most of them have a dream, or a purpose, and therefore it's okay to work part-time in the morning or evening in their pursuit of

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[13] This is an accusation that has been levelled at Italian mothers as well (2007d).

their goal. Tetsuya, with a slight question in his voice, stated that if freeters have a purpose it's 'probably okay...?' (*ii janai...?*). He thought that it was most likely fun and enjoyable when young, but when thinking about when they got older he thought it will be rough/hard (*kibishii*). Thus, dream chasing when young was thought to be somewhat acceptable.

These positive images are somewhat reminiscent of the positive spin created out of *From A*'s image of artistic, ambitious youth in pursuit of a goal. Other positives mentioned were the freedom that working as a freeter provides; that freeters can take holidays when they want (though unpaid). Moreover, if they can save enough, freeters can travel abroad for long stretches of time as opposed to salaried workers who are generally unable to take more than a one-week holiday at any one time. Friends who worked in full-time jobs stated that if they were to take a two-week holiday they would be told by their bosses that they were no longer needed and not to come back to work. So the perceived freedom of freeters was a source of some envy for people in salaried jobs who, though they wished they could do the same, were afraid of the consequences of doing so and not being able to find another stable job in what they felt was an unforgiving job market.

Thus, the 'original' image of freeters, as denoted by Michishita in *From A* magazine, that pitched freeters in opposition to salarymen and office ladies, remains somewhat in the public consciousness. However, that the negatives outweigh the positives is not surprising given recent media discourses that I outlined above. Those freeters with definite goals (and one's that looked to be achievable) were considered acceptable to most people I knew. I shall illustrate this in more detail later in the thesis when discussing individual case studies. However, freeters themselves also had very definite images of freeters, which often did not seem to accord to descriptions of themselves. I shall briefly explore these in the following sub-section.

'I'm not a typical freeter because...'

Many freeters, well aware of the pervasive negative discourse surrounding them, were quick to try and dissociate from it. This was almost always the case with those freeters who were living independently. They would declare that they were not really typical freeters because they 'can live life properly/correctly' (*chanto seikatsu dekiru*). Usually they stated that they were making money to pay their own way, working hard, saving for what they wanted, doing what they want, and being strong and independent. All attributes associated with being an adult.

Yuka, a freeter in her late twenties, said that her image of a freeter was of someone who lived at home and sponged off their parents, corresponding to pervasive media images and Yamada's (1999) discussion of parasitic youth. She herself was living comfortably (*shikkari seikatsu,* literally a steady lifestyle); she supported herself, paid the rent, the bills, and saved enough for her travels and was therefore not a typical freeter in her mind. Yuka did not want to work as a full-time employee because she did not like the Japanese way of working; that you could not take holiday, that mandatory overtime was expected, and that it was difficult to have a life outside work when so much time and energy is spent working. She wanted the freedom to take time off when she wanted to, and as much as she wanted to. However, as was so often the case when I spoke to female freeters, she thought that she would get married (thereby fulfilling a major transition to adulthood for women) so was not particularly worried about her future. She expected that her husband would be the main breadwinner and she would continue to work part-time, as is the case for the majority of lower middle-class and working-class women.

Kenji, a twenty-four year old musician, also said that he didn't think that he was a regular freeter because he was not only working enough to pay his way, but was also seriously striving for a goal. And Midori, a twenty-one year old freeter, said something similar, that she wasn't like a lot of freeters because she was saving for a purpose (to study in the U.S.), and working a lot of hours to save enough to achieve her goal, whereas most freeters, she thought, only work a few shifts a week. Kenji and Midori were both surrounded by fellow freeters in their working environments. Midori worked in the local Toho Cinema, where I did my fieldwork, and most of the freeters there worked long hours, and most were striving towards some kind of goal. What differentiated Kenji and Midori, in their eyes, was the strong *purpose* that they had. They felt that others working around them were *just* working (even if they also had a goal), but that they were doing something extra and were striving harder than others in pursuit of their goal, and therefore they felt that they were not 'typical' freeters.

Being a 'typical' freeter was, for many of my contacts, very much related to pervasive media and popular discourses which cite that freeters work little and live a relaxed supported life with their parents. Actively striving for a goal and doing part-time work in pursuit of said goal, as per 1980s conception of freeters, was considered an exception to the stereotype. The discourse has emphatically moved on from bubble era ideas. The realities of the job market today, coupled

with the negativity surrounding (particularly male) freeters makes for a precarious position. Working as a freeter is thus a risk; for some a calculated risk, for others not. For those who felt that they were 'not typical freeters', they were attempting to distance themselves from prevalent discourses and justify their working styles, and to show how responsible they were thereby dissociating themselves from images of childish irresponsible freeters. That such justification was necessary speaks volumes, not just of their personal feelings about being dubbed a 'freeter', but also the socio-economic climate of Japan today.

Male freeters in particular were most vociferous about stressing their motivations for being a freeter – they often stated that they were working hard towards a goal –something that was looked on positively by many of my non-freeter informants as the positive images of freeters shows, and also an attribute that is held in high esteem in Japan, as I have shown in the previous chapter when discussing the qualities of masculine men and the links back to samurai ideals. In addition, male freeters were well aware of how they appeared to women. Many who had girlfriends felt distinct pressure to get into regular employment and as the images section of this chapter has shown, women were not shy about coming forward regarding their disapproval of young male freeters. This however, is not only because they are freeters. The following section explores women's views of men in contemporary Japan and shows clearly that they feel that young men, in general, are weaker than men of previous generations.

'Masculine' Men

> My husband is masculine ... like a man I think...his 'atmosphere' is masculine. He has a loud voice, clearly does things, clearly speaks his opinion, is frank and is not indecisive.

<div align="right">(Interview with Saki July 23rd 2007)</div>

So, what makes a masculine man in the eyes of Japanese women? When asking women about this the 'masculine' men that they described to me were those that they perceived had highly masculine attributes; some of which were desired and others not (a detailed discussion of this comes below). Many women would cite Ken Watanabe's character out of the *Last Samurai* or in the film *Iwojima kara no tegami* [Letters from Iwo Jima].[14] According to many of the women I spoke with, Watanabe exhibited (in both his characters and real life) a 'strong spirit'

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[14] Both western made films. See Robertson (1998) on the ideal man as western.

(*seishinteki ni tsuyoi*); a *bushidō* spirit, something that was regarded as particularly masculine, and which also corresponds with aspects of salaryman masculinity as discussed in Chapter 2. Watanabe was cited as highly masculine, not just for his samurai character portrayals, but also due to his personal life where it was well-known that he had fought and overcome cancer. This 'overcoming' or perseverance at something was often stated as being a very masculine quality by the women I spoke with. Another popular person women mentioned was Abe Hiroshi for his portrayals of men in period pieces and his versatile performances of stoic men in such programmes as *Kekkon Dekinai Otoko* ('The man who can't get married') and in *Atto Hōmu Daddo* ('At Home Dad') whose characters exhibited 'typical' traditional masculine qualities; that of being uncommunicative, stoic and chauvinistic.

Other images of 'masculine' men discussed incorporated these ideals. For example, Saki (a thirty year old married part-time worker) stated that her image of a masculine man was that of Kyushu[15] men (*Kyushu danji*) – a strong husband; stronger than the wife. She then went on to list stubborn (*ganko*) and strict (*kibishii*), as further attributes of a masculine man. Her husband was from a Kyushu family and she noted that whilst her husband was not so strict generally, when at his parents' house the above applied – men were to be served, women the servers:

> I think that generally this is ok, it can be good, but if men were like that now women would not stand for it ... But I think that today's young men cannot be like this... Now more women are working long hours outside the home so gender roles have become fifty-fifty. I think that the days of the *Kyushu danji* are finished. Sometimes I think this is a shame (*shōganai ka na-*).

This though is perhaps because her own marriage was one that seemed to follow traditional gender roles. On the topic of gender Saki said: "Men should have courage/nerve (*dokyō*) and women grace/charm (*aikyō*). Men should want to say: "*Yoshi, ganbarō!*" (Ok, let's do it!), and do what needs to be done without hesitation, women should be demure and quiet".[16]

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[15] Kyushu is one of the four islands of Japan, and is located at the southern tip of the main island. It is largely agricultural though there are some major cities, for example, Fukuoka, Nagasaki, and Kita-Kyushu.

[16] To *ganbaru*, or try one's best, is a characteristic that is encouraged in all Japanese people – both men and women. Strictly speaking it is not gendered at all. However, many women suggested (as I show shortly in the chapter) that young men today, and freeters in particular, do not *ganbaru*, and they do not want men who they think won't

Responsibility (*sekinin*) was another trait that often came up. Though linked to what it means to be an adult in Japanese society (in that it was something that women should have as well as men), it came in as a quality that was part of descriptions of what a masculine man is thought to be. Men who were considered unmasculine (*otokorashikunai*) were often described as lacking a sense of responsibility to others, of being weak emotionally/spiritually (*seishinteki ni yowai*), and of lacking the ability to make decisions without help. Changing jobs because of not being happy was also not considered positively, but rather showed a lack of ability to *gaman* and was often linked to being selfish (*wagamama*). Being aggressive however, which is often associated with masculinity was not a desired trait, with almost every woman stating that kindness (*yasashi sa*) was an important attribute in men, so long as he was not too kind and yielded to their every demand, which was considered to be decidedly unmasculine.

Although most women I met, across age groups, would cite men such as Ken Watanabe, or Abe Hiroshi's characters as particularly masculine, younger male idols were not excluded. As Darling-Wolf (2004b: 291) found, though older celebrities were thought to be particularly manly, and younger idols were not "..."the macho type"..." this did not preclude them from still being considered masculine and sexy. The androgyny of many male celebrities and tolerance of it was linked by her informants: "to its presence in traditional cultural texts, including Kabuki theatre and Takarazuka review or even comic books, they appreciated these young celebrities' ability and freedom to define what they perceived as their own unique and cool personality through hairstyles, makeup, or jewellery" (Darling-Wolf 2004b: 291). She goes on to note that though disputed among her informants, androgynous looks and fashion did not suggest that these men were more feminine than the earlier and less androgynous, more typically manly, idols. Thus fashion in and of itself does not suggest masculinity or the lack thereof; rather attitudes, actions and 'spirit' were looked at more to decide whether a man was masculine or not.

'Weak' Men

> The disciplined hardworking types of the immediate post-war period, the supposed latter-day samurai whose selfless efforts helped Japan rise to superpower status, despair that they are being succeeded by a generation of

pull their own weight or make efforts for others. This is strongly related to ideas of adulthood as discussed in the Introduction.

weak and selfish wimps (Henshall 1999: 2).

...younger men were perceived as less reliable, "softer," and more indecisive than their older counterparts (Darling-Wolf 2004b: 296).

I had many comments that support these two quotations. Simply put, women, of varying ages, felt that men had become weaker. The men I met attributed it to be a fact that: in recent decades women have become much stronger and men have not changed, thereby leading to men *appearing* to have gotten weaker. It was a common theme that came up whilst talking to both men and women. Even men in salaried positions were not safe from this criticism, with women I knew noting that young men today often ask them for advice; on work issues and also on personal issues. One woman who I was doing a language exchange with said (in English) that she thought men were weaker because: "Well, for example, when I give advice they seem to get smaller, so I think their spirits are weak."

Another contact, Ai, also commented that men are weaker nowadays than their older counterparts: "In the past men had to work because they were the only breadwinners. For example, my father had to bring home money to support the family – there were five of us. He did not have a choice about working - he had to do it even if he didn't like it..." However, today's young men are now more selective in their work choices: "If they do not like what they are doing they will quit. They don't think that they should continue working... Now young men think that it's ok not to try hard/persevere (*ganbaranakutemo ii*)."

On the whole women did not like this new perceived 'weakness', though some thought it was *kawaii* (cute, a word typically used to describe girls, puppies and other 'harmless' nice things).[17] Most women I spoke with were unsure of the reason why this apparent weakening was happening, but suggested that it was due to the recent strengthening of women and their increased full-time participation in the work-force. This was the same reasoning of my male informants. Moreover, it seems likely that post-war gender-equal education, the rise of the Japanese feminist movement and changes to employment law such as the Equal Employment Opportunities Law have also played a role in changing gender attitudes (Darling-Wolf 2004b).

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[17] See Kinsella (1995) for a discussion on the use of cute by women in Japan.

Freeters came up for more flack than others in conversations about 'weak' men. Their unstable employment and the general idea, discussed earlier in this chapter, that most freeters were drifting along through life with not much idea of what they wanted to do; without exhibiting the ability to make firm decisions, take decisive action, take responsibility, or display other perceived desired masculine traits worked against them. [18] Whilst many women stated that they would consider dating a freeter, almost all of them said categorically that even if they loved a freeter they would not consider marrying him. Furthermore, most said that their families would not let them marry a freeter.

'Ganbaranai' Men

Linked to ideas of young men now being weak, women thought that men no longer know how to '*ganbaru*' (try one's best): One friend stated: "Since starting my [full-time] job I have started to think that men now think that it is ok to not do their best (*ganbaranakutemo ii*)." One of the young men who started at the same time as her was placed in a section that he did not want to be placed in, and, just four months after starting the job he was already talking about quitting and it looked like he would (*yame sō*). She felt that he was *seishinteki ni yowai* (mentally/spiritually weak) as illustrated by his negative attitude and inability to say anything positive. She did not think that all young men were like this, but did suggest that, overall, when thinking about her parents' generation and her own, she thought that young men today are more likely to change what they are not happy with than to *gaman* (be patient/endure) as she thought men of her parents generation did.

Saki also thought that young men don't want to *gaman* anymore: "Men want to keep moving around and playing even after they become an adult, but women are more realistic (*genjitsuteki na*)." She thought that it was this desire to play that led young men to quit jobs soon after starting and in some cases to become freeters. Quitting, she thought, was fine, if they were in their early twenties, single, and without dependants, but as soon as a man has a family she thought that men have to continue on with the same job, no matter what their personal feelings

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[18] Willis (1984) noted something similar in the 1980s in the UK. Young men who were unable to get steady employment became less attractive to young women who were increasingly economically independent themselves. Consequently traditional transitions from education to employment and heterosexual relationships and marriage were disrupted.

about their work or company. So, are expectations of marriage partners changing? What are women looking for if all the men they know are weak?

And, Ideal Partners Are?

> ...the ideal male partner should fulfil the *sankō* or 'three *takai*'s' (*takai* meaning 'high'/'tall'): he should have a *takai* salary, be a graduate of a *takai* status university, and be physically *takai*.

> (Henshall 1999: 5)

Whilst the above statement is often thought to be representative of what many Japanese women want in a man, it was not everything. The most common desired traits that came out of interviews and conversations with women were that they wanted a kind (*yasashii*) man, who had a strong sense of responsibility, and was in stable employment. 'Kindness' meant different things to women of different ages. For older women (in their late 30s and 40s) kind men were considered to be those who would shelter/defend (*mamoru*) the family, whereas for women in their 20s and early 30s this was used in a more literal sense; someone who is gentle and kind. Outside of that they wanted men who could make decisions when decisions needed to be made (*kimeru tokoro kimeru hoshii*), someone they could communicate and share hobbies with, and someone they could depend on (*tayoreru*). Many also wanted someone who did things reliably, was steady, trustworthy (*shikkari shite iru*), and who would do things properly (*chanto*) and be responsible. Another desired quality was a calm (*odayaka*) man, who was not aggressive or pushy in any way.

Kawanishi (1999) states that there appears to be a gap between young men and women's expectations of their future spouses. Women are said to be looking to have marriages that are based on companionship, understanding and affection whereas young men appear to still want to have relationships based on the traditional division of gender roles. Whilst this was the case for the majority of men and women I met in Hamamatsu, it oversimplifies: women still (strongly) expressed the idea and desire that men needed to *also* have secure employment, financial security, and be reliable. Just being companionable, understanding and kind was not enough.[19]

Men's ideas were highly affected by what they thought that women want.

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[19] See Donner (2002, 2008) for marital expectations and the role of love marriages in India, and Ahearn (2001) for Nepal.

According to Yamaguchi (1995) the gap between marriage expectations and alleged disillusionment on the part of women is beginning to make younger men aware of the fact that they cannot act in the same ways their fathers did in the domestic sphere if they wish to get married (ibid.). I remain sceptical about this. I met men who spoke of how they wished for gender-equal relationships, to split everything fifty-fifty, but when pressed a little further the vast majority of them maintained that whilst this is what they would like, it was an *ideal* and the reality would likely be different. They envisaged that they would still be expected to be the main breadwinner and to support any family that they made. Whilst they were happy for their wives to work, they also maintained that if economically possible they wanted their wives to stay at home raising the children – the middle-class ideal that is becoming economically more distant for many. Moreover, many women I knew, both unmarried and married, conceded that whilst fifty-fifty was what they wanted, it was generally not possible. Many said that this was because men are still expected to work long hours and do service overtime'[20] and because most men do not want to do equal chores in the home. I met many young men of various backgrounds and education who still wanted traditional gender roles after marriage.

Whilst all the women I spoke with expressed a desire for chores to be split fifty-fifty, they all said that it was an ideal and that the likelihood of it happening was slim. It was further illustrated how much this was an ideal, rather than a reality, when they discovered that my boyfriend did the vast majority of the cooking. Initially they would be surprised that he was Japanese and a lengthy conversation would usually ensue asking about how we met, what he was like, and *why* was I with a Japanese man? When they discovered that we lived together they would ask about cooking and chores. As soon as they heard that he did the majority of the cooking they would look shocked and either state outright with a sigh that it was *rabu rabu shite iru ne* (that's love isn't it?), or that he was *yasashii* (kind). All reactions were that this was not the norm. I was often surprised at both these reactions and the negative portrayal of young Japanese men, though it could have been that, as Darling-Wolf notes, they may have been "attempting to draw a picture of the Japanese cultural environment for a Western woman to see"

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[20] This is overtime that is not paid. Many people I knew in full-time *seishain* positions were expected to stay in the office until their boss left. Most did not leave before 7 p.m. at the very earliest and many regularly left at 9 or 10 p.m.

(Darling-Wolf 2004b: 298). Whilst many of the young men I knew did cook, few professed to know more than a smattering of meals they could prepare, and it was generally assumed that women do the cooking and men the eating.[21] When they came across a Japanese man that was the instigator of cooking in the domestic sphere they regarded him as being unusual and attributed his behaviour to being 'in love' or to kindness. None of them considered that he enjoyed cooking, or that he could cook better than me. Moreover, wanting a man to do *all* the cooking or chores was not once mentioned. Thus their desire for a fifty-fifty split in chores was really just that; a desire that they didn't really expect to have fulfilled. Women clearly wanted men who were capable of providing financial security, who were reliable and who were strong mentally and emotionally. They also wanted someone with whom they could enjoy their spare time, share hobbies, and have companionship and good communication.

Though my female contacts did not want the typically masculine men illustrated in the 'Masculine Men' section, they also did not want weak, ineffective or unreliable men with unstable employment. Though they did not think *all* young Japanese men were weak, there was still a general consensus that on the whole, compared to previous generations, young men did not possess the *same* strength of spirit that was thought to have existed in older men. This, I would suggest, is intimately tied in with the bursting of the economic bubble, the resultant recession, changing job market and limited opportunities for 'lifetime employment', and the increased calls (in the media) for people to think about what they want to do, to be more individualistic and 'follow their dreams' (Mathews 2003).[22] With companies not able to offer the same perks as during the high period of economic growth that young men's fathers experienced it seems more prudent for workers to get what they can from a company before moving on, hopefully to something better. This lack of loyalty was often seen as a lack of *ganbaru* spirit by women in Hamamatsu who, for the most part, still wanted to marry someone who would enable them to live a comfortable life and maintain

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[21] Although many famous chefs in restaurants are men, they are cooking as a profession, and they are cooking in the public (*soto*) sphere. For an interesting look at food and gender see Aoyama (2003).

[22] Ironically, whilst many freeters are doing just that, trying to 'follow their dreams', they get a lot of flak for it with people dubbing them irresponsible if they are in their late twenties and early thirties and still trying to follow their dreams. See Chapters 4 and 5 for more discussion of this.

their current consumption levels.

Conclusion

The bursting of the economic bubble and the long recession that followed has clearly had significant repercussions on how freeters are viewed within Japanese society. Coming into public prominence in the late 1980s at a time of national prosperity, and commended for their alternative lifestyles, they have since slid ever downwards in public estimation. After the economic bubble burst the recession began (and seemingly never-endingly continued) and public concern about public resources, social welfare and the pension system, in the face of an aging and declining population, spurred public damnation of these 'irresponsible' youth. Freeters became a convenient target for national worries about the economy, the changing employment environment and the future of the nation. This sea-change in popular opinion is particularly evident in the media coverage of freeters and is especially obvious when comparing Japanese media coverage of freeters to that of the foreign press. The arguments put forward in the press and in academia have not only influenced the Japanese government, as can be seen by their attempts to give a conclusive definition to freeters, and their attempts to write and implement policies at improving youth's so-called lack of work ethic, but have also clearly become part of regular people's awareness and concerns. Yet, it is also clear that much of the negativity that surrounds male freeters is derived from gendered ideas of what men are supposed to do and how they are supposed to be. Freeters, by their structural position in the economy, and due to the often overwhelmingly negative discourse surrounding them, are disadvantaged from the outset – not considered to be responsible, willing to endure (*gaman*), or try their best (*ganbaru*). Not only does this highlight the difficulties that male freeters face in being seen as masculine and marriageable, but also illustrates the difficulties that freeters face in attaining full adulthood. But enough of discourses and others' views of freeters. The following chapter begins to look in detail at individual freeters' lives.

Chapter 4: Youth and the Quest for Experience

This chapter will highlight and explore how the concept of 'youth' was employed and negotiated by young male freeters in Hamamatsu. Through the use of two main case studies I explore how, in their youth, they engaged with, resisted and rejected the dominant discourses of masculinity and adult manhood. Yet, at the same time they held these very ideals in tension with their own aspirations when they looked to the future. Critically, they positioned themselves as still 'in the making', and therefore somewhat outside of mainstream expectations.

The case studies aim to initially give a brief snapshot of these men's lives; who they are, where they come from, family relationships, educational background, work experience, romantic relationships and their future aspirations and dreams. I then provide a discussion of how they negotiate their current situations and future aspirations alongside notions of appropriate manhood and appropriate working styles. I explore how they mobilise ideas of youth to explain and give themselves space to pursue their current dreams. Furthermore, I show how, in this liminal space of youth that they have appropriated, they are beginning to somewhat prepare themselves for (and accept/reject) the expectations of wider Japanese society (to be 'responsible' hard-working married men), whilst also pursuing their interests. Interspersed throughout this discussion I provide supporting evidence from other interviews and conversations.

Kazuyuki

Kazuyuki was 21 years old when we met. Our first meeting was at the cinema when I went for a job interview in December 2006. The manager had requested that I ask a member of staff to call him when I arrived because his work was focused in the office rather than the public floor area. When I arrived I went to the counter of the Store which was devoid of customers. I approached Kazuyuki, a fresh-faced approachable looking young man with long curly hair (tied back), big almond shaped brown eyes and high cheekbones. I told him that I was there for an interview and asked him to let the manager know that I had arrived. His eyes widened and he asked for clarification by stating back to me, with a slight question in his voice, that I was there for the interview? When he realised that this was the case he got onto the *musen* (wireless radio), still looking somewhat bemused, to let the manager know I was there. After getting the job I was looking forward to chatting with him, but for the first three or four months he was very shy whenever I would greet him or try to strike up a conversation. This changed,

however, after Koji, a co-worker whom I knew well (who had been working in the cinema for a few years) transferred into the Store section in April 2007. They were soon working many shifts together, or had shifts that overlapped[1] and became friends, which facilitated more interaction between us. Kazuyuki gradually became much less shy and started to initiate conversations as we passed each other whilst going about our duties during shifts.

Kazuyuki's style was somewhat different to that of other young workers at the cinema. Long hair (that is shoulder-length or longer) is quite rare on men in Japan,[2] so I was curious to see what he dressed like outside the cinema. I was not disappointed. One sunny Saturday afternoon we met up at a local coffee-shop for an informal interview. When I arrived he was lounging on a chair outside, iPod earphones snugly sitting in his ears, watching the world go by. When I was almost at the table he noticed me, grinned and removed his earphones slowly giving me a casual nod and a slow "uiissu"; an informal greeting common among young co-workers. He wore black jeans turned up to three quarter length, converses, oversized 80s style sunglasses (all the rage in 2007), a flat cap (again 80s style sporting a square pink and blue pattern adorning the visor) and lots of jewellery. He regularly wore two necklaces – one with a blue opal, the other featuring a gold sneaker; a large gold signet ring on the first finger of his right hand; a large watch on the left wrist; and three earrings – a large silver dollar sign in his right ear, and a small stud, plus a large gold edged zircon hoop in his left. Finishing the look was an iPod shuffle hanging around his neck. He looked the epitome of the break-dancers I had seen around, but with marginally less bling. The bag he was carrying with him (we met up before he left for a weekend trip with friends) also looked like it came from the 80s. All in all I was reminded somewhat of the style

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[1] There are not many workers assigned to the Store – it is so small that only one person was needed to work each shift on weekdays. Other members of staff would be asked to pop in to cover the staff members' break. This was also a time when the cinema was generally short-staffed so Kazuyuki and Koji were often called on to work six, and sometimes seven, shifts a week, sometimes at ten hours (or more) a shift. Students and *pāto* had other demands on their time, but freeters were perceived to be 'free' and therefore available for covering shifts. Furthermore, most were happy to be able to receive more money as a result.

[2] Long hair on men is not allowed by schools and usually is also not allowed in companies. Therefore men with long hair are often either students, self-employed, or in an artistic trade. Young men usually have to cut their hair short when job hunting for full-time positions and dye it back to black if they had it any other colour. Part-time workers in the service industry have more leeway for their hairstyles. The cinema only stipulated that all hair should be tied neatly back, be black in colour, and that no jewellery was worn during work hours.

seen in popular US 80s sitcoms, particularly *The Fresh Prince of Belle Air*.

Family background

Kazuyuki lived with his father, grandfather and grandmother in a quiet area of Hamamatsu in a rented apartment. His sister had, until recently, also lived with them, but a few months before she had moved to Tokyo to work as a ballet teacher. I was unable to ascertain what his father did for a living, except that he worked in a company as a salaried worker, but from other comments Kazuyuki made (for example, about being unable to study abroad due to lack of money) and the fact that they lived in a rented apartment, it is possible to assume that they were a lower-middle-class family. His mother had left them ("*nigeta*" (run away)) when he was thirteen and he had had limited contact with her since. Until recently they had been in contact, but she had since moved and they had lost contact. Because of what happened with his mother he had come to see his father in a new light, and spoke of his great respect for him, for bringing both him and his sister up.[3] He had lived with his father and grandparents except for the two years he spent studying in Nagoya: "I feel that I have a good relationship with them. And I like living with them. My father is really cool (*kakko ii*)." He attributed this largely to the way his father responded when faced with bringing them up. Moreover, Kazuyuki felt that his father implicitly supported his endeavours and wanted him to do something that will make him happy.

Kazuyuki's relationship with his sister (who was three years older than him) was also very close: "we are more like friends than siblings – we have similar hobbies and interests; we often share music with each other... I love break-dancing and she does ballet." Consequently his family background was overall very supportive.

Education and Employment

After graduating from high school Kazuyuki moved to the nearby city of Nagoya (an hour and a half by regular train, or just forty minutes on the bullet train from Hamamatsu), to go to a *senmon gakkō* (vocational college) to major in English. Asked why he decided to study English he said only that he liked the language and wanted to be able to communicate well. However, Kazuyuki never used it in

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[3] Though his father was the single parent his grandmother, in particular, was also on hand. She did most of the day-to-day cooking, though Kazuyuki stressed that his father also cooked.

any way, even when I sometimes struggled to communicate something well in Japanese, and he gave no indication that he spoke English. Neither he nor his family had had the money to be able to finance study abroad, as many of his fellow course mates had done, so he felt quite insecure about his English ability. Much of his initial shyness around me seemed to stem from this fact. Even when out drinking he would remain very shy about it, made worse by the fact that co-workers would try to pressure him into using English because they were curious to know what his language ability was like.

Kazuyuki had worked in a cafe whilst a student in Nagoya. He was enthusiastic when describing the place, saying that it had a really relaxed atmosphere: "The floors were just of wood so it had a bit of a dirty feeling (*kitanai kanji*), but it is the kind of place where you can sit for a long time and relax. I like that a lot." The walls were lined with film postcards and there were lots of different sofas: "I really liked working there, and if they needed people again and I am in Nagoya I hope I could work for them again."

He had started working at the cinema after returning from Nagoya in April 2006: "Generally I like working here, but I wish I had been put in a different section." The Store is, as already described, quite lonely. Moreover, it was the only section where you had to stand the entire day without the opportunity to move much.[4] Although he generally appreciated the working atmosphere, Kazuyuki also felt that the cinema was sometimes a bit like a high school, which, he implied, was not so good.[5] He was generally quite quiet with co-workers: friendly but seemingly uninvolved in any of the cliques or politics, preferring rather to hold back: "If I meet someone I think I could be friends with I wait for them to open themselves first, and then I open up." Kazuyuki therefore did not have any close friends at the cinema, though he had people he was friendly with and whom he considered to somewhat be friends with, but they did not generally interact outside of the cinema unless at staff organised parties. This could also be because

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[4] Concessions staff were always moving backwards and forwards filling food and drink orders. Box office staff had chairs, Floor staff were often on the move, doing, amongst other things, cleaning cinema's at the end of screenings and checking the customer bathrooms, and Projection staff were always moving between projectors loading up and checking films. Store staff had limited chances to move around, making shifts feel longer (according to Kazuyuki and Koji).

[5] He did not like the cliques and politics that were endemic in the cinema. Furthermore, many of the workers were quite young students who had not long finished high school.

he worked in the Store and therefore had less chance to interact with others given that his shifts were usually worked alone. Although he was not planning to remain with the cinema, and although his job was not one that he particularly enjoyed due to its lonely nature, he did feel happy working at the cinema: "... I feel supported here. The manager often listens about what I want to do and gives me advice."

Kazuyuki stressed that in life he wanted to do a job that he enjoyed: "I think I will be most happy if I do a job that I have an interest in. One that is more like a hobby than a job." When I asked if he would ever want to work like a salaryman he physically recoiled in his chair and adamantly said: "No, no, I can't imagine that! ... I can't work like that – self-expression is not possible ... I absolutely cannot think about it!"

Aspirations/plans

At the end of July 2007 Kazuyuki was planning to move back to Nagoya. Most of his close friends still lived there, so he was looking for a place to share with two friends from college. His reasons for moving were to pursue his break-dancing: "The only thing that is not so good here [at the cinema] is that often my shifts end late [at around midnight on weekdays or 1.30 a.m. on Saturdays] and then I miss the dance practices that my friends do." Although he danced in his spare time in Hamamatsu[6] he felt he was not practising as much as he wanted to because of his work.

Although much of his time was taken up by working at the cinema to earn and save money his main interest was break-dancing. Kazuyuki started dancing when he was sixteen after having seen a film about break-dancers that pitted dancers from East Japan against those from West Japan: "I saw them spinning on their heads and I thought it would be fun to do it. So I started trying." His aim was to take his break-dancing as far as he could whilst still young:

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[6] Though there was a studio the dancers hired cheaply in the late evenings after all dance classes were finished, they could also often be seen practising opposite the shopping centre the cinema was located in, on a small raised pavement section in front of a lettings agency. This pavement area was separate from the main pedestrian pavement and not busy once the offices had closed for the evening. In the evenings (from around 8 p.m. onwards) there would often be groups of guys practising head-spins and the like. I saw him there only once, on a Friday evening at around 11 p.m. We stopped and chatted for a while and though I smiled at his group he didn't introduce me to them, perhaps because I was with someone and Kazuyuki seemed to be conscious that I had been going somewhere before I saw him.

> I don't have much chance to dance here – most of my friends that I dance with are still in Nagoya. That's why I want to move there ...I will have more time to practice. I want to practice every day. ...Maybe we [Kazuyuki and the friends he was to move in with] will be able to practice at home too.

Whilst Kazuyuki wanted to take his dancing as far as he could, he also felt that he was not good enough to be selected as a professional dancer. Moreover: "I want to dance, but it is very difficult to be professional. I don't think it is possible for me. And I think sometimes that maybe, erm, maybe I don't want to be a professional."

Aside from dancing, opening a café was also an aspiration for the future. His ideal cafe was somewhere with lots of different sofas and a relaxed atmosphere, with the same customers coming in and becoming regulars:

> I think I need to study more, about cafes, before I open one. So if I can, I want to try and work in my old cafe in Nagoya when I move...I don't want to transfer to the Nagoya branch of the cinema because I will just have the same problem – late shifts and less chance to dance ... also I don't enjoy the work that much. I want to work somewhere that has charm and that is fashionable (*oshare*). I don't want to work somewhere where there is no real atmosphere.

Kazuyuki's ideas of work and of doing something that he wanted to do seem to have been somewhat encouraged by the support of his family: "My dad told me that it is best to do something that makes me happy. Honestly, it made me cry when he said that – but not in front of him. He hasn't said anything about my plans to move, but I think that he supports me. I really appreciate that, it helps me."

Romance and women

Kazuyuki's original plan of relocating to Nagoya was to move there with his girlfriend, also a freeter. They had been together for about a year and a half, but plans to move in together had recently changed because she had not managed to save any money: "I think that maybe she doesn't really want to move... that is why she hasn't saved anything. ...Maybe she will move later, after she has saved some money." He was not, however, that hopeful: "We don't speak so much anymore. It is not going very well." I asked him what she was like:

> She's selfish ... It's probably a good thing that she didn't save any money. ...Now I think that it is better for us not to live together. I want to go out with friends, enjoy myself. But if she is at home she will worry about where I am and who I am with... that is not so good. Lately I am thinking that we do not suit each other. It would be good if we could argue, but when there is a problem she does not talk to me or say anything. It would be better if we could talk about the problem, but it is not possible. ...I want someone to feel comfortable with (*iyashii*). If we split up I want to stay single. I want to concentrate on dancing...

When talking about relationships Kazuyuki mentioned a couple of times the word *iyashii* which also means to heal, cure or remove (the pain). Kazuyuki wanted to be with someone who he could be calm with, who would help him forget when something bad happened, and someone he could enjoy talking with. He asked me what I looked for and when I said that I want someone to support me in my choices he excitedly replied:

> Right, me too! ...I want to do the things that I want to do. I want to do what I want, whatever people say ... I really want to make myself that way. That is what I ask [of my partner] as well. I want to make my own path (*jibun no michi wo tsukuritai*), so I don't know if I want to get married in the future. I think I will not be ready until I am in my thirties...

One of his friends was soon to be married and Kazuyuki was a little sad about it:

> When you get married your family becomes the most important thing, not your friends. ...He will not be able to come out with us much anymore. Maybe he will have children soon. ...I think I need to have many experiences before I have children. To be honest, I'm not sure if I will have any or not.

Kazuyuki really aspired to be like his father, but felt that he may never be as good a man, or father, as him. He seemed to want to ensure that he had had enough life experience as well as had enough independence and freedom before thinking about whether to settle down and have children.

Though young and 'hip' Kazuyuki was quite traditional in his views of gender roles (as seen by the expectation that his friend would stop socialising once married) and was adamant that he would never have children outside of marriage. This reticence, though understandable at age 21 was also, I would suggest, a sign that he wanted to be/feel like he was responsible and mature before having a family and children. He had seen how his father coped as a single father and felt strongly that children should not be brought up outside of marriage.

Freeterism

"I'm a freeter," Kazuyuki commented:

> I work in a part-time job, I get paid hourly, I have no benefits like paid holiday, and I can choose how much and when I work... Also, I could quit easily if I want. Recently I said to the manager that I was going to quit next month, but then I realised that I needed to save some extra money... the manager is very supportive; he said that it wasn't a problem and that I can stay as long as I like.

Although he thought he was a freeter he also considered his current position to be transitory: "I want to have many experiences whilst I am young, and find what is enjoyable work. I want to make my own path. But I don't think I will be a freeter

forever. But now, I think it is important to make my own path." His ideas of how to actually further his dreams of opening a café and being a break-dancer were ambiguous and the way he spoke about doing it seemed to imply that he himself was unsure about whether he would ever do it.

As my fieldwork was coming to an end, problems in securing a guarantor for the apartment he and his friends had found meant that they had to give up the apartment they had found in Nagoya. Moreover one friend, whose father was supposed to be the guarantor for the apartment, pulled out on the plan of living together entirely, apparently due to pressure from his father. This meant that Kazuyuki was unable to afford to move to Nagoya to pursue his plans and so he began thinking of moving to Tokyo instead. He worked for a couple of extra months at the cinema to save more money whilst deliberating whether to continue with his plan of moving.

Kazuyuki was a fairly typical young man, similar to many of the students who were our co-workers who were also somewhat unsure about their course in life. However, he stood out from many of these students because of his desire and determination to do work that he enjoyed and felt would make him happy. Most young people I met who were job-hunting were 'realistic' about having to do jobs that were perhaps not really what they wanted to do. Kazuyuki, like many of the young freeters I knew, seemed unprepared to settle.

Yet, even with this desire, and with wanting to pursue break-dancing he did not seem to be overly clear about how he was going to do this. Furthermore, his dream of opening his own café also seemed somewhat of a pipe-dream. When we were out having drinks one evening it came up, and Kazuyuki suggested that I could open a café and he would work in it for me. When I initially said that that sounded fun and that he should be the manager he seemed really keen. However, given that he had said before that one of his aims was to be the owner of a café I reversed the idea and suggested that he should open it and I would be his manager instead. At this he beamed at me and then made me shake on it that it would happen. Even with this enthusiasm, it seemed more of a youthful hope, given that he had no capital to make it happen.

Kazuyuki's ideas and current thinking about marriage seemed to be one of loss: loss of friendships and freedom. He stressed a few times that he was unsure whether he would ever get married. This was, for him, a time of freedom and for

having new experiences. These ideas validated his desire to go back to Nagoya and pursue his dreams. Doing what he wants to do, rather than what many of his non-freeter peers were doing (for example, job-hunting or working in stable jobs already) was important to him and was important to how he constructed ideas about himself, his future and possible partners.

In this section I have tried to show a brief snap-shot of Kazuyuki's life in order to later start to contextualise and analyse his choices in respect of being a freeter, being a 'man' and his visions of the future. I will now present a similarly structured case-study of Shiro, before looking at Kazuyuki and Shiro together at the end of the chapter to explore implications on the discourse of youth, Japanese life courses and masculinity.

Shiro

Shiro was 22 years old. We initially met at an afternoon seminar which was held by a local NPO whose aim was to help NEETs into employment. Initially Shiro and his friend sat next to me; however, this lasted only a few moments before they moved closer to the speaker. On first glance I thought that perhaps they were students attached to the university of the speaker (who was a professor in criminology as well as the head of the NPO), but neither were in college or university. Shiro was wearing a camouflage style t-shirt and jeans that were a little too short. He had closely cropped hair, with quite a round and serious looking face. After the seminar ended I stood near the doorway waiting to meet the professor and noticed them loitering just outside the room. Contrary to my first impression that they were students of the professor I then thought that they looked more like high school students. This was largely due to their hesitant body language and the way they stood nervously outside the main hall. I approached them and asked if they were also waiting to talk to the speaker. They both looked surprised that I had spoken to them. Shiro replied that they were not; his friend said nothing and looked at the floor. After a very short chat I excused myself to approach the professor and Shiro wished me luck.

When I was leaving I passed them in the hallway, said goodbye, and went outside to wait for the bus. Shortly after Shiro came running out to meet me. He asked me what I had talked to the professor about and when I said that I was doing research on freeters and had asked the professor about his NPO and if he also worked with freeters, he said: "Oh, but I'm a freeter!! ... I'm working part-time growing and harvesting vegetables, so I am a freeter." At that point the bus pulled

up. Shiro became a little agitated and said that I should get on it and not miss it, so I pulled out a business card and gave it to him, saying that if he wanted to meet up then to please contact me. As the doors closed I kicked myself when I realised that I didn't even know his name, and had not had time to get his contact details. However, a week later a short letter, written on Mickey Mouse paper and enclosed in a Mickey Mouse envelope, arrived through my door. He wrote that he was glad to have met me the previous week and that if I wanted to meet and talk with him then to please contact him. He gave no phone number (and I found out later that he had no mobile phone, and, at that point, no computer), so I wrote back including my phone number, which had been on my business card as well.

A few days later Shiro rang me and we arranged a time to meet, and two weeks after our initial meeting we met up for an afternoon. He was initially quite quiet and shy when we met and was wearing the same old-looking jeans which were a bit too short, a blue t-shirt and a baseball cap that was on backwards. Shiro came cycling up on his bicycle to our agreed meeting place outside City Hall and we ventured into the grounds of the Castle Park[7] for a picnic lunch. On entering the park I started to steer us towards a more crowded area as I was unsure about his reasons for meeting me so thought it best if we were in a more populated area of the park, but he said that he would prefer somewhere quieter. We ended up in a relatively secluded area where only a small family had gathered. The more we talked, the more relaxed he became and in the end we chatted for over three hours that day. I anticipated that he would be more relaxed each time we met, but every time it happened the same way: initially he would seem nervous and a bit quiet, but as soon as we were walking (or sitting) he would relax and become increasingly chatty.

Family background

Shiro lived in a rural area of Hamamatsu with his parents and younger brother. His parents owned and ran a small car parts factory which employed about twenty workers. His mother was basically a housewife, but sometimes helped out at the factory when needed. They were clearly a middle-class family, owning a small factory, their house and a small plot of land. His brother was in the last year of high school, and his grandmother also lived with them.

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[7] Just behind Hamamatsu City Hall there is a park in which Hamamatsu Castle is situated. It sits atop a small hill a short walk from the city centre.

Shiro had a good relationship with his parents: "I feel lucky and blessed (*marete iru*)... most parents tell their sons that they have to work properly (*chanto hatarakereba narenai*), but my parents want me to do something that I like, that I enjoy." Yet his relationship with his family had not always been so good: "My parents are kind, and now I feel safe and secure, but when I was younger I did not." Whilst walking around a newer part of the city after having had tea and Japanese sweets he asked about my family. After hearing more about them Shiro started to talk in more depth about his family:

> I always thought it was a little strange that my surname was different, but I was shocked when I found out that my father is not really my father... Just after I was born my parents got divorced. A couple of years later, when I was three, my mother married again. My step-father agreed to take me as his own.[8]

He had seen his biological father sometimes when he was small, but seemed not to have really recognised him as his father, and when he was seven his father died. Shiro did not say how, and seemed unwilling to divulge further details, except to say: "My father's way of thinking was 'dark' (*kurai*). Sometimes I wonder if that is why my thoughts are sometimes dark." Most of his friends do not know about his family background so the majority of people think that his step-father is his biological father. Shiro prefers to keep it that way, thinking that people will judge him in some way if they know the truth. He confessed that he would never have told me about it if I had not first opened up about my own family background when he asked (cf. Bestor, et al. 2003).

When growing up Shiro had a difficult relationship with his younger brother, who he said used to bully him (*ijimerareta*), but now that they are older they get on better, though they are not close. His brother was, Shiro said, very different to him – more outgoing, confident and communicative with people. Although he was close to his mother in particular Shiro also seemed to distance himself from the family and other people, possibly because of his family history. He mentioned a couple of times that he felt as if he did not quite fit when he was growing up and that this had had an effect on his confidence and feelings of acceptance in the

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[8] Shiro would have remained registered on his biological father's *koseki* (family register) unless formally adopted by his stepfather, which never happened. The household is the basic unit of the *koseki*, not the individual. "The records of each individual's gender, birthplace, date of birth, parent's names, position among siblings, marriage, and divorce are kept in detail in each household *koseki* and filed in the local municipal office" (Sugimoto 2003: 136).

family and outside. He was much more of a quiet introverted child, interested in *anime* and growing plants and vegetables; all things to be done in isolation, involving no social involvement. These interests remained with him and took up the majority of his free time.

Education and Employment

Shiro graduated from a local agricultural high school (*nōgyō koko*). He wanted to study there instead of going to a more academically focused school because from a young age he loved working with plants and growing vegetables. However, whilst at school his plan was actually to become a voice actor for *anime*. After graduating he moved to Tokyo to a *senmon gakkō* that focused specifically on training voice actors/dubbers (*seiyū*). A variety of subjects were covered and he took classes in performance, mime, narration, and even ballet. When talking about the course Shiro's eyes lit up and he became animated. However, after a year of living and studying in Tokyo he decided to return to Hamamatsu:

> There are many schools in Tokyo training voice actors and the classes were fun, but I did not like living in Tokyo. It was too big and there is no nature there ... I did not really make any friends. I had a mobile phone because I thought that it was the only way to keep in touch with people, but I kept it switched off most of the time. I did not like that people could contact me easily, whenever they wanted to.

Shiro seemed to like keeping boundaries between himself and other people, and perhaps this contributed to his loneliness whilst living in Tokyo.[9] He also found it hard being amongst so many buildings with limited amounts of greenery, and said that he wanted to be back in nature (*shizen*) where he could see the stars at night and hear the frogs croaking in nearby fields.

After returning to Hamamatsu, Shiro worked at two places helping with the planting and harvesting of small-scale organic vegetables. Both places were family run and after we had met a few times he described the jobs as being more like training than 'real' jobs. They were flexible, paid little (3000 yen - about £15 - a day) and were more educational (he felt) in teaching him about good growing techniques than actual employment. Laughingly Shiro said: "I suppose that means I am not a 'proper' freeter." For the majority of the year he worked at these two farms about four times a week and also cultivated vegetables on a relatively

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[9] Much communication happens through cell-phones among young people in Japan (cf. Gottlieb and McLelland 2003; Ishii 2006)

large plot of land (10m by 70m) outside his family house:

> I think it is better for people to do jobs that they like. I do not want to be a salaryman. Salarymen have to endure a lot for good money. I think money is not so important. Doing something that I enjoy, and something that is a good experience, is more important for me.

As the year progressed there were a number of changes in Shiro's work life. He took the month of February off to go to the island of Shikoku to walk the old pilgrimage route of 88 Temples which are situated around the island.[10] As he walked the route he started thinking about the necessity of working to earn money and after returning from the trip decided that he wanted more experiences and wanted to set himself a challenge. "I want to grow vegetables, but to make money I also have to sell them... I don't think I can do that. I realised that I need to increase my confidence..." Consequently, when he got back at the end of February, he went to Hello Work and the Young Job Station and found a position in a bread factory located close to his home. He started working in March 2007.

Shiro originally took the job because the shifts advertised were early morning (from 4 a.m. to midday), so he thought that he could work in the mornings and then work in the fields in the afternoon to look after the vegetables he grew at the family home. However, he soon realized that physically he was not able to do both because he was exhausted each day. He tried working this way for about two months before changing his shifts: he worked 8.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. at the bread factory and from 5-7 p.m. in the fields which he felt was less exhausting then going into work at 4 a.m.: "Working at the factory is easier than working in the fields and less tiring, but I do not get much satisfaction from it." The people he worked with were nice, but he didn't really speak with them and didn't eat lunch with them. Instead he kept himself to himself.

Shiro described getting his first pay-check with excitement; the first thing he did was buy a cheap laptop whereupon he was then able to post comments on *anime* sites and interact a little with other fans of the *anime* he liked. He seemed to get quite into it, though e-mailing was something that he did little of.

When we met again in June, Shiro mentioned that he planned to quit the job at the bread factory the following month: "I want to experience a variety of different jobs. And I think that being a *haken* worker will be a good opportunity. ...I want a

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[10] He took a trip each year in January and February whilst working in the fields. The year before he had gone to Okinawa to learn more about organic farming.

job where I do not have to communicate with other people much. But, I think I want to try different kinds of jobs." Although he professed to having had little interaction with his co-workers at the bread factory he was keen for even less. At the time of quitting Shiro had worked there for four months, and it is possible that he felt more pressure by being a more established worker, something that I also experienced the longer I worked at the cinema.[11]

After quitting the bread factory in July Shiro joined a *haken kaisha* (temping agency). His first job lasted just three days. He was given a job working in a storeroom and it was his responsibility to receive the stock when it was delivered, deal with the paperwork, and then stack-up the stock in the correct places. When I asked what had happened he explained:

> Everyone was very quick and good at their jobs, and I was not. The people were not unfriendly, but they were also not particularly friendly either. I thought that they might be angry ... well, maybe not angry, maybe they were just concentrating on their jobs. Anyway, I felt they were not very approachable. ...I did not feel comfortable and I felt that I was not able to do the job, so I quit.

Shiro seemed a little embarrassed that he had quit so soon and made reference a couple of times to how he admired that I was still working at the cinema. He was also reminded how, whilst away in Shikoku, his intense feelings of loneliness had made him want to quit the pilgrimage. This led to him feeling very deflated and like he was a quitter. As Statler notes in his book, *The Japanese pilgrimage*: "...what is important is not the destination but the act of getting there, not the goal, but the going. The Path is the goal itself" (Statler 1983: 372). Even after I had pointed out that finishing the entire route was also a real accomplishment in itself (after all it is a total of 1,400 kilometres), and he had walked the entire way alone in just less than a month, Shiro kept saying that it was only because he had promised people that he would finish that he had done so:

> One day I met an older lady (*obasan*) who ran an inn along the route. I stayed there the night. The next day she gave me snacks when I was leaving to keep up my energy. I promised her that I would finish it, even though it was so hard. Even though I promised I really wanted to quit so I went as quickly as I could. I thought that if I went any slower I would give up.

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[11] In the cinema there was a quick turnover from being a newcomer to being someone else's *sempai* (senior). This entailed more responsibility and an expectation from managers that you can help and support newer workers in the job. It is likely that Shiro found this transition from new worker to *sempai* a difficult one and this perhaps precipitated his decision to find alternative work.

The manner in which he had accomplished the route was therefore quite against what he had hoped he would achieve, which was greater confidence in himself and an opportunity to calmly ponder his life and his future. When I asked if he would consider walking it again he smiled and said that he wouldn't at all, but that if he ever did do it again he would do it with someone: "Sometimes it was quite scary. There were strange people (*hen na hito*) on the route who would rob people. One day a man came up to me, he was really odd and I was scared, so I ran away."

Quitting the storeroom job seemed to bring up his feelings about wanting to quit the pilgrimage and that made Shiro further question his own abilities. Moreover, the job required more communication with co-workers and more interaction with people; the fact that he had wanted a job that involved less communication was, I think, what tipped the balance to quit, rather than the content of the job itself. After leaving this job he returned to his old agricultural employers and worked in the fields until the temp company contacted him again with the next job opportunity, which happened in August, just before I left. Shiro started working at a car parts factory (not his stepfather's) putting together pistons for car engines.

Aspirations/plans

Shiro's aspirations seemed more directed at developing himself rather than working towards any particular job. As already discussed, he wanted to grow vegetables for a living, however, on realizing that he would have to *sell* the vegetables to make that living he seemed somewhat put off because he was not confident that he would manage to do the sales. He therefore set about gaining different working experiences as a means to explore possible options, to start making a living, and to try and increase his confidence.

Shiro's relative unconcern about his earning ability and having a stable job appeared to change somewhat during the year, but not because he was necessarily motivated to work full-time. Rather, he wanted to have many experiences, increase his confidence, and felt that this was the time, in his early twenties, that he could and should try many things. Furthermore, he felt comfortable and supported at home. There was no parental pressure to get a 'proper' job and he paid no rent, nor was he planning to leave home, though he stated that if he were to get married this might change. As he was not formally adopted by his stepfather it is unlikely that he would take over the family business (hence perhaps his recent advances into outside employment). Thus he was taking the

time and opportunities available to work on himself.

Romance and women

Shiro had had little experience with women and had never had a girlfriend. He attributed this to being so shy. Moreover, he had no female friends. Although young people seem to be having more mixed gender groups of friends there remains a trend for men to generally be friends with men. This made his approach to me the more surprising.[12] In our first proper meeting, when he learned that I had a boyfriend he leaned back in surprise and seemed to be slightly disappointed. When I asked why he said that it was for no reason, but just that he was a little surprised. He then asked whether I knew anyone that I could introduce him to. He mentioned a few times that he enjoyed speaking with me because he felt that I was a people-person who could gather people together and introduce people to others, something I think he was hoping I could do for him.

One of Shiro's reasons for joining the *haken kaisha* was that he felt that he would have more opportunities to meet women: "My image of temp workers was of women so I thought that I would have more chances of meeting someone than I do in the fields. But I have met more men than women..." This was probably as a result of the kinds of factory work he did; the bread factory seemed to be older women, and he mentioned that he kept himself to himself so perhaps he was too shy to talk to the younger women, and the section of the car parts factory he worked at consisted mainly of men. He was unlikely to meet women through other means as well – Shiro had no real friend networks to call on and therefore would be unlikely to be invited to *gokon*,[13] for example. Perhaps this was another possibility his computer offered – the chance to meet like-minded women on the internet. Meeting someone to date was important to him:

> I would really like to get married I think, one day ... in the future. But I don't want to be the breadwinner. I don't think I can be a salaryman – I don't want to have to endure (*gaman*) for money. Honestly... I would prefer it if she [his future wife] went out to work, as a career woman, and I looked after the home. That would be really good I think. But to be honest, I can't really imagine it.

When I left Hamamatsu he had not yet found a girlfriend, but was still hoping.

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[12] However, Rabinow (1977) notes that people at the edges of their own society may become informants for anthropologists, themselves outsiders.

[13] Gokon are matchmaking parties, usually organised through mutual friends (cf. Nemoto 2008).

Freeterism

Shiro's image of a freeter was someone who worked part-time whenever they chose to, who was easygoing (*kiraku na*) and was free (*jiyū*). He readily said that he thought he was a freeter, but expressed reservations early in our meetings about whether he was a 'proper' freeter given that his farming work was more like training than a real job. However, he identified with being a freeter because of the freedom he had in choosing when and how much he worked. As the year went on however, Shiro seemed to identify more readily with the term, even when he became a temp worker:

> Freeters get jobs by making applications to each place they want to work at, and then interviewing at each place. *Haken* workers get jobs by registering and making an application to a *haken* agency; they interview once with the agency, and then they wait to hear whether positions are available. For me, freeters and *haken* are the same.

Therefore, the difference, for him, was of ease of finding work – of making only the one application. It also appealed to his desire to try a variety of jobs. Being a *haken* worker gave him more freedom to do this in that he did not have to keep making applications and being interviewed. Once his short-term contract ran out he could just wait to hear about the next available job and decide whether he wanted to try it out or not. Moreover, he could still decide what days and hours he wanted to work. Shiro therefore felt free (*jiyū*) and consequently continued to feel as though he were a freeter. There was no sense that this was going to change. He had no desire to become a salaried employee and although he was still interested in making his living through growing vegetables, for the foreseeable future at least he was planning on remaining a freeter/*haken*.

Shiro, though not particularly sociable or confident in his communication skills, approached, initiated, and maintained a relationship with me throughout the year. He commented that he liked being with me because he thought that I was sociable and good at bringing people together and he seemed to hope that maybe I could introduce him to other people or make him more sociable: "I don't have any self-confidence. ...I think this is because I was not praised much when I was a child. Maybe this is why I cannot do things." Shiro sought comfort from books written by the popular Japanese psychologist Kato Taizo who described the difference between people who are emotionally strong and those who were weak, and found affinity with them, often thinking: "Oh, I'm like that too." He also professed a deep interest in clairvoyance and in astrology. He had had his fortune

read once, when on the Shikoku trip, but said that generally he was afraid to have his fortune done because at New Year, when getting the customary yearly fortune (*omikuji*) at the local shrine: he usually got the one denoting worst luck.

Shiro went between periods of feeling like he couldn't do/achieve anything at all, when he had no confidence in himself, and times when he felt like he could achieve anything he wanted to. During the time I met with him he mentioned that in the previous few months he had felt more often that he could do things, and that the older he got the more he felt it. However, he continued to fluctuate in his belief in himself. Although frightened of having his fortune read, when the woman in Shikoku said that she could read his fortune for him, he accepted. He felt reassured when she told him that though his youth was painful/difficult (*kurushii*) life would get easier for him the older he became. Shiro's greatest aspiration seemed to be in having more confidence in himself. He also wanted to have a variety of jobs for the experience, and to meet someone with whom he could have a relationship. Yet he simultaneously savoured his solitude which seemed like a barrier between him and the world.

Youth and Delaying Adulthood

Though with different experiences, aspirations, personalities, and from different backgrounds, Kazuyuki's and Shiro's experiences were somewhat similar in many respects. Both had graduated from high school and gone on to a vocational school rather than a four year university, although Shiro did not finish. Both had had somewhat difficult family backgrounds, but suggested that they remained close to their families, felt supported in what they were doing, and were sure that their families wanted them to be happy in what they chose to do. This seemed to give them confidence to remain on the edges of adulthood, pursuing various interests and different experiences.

The hegemonic masculine ideals of responsibility, being stoic, the breadwinner, and a father are all far removed from the current realities of these young men, thus it seems more pertinent to analyse how these young men, in their *youth*, are engaging with dominant ideas of masculinity. After all, the early twenties is just such a time when people are almost *expected* to resist, reject and consequently learn to negotiate these adult norms as they move into adulthood (Durham 2000; Liechty 2002; Vigh 2006). Wider Japanese society does not expect youth to conform, instead thinking of the university years (from the ages of around 18-22) as times when young people are learning the social skills necessary to fit into

adult society, whilst also operating somewhat outside of the constraints of adult society. Youth is thus not only a transitional space, but also one of liminality (cf. Bucholtz 2002). Therefore, instead of examining how they resist or reject the model of hegemonic masculinity, I instead try and understand how these youth engage with masculine ideals whilst being in a space/place where they are not yet expected (nor do they expect themselves) to conform to them. Whilst they may not yet be expected to conform, the pressure to do so in the near future exists, and the way they engage with and negotiate these ideals whilst on the edges of adulthood is strongly linked to their relationships with their families, fathers and peers.

Postponing Work and Marriage

Work and marriage, being the two main signifiers of both adulthood and ideal Japanese masculinity are important concepts to analyse in a discussion of the postponement of adulthood. Even though Kazuyuki (and Shiro to a lesser extent), on the surface at least, appear to conform to Taga's (2003) ideas that young men continue to embrace the ideals of men being breadwinners (i.e. stable work) and good responsible husbands/fathers (i.e. marriage), they also negotiated and resisted the model in various ways.

Considering work, both men rejected the idea of becoming a regular worker, a salaryman, with both clearly stating that they would never want to get such a job.[14] Rather than this being an outright rejection of hegemonic masculinity, it can be seen rather as part and parcel of being a youth and being expected, at an age when it is socially acceptable, to resist normative notions of work. Other young informants felt similarly, for example, Kenji, a twenty-four year old man, was endeavouring to become a successful musician with his band. He had identified the early twenties as a time of being allowed, with relatively little risk, to pursue an aspiration: "I have given myself until I am 26. If I have not become successful by then, then I will reconsider what to do with my life." For Kenji, giving himself this space entailed little risk. Although he stated that after the age of twenty-six it would be difficult for him to find a *seishain* position, he was also not seriously considering it – he had other options due to the existence of a family

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[14] Nisbett (2007), conversely, suggests that in India middle-class youth do desire to gain jobs similar to those of their fathers, but are increasingly unable to due to changes in the labour market.

business. His father ran an up-market *ryokan* (inn) where his oldest brother was working and was likely to take over. However: "My uncle owns a restaurant in London, and I have spent a few summers there helping. Lately he keeps pressuring me to give up music and join him in London, but I really want to try to make music my life and my career ... maybe if I haven't succeeded by 26 I will think about it." Although not a typical salaried type of job it was a stable, regular position that he sought to postpone, and if at all possible, avoid.

Young freeters' perception of and engagement with the ideals of being a good responsible husband/father were more complicated and ambiguous. Marriage remains one of the main transitions into adulthood in Japan, as elsewhere (cf. Osella and Osella 2006). Kazuyuki and Shiro, like all of my informants in their early twenties (male and female) made clear that they would not consider marrying before their thirties. This clearly follows the recent demographic trends of later marriage (cf. Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2007c). Most of them felt they would not be ready – emotionally and, for men especially, materially. Kei, a twenty-two year old freeter, commented: "If I get married I will probably have to give up my dream of travelling the world. It is not possible once you have a family – family comes first." Kenji felt that, although being with his girlfriend for five years, he was not yet to be ready to marry or live together: "I want to be with her, we spend a lot of time together, but I don't want us to live together yet. I need space and time to do what I want to do." Matsumoto, a twenty-year old freeter, who worked in a convenience store whilst pursuing his musical ambitions, meanwhile noted that: "I think it will be impossible to get married until I have a stable income." This was a sentiment echoed time and again from numerous freeters and non-freeter males, and it was further reinforced when women (of varying ages) confirmed that, indeed, financial stability was important (see Chapter 3 for more on women's expectations of marriage partners, and Chapter 5 on the pressures men felt from their partners on this topic). For Hirano, however, a twenty-four year old freeter who worked in a designer shop, the issue of marriage was, he felt, irrelevant because he was gay: "I don't think about marriage. Sometimes I think it is sad that I won't have children, but anyway, marriage is not possible for me, and I like my freedom."

Young freeters thus planned to effectively postpone full socially sanctioned adult manhood to their late twenties or early thirties. Kazuyuki, Shiro, and Matsumoto were even unsure whether they wanted to marry at all. This has potential repercussions on how they will be viewed in Japanese society, and may have a

negative affect on work possibilities as they get older.[15] However, this resistance to marriage is to be somewhat expected in the early twenties, and both men mentioned their age when talking about women. Thus not being ready to marry or wanting to be a breadwinner can be seen as a product of youth (though heavily influenced as I shall discuss by their fathers), than of a desire to actively resist hegemonic ideals of masculinity. By postponing thinking about it they effectively postpone adulthood. With later marriages becoming the norm there seems to be a definite trend towards adulthood (when defined through marriage) becoming more delayed in wider society as well, not just with these young men (Arnett 2004; Côté 2000).

Fathers and Families

Kazuyuki and Shiro have both had unusual relationships with their fathers, which I would suggest have significantly shaped them and their ideas of adult manhood. Typically fathers in Japan, though extolled by media and government policies to be 'active', remain rather in the background. Women tend to be expected to still be the main childrearers, even if they are working, with men doing family 'duty' on the weekends. Of course this is not true of all men and is dependant on class and occupation. Middle-class salaried workers are most likely to be 'weekend fathers' whereas other men in more home-based occupations or craftsmen etc. may be more present in the lives of their children (Bestor 1989; Mathews 2003).

Shiro had a complicated relationship with the father(s) in his life. His biological father, described as a 'dark' thinker, died when he was young and he had a complex relationship with his stepfather. Shiro's ideas towards his youth consisted of two main and contrasting dimensions, the first that he felt he did not fit in with his family and wider society; and the second, that he now felt supported and safe in his family. This has led to an ambiguous self-definition within his family and in identifications with his stepfather and younger brother, who used to bully him. However, even whilst stating that he felt different during his childhood and had a difficult time, he was quick to stress that he now felt

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[15] Marriage is often thought of as proof of responsibility, and of being a proper adult man in Japan. This can be seen in companies where unmarried men often miss out on promotions, and where it becomes potentially difficult for unmarried men to get jobs (McLelland 2005; also cf. Sedgwick 2007). Suzuki (2003: 93) states that unmarried men are often categorised as 'youths' in the workplace and are excluded from decision-making. Furthermore, those who "do not form 'standard families' may receive negative sanction" (ibid.).

supported, lucky and blessed because his family were behind him. Perhaps, given that he was in a somewhat insecure position, Shiro felt lucky that his parents had not been pushing him to get a 'proper' job, but to financially support him while he does something that he enjoys. His gratitude most likely also came from the realisation that his situation within the family was somewhat insecure: not being formally adopted has repercussions on his legal rights after his parents die.

Although Shiro has none of the responsibilities of an adult man yet, over the course of the year he began making moves in the direction of learning how to become economically independent via gaining work experience. One of the main reasons for this could be due to his complex family history. Given that his future as an eldest son is somewhat unstable it could be that he was becoming more aware of the fact that his parents will not always be there to support him. Furthermore, it is possible to infer that he may be projecting his current feelings of instability somewhat onto his past. It is likely that his feelings of not fitting in have perhaps become more acute as he has gotten older and has understood the future repercussions of not being formally adopted. His recent move into the irregular work sphere can therefore be seen as a tentative step in the direction of adulthood. His recent lone pilgrimage to Shikoku can also be seen as a way to learn how to depend on himself and himself alone. In a sense, Shiro was seeking to achieve a change in himself. Though shaken by intense homesickness and the realisation that he was not yet able to depend on himself, he appeared to be realising that he needs to be able to learn how to be independent of his family in the future. Shiro was therefore attempting to increase his independence and was taking steps towards adulthood.

Shiro's ambivalent relationship with his stepfather has had an effect on how he related to other men, as can be seen at his discomfort when working in a small warehouse with men. He was much closer to his mother and enjoyed being in her company, and this also comes through when seeing his attachment to hobbies that keep him close to home; *anime* and harvesting vegetables on the family plot. Moreover, it is relevant to note that the majority of small-scale agriculture (the job he felt most comfortable in) is done largely by older people, most of whom are women, and he was more at ease talking with older women than men. The attachment to his mother and the safety he felt being at home is also manifested in the hope that his future wife would go out to work instead of him. Though he potentially conformed to one tenant of Japanese masculinity, marriage, he quite distinctly rejected the other core value, that of being the breadwinner. The idea of

being a househusband appealed to Shiro not only because he could identify/relate to his closest person (his mother), but also because it would mean he could live a quiet life with little need to communicate with people outside his comfort zone. This also indicated a desire to be looked after and cared for. Shiro was looking to reverse the gender roles: unable to relate to the role of father due to his ambiguous identification with both his fathers, his potential future wife, by becoming the breadwinner, would effectively take over this role, whilst he would be able to remain in the sphere he remains most comfortable in; the female domain. Shiro was, however, a distinct minority when talking about gender roles. All my other male informants in their early twenties (with the exception of Hirano) anticipated taking a breadwinner role should they ever get married. None imagined themselves remaining at home. Most were supportive of their imaginary wives working after marriage and contributing relatively equally to the house, but all thought that being the breadwinner was the married man's responsibility.

Kazuyuki's situation was somewhat different to Shiro's. In recent years his father had become a rather different type of role model to the 'typical' Japanese father mentioned at the beginning of this section. Ten years earlier his father had had the responsibilities of being a single parent thrust onto his shoulders. His reaction to this has had a considerable effect on Kazuyuki's views of him as a father and breadwinner, and consequently on his own ideas of what it is to be a man. Kazuyuki seemed quite worried that he would never be able to live up to his father; to be as good a man as he, as capable of bringing up children alone as he did, and he expressed this concern by going in somewhat the opposite direction. As mentioned before, Kazuyuki was unsure about whether he would ever want to marry, and he maintained that he would never have children outside of marriage. Not only was this likely to be a direct consequence of seeing his father's situation, it is also a site of resistance to one of the core elements of hegemonic masculinity. Being 'relaxed' was important for Kazuyuki: he wanted work to be relaxed, like a hobby; in a sense like a voluntary exercise, choosing when and if to do it that day, and it was one of the qualities he looked for in a romantic partner.

Whilst Kazuyuki thought that he would prefer it if his future wife worked, if she did not then that was probably also okay. Although this shows his reluctance to become a main breadwinner, it may also illustrate that being supportive of his future wife is an indication that he was also looking to feel supported (as he was at the cinema), something his father did not have when his wife left. For Kazuyuki,

the space for self-expression in his life was also paramount. This balance between support and self-expression was also discussed by Kenji (a twenty four year old freeter) in reference to both his family and his girlfriend:

> I get on well with my family. I have no family problems, unlike most freeters! My mother in particular supports what I am trying to do – she was a musician herself and has always encouraged my music. My father, and my uncle, they worry about me – they think that I should join the family business, that I should have a more secure lifestyle. But of course, they also worry about their age and having someone to continue the business. My cousins basically grew up in the UK and are doing their own thing so my uncle is getting worried. I know they care, but I need to try my best to be a successful musician. Music is my life. That is why I don't want to live with my girlfriend yet. I want time and space to do my own thing, and she understands that.

Kazuyuki's dancing was similarly important to him because it allowed him to express himself, something that he also wanted in a relationship. Kazuyuki felt unhappy that his girlfriend could not talk through the issues; and it was something he linked to his father's experiences: "When my mother ran away it was out of the blue. It didn't seem like there were big problems. My parents didn't argue, but I think that maybe they did not communicate much either", hence Kazuyuki's desire for better communication. Furthermore, his wish to do something to express himself rather than be a company-man also in part stems from seeing his father doing everything for the family and nothing for himself.

Other young men, however, did not have such positive associations with their fathers. For example, a twenty-year old freeter said this of his father:

> He was not a good man. My mother divorced him when I was eight, in the 3rd or 4th grade at elementary school. He had affairs and treated my mum badly. One day, after I saw his new girlfriend, he said 'did you like her breasts? She has a great pair eh?!' I was disgusted. Now I'm not in touch with him and I don't know where he is. I have never really felt that I had a father – when I was small he used to come home very late, and leave before I got up, so I thought 'who is father?' ... ... I guess I could get married ... if I got married then we will both work, ideally. But I don't want to become a dad. I am scared of kids! ...Also, I don't want to be like my father – I'm afraid to become like him. I feel like I won't notice when I do something bad, so I think I cannot raise kids. Anyway, I haven't grown up yet. I don't have any power to become a parent.

Mathews (2004) has suggested that one of the main reasons why (male) youth become freeters is due to their desire to not lead lives like their fathers: "[S]ome young people may fully understand the economic odds against them, but may feel such repugnance at the lives their fathers have led that they are willing to abandon the pursuit of regular employment in order not to have to live such a life themselves" (2004: 129). I suggest, however, that for many it is more than

distaste of their fathers' lifestyles. Many of the young freeters seemed to fear the obligations of adult life and of being an adult *man* in particular. They were hesitant about whether they would get married (many male students of a similar age all said with some confidence that they expected to get married). Whilst they seemed sure that they *could* marry if they wanted, they were unsure that they would ever really want to, and were equally uncertain about whether they would ever have children. Although this is not surprising at such young ages, I would suggest that watching their fathers' experiences, struggles and responsibilities has had an obvious effect not just on the type of employment they have chosen, but also on their ideas of adulthood and masculinity.[16]

Both Kazuyuki and Shiro (and the majority of other young freeters) also spoke of having the support of their families to continue doing what they are doing. Parents were seemingly happy for their children to draw out their childhoods further, perhaps because understanding the realities of adult life they were happy to protect their children a little longer. Their family situations, notions of breadwinning, ideas of what it is to be a husband and father all influence their perceptions of adulthood and masculinity. Yet peers also play a vital role in the lives of these young men, as shall now be discussed.

Peers – Providing Space for 'Youth'

Peers, as reference groups, give space within which it is possible to remain a youth. They also indicate when it is time to move on from the edges of youth into adulthood. Apart from his father Kazuyuki modelled his masculine identity through the peer group that he identified most with – his fellow break-dancers. The nature of 'breakin' is such that peers all stand around watching what the dancer is doing, cheering them on, getting into the beat, admiring or disdaining performances. Being 'one of the guys' is one such way that Kazuyuki got his sense of belonging, as well as mutual support, understanding and acceptance of his views about life, work, and manhood (cf. McDowell 2003; Nisbett 2007; Osella, et al. 2004; Swain 2005). He had said before that all his friends think it is important to do jobs that they enjoy. Whilst it can be argued that most youth may

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[16] What was striking about many of the young freeters (in their early twenties) I met was that, in contrast to other studies, for example Vigh (2006) in West Africa, none of them talked about wishing to transcend their status as youth, or complained about being under the control of their fathers – rather they embraced the status and the flexibility it gave them (cf. Durham 2000).

think this, the majority of young students I knew felt they would have to accept jobs that they might not perhaps have envisioned themselves doing. Satoru, a 21 year old student who had just started job-hunting, had this to say:

> Ideally, I want a good job, a job that is interesting and enjoyable. But, realistically, I know that I probably won't get that. No matter what the job is I have to try my best (*ganbaru*), be patient and endure (*gaman*). I have to work there for at least two years. I cannot quit before then otherwise I will not be able to find a good job. It is important to stick at it.

Other students who were job hunting echoed this sentiment. They felt that they would have to *gaman* and *ganbaru* even at something they did not particularly enjoy: two traits they felt were expected of them as adults. Kazuyuki and the majority of his friends, meanwhile, were not looking for stable work. Indeed all of the young freeters I knew were in a search for enjoyable, meaningful, work (cf. Mathews 1996, 2003). Peers reinforced each others lifestyles and aspirations through tacit approval, and thus they were able to remain within a transitional space of youth. Whilst all members of their group were doing this, it remained a valid option and being in such a transitional space felt normal. As Liechty (1995) has stated in his work on youth and modernity in Kathmandu: "Peer groups allow young people to abandon themselves in the utter banality of a day-to-day material existence, consciously avoiding the future by living for each other in the present" (1995: 190). This is perhaps another reason why Kazuyuki was sad about his friend getting married; it was a clear sign that one of his inner circle was moving beyond youth and into (or at least towards) adulthood. Rejecting (for the time being) the normative notions of work and marriage is a clear way of postponing their youth for as long as possible, but it only remains a viable acceptable option when other members are doing the same. Friends moving away from this youth space thus challenge the validity of remaining within such a transitional space.

Conclusion

Kazuyuki, Shiro, and the other young freeters mentioned in this chapter clearly appropriated the idea of 'being young' as a time for trying out different things, for pursuing alternative lifestyles. At times this was explicitly stated such as when both Kazuyuki and Shiro, on a couple of occasions over the course of the year, laughingly said: "I'm still a child (*watashi ha mada kodomo da yo!*)", to explain or justify their situations. This seemed to give them some breathing room, some space to move in before having to decide what they were to do, but perhaps more pertinently, before they began to receive pressure from people to conform to expected life courses and routes. They were in somewhat of a liminal/transitional

stage. No longer children (though they may have still identified with this state), but not yet considered full adults with all the attendant obligations and social pressures of adult Japanese society. For as Takehiko, a 38-year-old man, commented: "I think it is good for young people to take time to think about what they want to do, to try new things, while they are young, before marriage and regular life." Youth is thus not only a transitional space but also one of liminality. As Liechty (1995: 191) puts it, they are stuck: "in the 'in-between' space: between expectations and reality; between past and future; ...between child- and adulthood; ...between education and meaningful employment", that is the lived experience of modernity.

Garsten (1999), in her article on temporary workers and agencies, notes that in at least a metaphorical sense temp workers are also liminal: they are transitory and exist outside of the structures and social relationships of the organisation they are working in. She states: "The attributes of liminality or of liminal *personae* ('threshold people') are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space as Turner (1977: 95) puts it" (Garsten 1999: 606-607). Young male freeters, by dint of their youth are, as already suggested, in a liminal space – not children, yet not adults, somewhere, as Liechty (2002) puts it, 'in-between'. Yet as *freeters* they are also liminal – temporary/irregular workers whose contracts are up for renewal usually every six months: crucial to the company as cheap labour, yet easily dispensable. If we consider mainstream *expectations* these young people are at the margins of society and work, yet they are also part of an irregular workforce that is increasingly part of the employment norm. Thus young male freeters exist in a dual liminality. As work is deeply implicated in male transitions to adulthood in Japan young male freeters are betwixt and between in two inter-related senses.

Their strong resistance to working in an office or as a salaried worker will likely limit them to more irregular work if they are unsuccessful in pursuing their dreams; break-dancing and opening a cafe for Kazuyuki, and self-sufficiency via organic farming for Shiro. Working as a freeter and pursuing dreams was generally deemed socially acceptable whilst a person was in their early twenties,[17]

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[17] This was not the view taken by the Japanese government however, who seem to imply young people are not motivated to work and be 'proper' members of society. See Chapter 2 for the Japanese government's position on freeters.

however there was consensus among many of my contacts that after reaching their mid-twenties it becomes less tenable, and that men, once reaching that age, should be becoming serious and looking for more reliable work. It is only reaching the mid-twenties that social expectations and perceptions of appropriate and expected life courses start to seriously come into play.

None of the freeters I met in their early twenties had any solid plans to start moving in the direction of regular employment, and were thus prolonging this transitional stage of youth past what has previously been considered the norm. Peers who were graduating from four-year universities (and those who already graduated from vocational colleges), have, for the most part, started regular jobs or are looking for regular work. These men, however, have situated themselves within groups, or around people, who are in a similar place to them, where decisions about their futures were not yet called for, nor overly expected. With the exception of Kenji who seemed to have an alternative secure path mapped out for him should he fail at becoming a successful musician, none of them knew what they would end up doing in the future. Kazuyuki was afraid of adulthood and what it actually means to be an adult man, whilst Shiro had no clear path to project himself into the future. However, they felt supported by their respective families and felt no pressure to get into the rat race. Moreover, none of them really wanted to. With the later age of marriage, and the changes in the employment system with companies employing more non-regular staff, this transition stage into adulthood is likely to continue to be prolonged for increasing numbers of youth. By using the liminal space of 'youth' they were able to give themselves time and space to explore options before becoming (and before being expected to become) full members of adult Japanese society.

The following chapter explores how male freeters in their late twenties achieve (or do not achieve) the expected transitions to adulthood, and will explore how they, with added societal pressure as they age, negotiate, resist, reject and conform to dominant ideas of adult manhood.

Chapter 5: Growing Up and Getting Real

Male freeters in their mid-to-late twenties had all come to a turning point. Whilst still attempting to carve out alternative lifestyles for themselves they had also begun to engage in more nuanced and conflicted ways with expected life courses, appropriate working styles, and expectations of adult manhood.

This chapter explores two main case studies of men who shared certain common characteristics; they were of similar ages, class, educational background, and had had international experiences through living and travelling abroad. They had both spent a substantial amount of time living independently from their families, neither had a girlfriend but wished to have one, and they both had clear aspirations which were not linked to regular employment. Whilst younger freeters were able to create a somewhat liminal space in which to freely explore different experiences, this chapter illustrates how, as young men enter their late twenties, identification with 'freeterism' and part time work becomes more complex. Calling on 'youth' as a transitional/liminal space becomes less possible as pressure from wider Japanese society, from families, and from their own ideas regarding age and life course come into play.

Notions of work dominate the discourse of mainstream models of masculinity (as discussed in Chapter 2), but they are also intimately linked to normative notions of adulthood. The following case studies highlight how these men negotiate, engage, and resist these models via their work and lifestyle choices and their ideas of marriage and family life, and seeks to show how the presence (or absence) of girlfriends plays a key role in men's negotiations of the discourses of adult manhood.

Nobu

Nobu was 27 years old when we met in October 2006 at a party hosted by Yuriko, a Japanese language teacher. When I arrived he strode up to me with a wide grin to say hello and introduce himself. Nobu was laid back, friendly and sporting an alternative style from the usual twenty-something; with short hair his face was framed by a longish wispy goatee and fashionable black framed glasses. All in all he looked decidedly arty. A close friend who also knew him said that she thought that Nobu was not a typical guy (*futsū ja nai*) owing to his expansive, friendly manner: he was humorous, open, prone to laughter, sensitive, and confident in manner and demeanour. Although fun-loving and a great fan of drinking he was

also thoughtful and serious about what he was doing and his future plans to be an artist.

Family Background

During my fieldwork Nobu lived for the most part with his family in Haruno-*chō*[1] which was about an hour and a half from the centre of Hamamatsu city, though still within its city limits. The area of Haruno is mountainous and though it has a population of around 6,000 people they are spread over a large area living in smaller villages and hamlets. The village (*mura*) that Nobu lived in had just twelve families in it; around fifty people. After returning from university Nobu lived there except for a brief stint when he was working at his father's company in Fukuroi city,[2] a two hour commute away from Haruno.

Nobu felt that he had a really good relationship with his family, though with some tensions with his parents. He had an older sister and brother, both married with children, living in the local area who he got along well with. However, by the end of his studies he had effectively lived away for twelve years; from the ages of twelve to twenty-four (the reasons for which I shall come onto in the following sub-section). He was highly independent and unused to living both with family, and in such a rural area: "At the beginning it was difficult [living with family]." This was not helped by the generally conservative nature of the area. In addition, Nobu had felt lonely; he had been used to living in Nagoya, a mid-size city where he would regularly go out drinking with friends, and to exhibitions etc. Moving back to a village of roughly fifty people, most of whom were over sixty due to the trend of young people leaving for the cities (cf. Mock 2006; Thompson 2003), was quite a shock.

On returning, his dreams of becoming an artist were put on hold: "They [my parents] say it's better for me to quit art". Throughout the year I would regularly ask how it was going and if they still thought that way:

> Yes, they think like that… yes, like that. After all, they are very conservative. Do you understand what I mean by 'conservative'? … To properly get money, to work, earn money, live life normally… they want me to live normally. They think that to not be out of the norm [to not stick out] is beautiful (*amari hamidasenai no ga utsukushii*).

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[1] Chō is a suffix indicating 'town' in Japanese.

[2] Located between Shizuoka City and Hamamatsu City. As of 2008 it had a population of 86,861 people (http://www.city.fukuroi.shizuoka.jp/kbn/10100050/10100050.html).

As clarification I replied: "So, if art was just a hobby it's ok, but as a lifestyle it's not good?" Halfway through this sentence he replied: "Right right." He went on to say: "When they say art is not ok... erm...no, wait, if we say 'why do they say it's not ok?' it's because they want me to be happy. Therefore I appreciate just receiving their feelings, that they care ... that makes everything OK."

His father had been a professional lumberjack until about ten years previously, and the past three generations of men in the family had also been professional tree cutters. However, according to Nobu, in the mid-nineties the cost of logs dropped due to competition from mainland Asia when a great deal of wood was being cut down: the price dropped from about 10,000yen a log to 500 yen: roughly £41 to £2. His father could not see that it was going to get better, so decided to set up a delivery company and consequently worked for two years as a truck driver for a delivery company in order to learn the business. Whilst talking about the beginnings of his father's business he stated laughingly: "But, after all, at the beginning my father was told, by my grandfather, not to do it... it's the same situation now with me!" Though not a large company when defined by the number of workers, it was a relatively large company for an area with such few people in it; they had approximately thirty employees, an office in Haruno (with around ten employees) and also one in Fukuroi which had approximately twenty employees in it. The other workers were all drivers.

His mother meanwhile worked at a mountain-top dormitory-style place which consisted of a dormitory, cafeteria, baths, hall, and lots of outdoor space. She worked there doing mainly the cooking, but also changed the sheets and did other housekeeping tasks. The family generated further income through tea fields, which they had had since his grandfather's time. Although the middle-class ideals of the salaryman and professional housewife (*sengyō shufu*) are probably the most well-known pattern of working styles, this way of working – the wife and husband both working and garnering income from different places – is probably the most common pattern in Japan (cf. Kondo 1990). Although Nobu's family were originally low-status working-class lumberjacks, with the advent of his father's small successful company they had basically become a middle-class family.

Though he described the difficulties of living in the countryside after he returned from Nagoya, Nobu said that he had really come to like it; he enjoyed the quiet, being in an area of mountainous countryside, and living a slower life; something that appealed to him a lot. Furthermore, he had come to enjoy living with his

family saying: "It's good, after all ... They are the most important thing in my life... they are my identity (*aidentiti-tte kazoku*)."

Education and Employment

Whilst most Japanese students commute to a school close to their family home, Nobu, at the age of twelve, moved away to attend school. This was due in large part to where he lived. The junior high school was within the area of Haruno, but it was quite far from the village so he stayed in a dormitory during the week and went home at weekends. Whilst this is not the norm, it is not entirely unusual either, especially in rural areas. After graduating from junior high school he went to a private high school even further away that specialised in art, where he lodged with a home-stay family. Nobu then moved onto an arts university in Nagoya where he lived alone. Whilst at university he spent six months on exchange in the UK, at an arts college in Falmouth, which he loved. On a number of occasions he described his enjoyment of playing the *sanshin*[3] in pubs in the UK. After graduating from university Nobu returned to Haruno, but found the transition difficult:

> When I was at university there were various things in the city: shops, my friends, bars too. Because it was that kind of place it was enjoyable. But returning to the mountain, living with my family, growing tea ... It was difficult, it was horrible! [said decisively with a laugh] Really it was horrible, at the beginning...but I guess that after all it is good... there is something... more than the town...

The return to the mountain was thus quite difficult and he referred to it a few times in other meetings throughout the year. After two years of working in the area he decided to take a part-time Japanese Language teacher course in order to become a certified teacher, which was how he came to meet Yuriko, who was the teacher of the course.

After returning from university Nobu began working in the tea fields helping to maintain and harvest the tea crop. Although tea is now picked using a cutting machine (which takes two people to use, rather than by hand), it remains a strenuous job. Because many youth leave rural areas to work in urban areas (cf. Mock 2006; Moon 1989; Thompson 2003; Traphagan 2004) he was the youngest person working there. Most people were in their 60s and older. On his return to the area Nobu also began working as a tree cutter (arborist) for Japan Rail. The

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[3] An Okinawan instrument with three strings which is often likened to a banjo.

contract was part-time and he would work normally five or six days a week. The days were long; working hours were from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., but it would take two hours to travel to where the work was done. He would leave at 6 a.m. and get home at 6 p.m. Although the work was risky: "the company has a 'safety first' policy so I do not feel worried. Six people work together to cut the trees. I like it – it's interesting/fun (*omoshiroi*)." He received around 15,000yen (£62.50) a day doing this - much more than most part-time workers who get an average of about 6,000 yen (£25) for an eight hour day in the Hamamatsu area.

In December 2006 Nobu took a short break from Japan Rail East to begin helping out on a short contract (until March 2007) at his father's delivery firm. He had to load up the trucks early every morning so they could get out on the road. During this time he lived above the office/loading area in Fukuroi: the commute would have been too long, and he worked long hours each day, loading the trucks from around 5 a.m. and working until about 4 p.m. in the office. He consequently put his other jobs on hold at that time.

Between March and May Nobu was back working mainly as a tree surgeon, but took another short break from this when the first tea harvesting season began in May. This was a job he really enjoyed: "it takes about a year to prepare the tea so it is quite a gamble, but it's fulfilling when we get a good crop." He seemed to gain a lot of satisfaction from being outside with his co-pickers who were all older people from his village: "I really like working with the older people... they are interesting to listen to."

He also began, in May, to work as an assistant Japanese language teacher at HICE (Hamamatsu Foundation for International Communications and Exchanges). The main teacher of the class was Yuriko, the woman who introduced us, and she had asked him to assist her classes to enable him to get more classroom experience. Nobu enjoyed it a lot, saying that the students were all quick and clever, but he nevertheless remained nervous throughout the course whenever it was his turn to run the activities.

Nobu's work, over the course of just this one year, was diverse. One evening I asked him jokingly if he might have another job on top of the others he was doing and he responded laughingly: "I don't have another! It's enough! [laughs] That's all, that's all! It's enough, it's enough!" This flexible job-hopping is clearly linked to ideas of freeters' ways of working as discussed in Chapter 3. Throughout the year he had four jobs: arborist, tea picker, delivery company worker and Japanese language teacher. The first three were linked to his family; his father and

grandfather had worked as lumberjacks (a profession closely linked to being an arborist), tea harvesting and the work at the delivery company were both family ventures. Given that he had an older brother Nobu was unlikely to take over the running of his father's company or the tea fields (Bachnik 1983; Kitaoji 1971; Roberson 1995), however experience in both family businesses is no doubt invaluable should his older brother be disinclined to take them over. He was, however, thinking to find a secure full-time Japanese language teaching opportunity, which I shall discuss below.

Aspirations/plans

Nobu had not wanted to be an artist when he was young. Rather this desire evolved rather slowly:

> I only gradually wanted to do art. This was because at elementary school, junior high school and high school I had a good teacher, so gradually I wanted to do art and I thought I wanted to study more deeply. So, when I went to university I studied at an art university, but after I graduated I was going to quit art. I could have continued, but I thought that maybe it was better to not continue. That's what I thought. Now, I've been three years in Shizuoka making tea, right? With that [working for three years] I thought that I want to try art again a little. So, I sort of quit once, but...

Returning to Haruno after graduating from university altered his perceptions of art for a while. He came to think that there was no money in it; that he would not be able to make a living from it because everyone around him in the village stressed that art was not something that could be done to make a living. I asked a little more about why he had decided to quit and he replied:

> So... what to say? I came back to the mountain right ... ... for mountain people art is... it's said that you can't make money with it. So, how do I say? ... everyone's surroundings... That experience [in the mountains] where everyone said it's not necessary to make art – that affected me a lot. Under those circumstances, alone, where everyone said there is no need to do it, my spirit was broken. So then I thought that a person's environment is very important. I thought that I want to start again. But my environment hasn't changed... it's like I have changed (*yappari sōiu kankyō-tte iu nowa kawaranain dakedo jibun ga kawattetta iu ka*).

Furthermore, as illustrated before, his parents also felt that art was rather something done as a hobby. The fact that he knew all the members of his village and they knew him and his family had a large effect on him because his actions were not just considered on an individual level, but also affected the standing of the family at large. This is especially true within small rural communities (cf. Traphagan 2004). His reticence in pursuing art as a career had, however, recently thawed somewhat.

The return to wanting to be an artist occurred not long before we met and was significantly affected by meeting Yuriko and her friends. Some were working full-time as regular workers; a couple had set up their own businesses. People were of mixed ages, but the self-employed individuals were in their late twenties – working hard but doing what they wanted to be doing. Although some of the group were peers Nobu looked up to them. He was inspired and encouraged to not give up on his own dreams so easily. In one interview when talking about meeting Yuriko, Nobu said:

> So, last year, I went to [Yuriko] Matsumoto's house for the first time. There are various people there aren't there? [I nod]. When I met those people, it was really big, inside me. I started to think about many things, for example, about what I want to do. From now I think 'what should I do?' Gradually I've felt this. I've come to understand that those feelings are thanks to that house [those people].

Although his surroundings had not changed and his immediate family and neighbours had not changed their opinion of art, Nobu had changed, and this was, he thought, because of his friendship and association with Yuriko and her friends. As a result of this he had consequently begun building up his art portfolio by working on pieces in the evenings and on weekends. He also took part in a joint exhibition towards the end of the year in Nagoya in an attempt to start putting his work into the public sphere. Nobu was not, however, blind to the difficulties of being a self-supporting artist, and he thought that he would need to support his artwork by working part-time, stating that very few artists are able to make a living solely through their art. Hence he took the Japanese teacher training course. He wanted to teach Japanese during the day to earn money to live, and do his art by evening, and he was planning – or rather, it seemed, hoping – to move to Thailand in a couple of years to teach Japanese and paint in his free time. Nobu reasoned that living in Thailand would be a lot cheaper, thereby making his plans to be an artist more sustainable.

Although this was his aim, when I had on a different occasion asked him if he wanted to be a professional artist, and how he would try and achieve it, he had replied: "That's right… first I've been really thinking about it… next year I'm thinking of moving…" When I asked where he was going to move to Nobu replied: "The place is not yet decided, but from now I will do exhibitions, speak to various people and then I want to decide." It was thus clear that he had still not totally decided that he would pursue being an artist, but was rather in the process of seriously thinking about it. He was effectively at a turning point. This was highlighted on another occasion when we were talking about the future and what

we wanted to do. Nobu said (in English) that he was "thinking, thinking, thinking," about his future. Turning 27 had made him think more seriously about his plans to become an artist and what he was going to do for employment. Not long after this conversation he applied for two full-time Japanese language teacher jobs in a nearby town. He was, however, unsuccessful in his applications. Nobu attributed this to his limited experience and to being male, stating that male Japanese teachers are not as numerous as women, and that recruiters preferred female teachers.

Romance and Relationships

When Nobu and I met he was without a girlfriend. At the beginning of November, I went to Yuriko's as usual for a Japanese language lesson and at around six, before anyone else arrived for the almost weekly get-togethers, Nobu arrived. As we sat down with a beer he was smiling slightly and both Yuriko and I asked him what was up. With a broad smile he said that he had had a great week and might have got himself a girlfriend. After a slight pause, which Yuriko and I filled by asking him what had happened, he said that he had gone to his *sempai*'s wedding the week before and had bumped into Aya whom he had known through a friend four years previously, when he was still at university. They went for drinks and following that, the day before our get-together, they went on their first date. She picked him up at a nearby station in her 'Biz' – a Toyota car which must have 'cool' connotations because both Yuriko and Nobu took a slight digression to exclaim that it was *kakko ii* (cool). He described their date and how, as the day went along, "the mood got better and better (*kibun ga moriagatteita*)." He evidently enjoyed recounting the tale and paused often so we would prompt him to continue. By the next time I saw him however, about three months later, they were no longer together. He initially said little about this, just saying: "We did not fit (*awanakatta*)." However, later he said: "She, after all, couldn't forget about her ex-boyfriend. Well... but, well, if it were me in that situation I would not want to date either... because there is no meaning after all."

When asked what he looked for in a woman, he said: "I'm not sure yet but, to begin with, a person who enjoys doing things together, ... what to say?... a person who has something they want to do ... It's ok if she's not an artist, but it's better if she drinks alcohol." It was clear that spending time together, drinking (one of his favourite past-times) and having motivation to do something was important to him. Later he said that he does not mind about looks, but wanted someone with a good sense of humour, who laughed a lot and who was willing to try new things.

Nobu thought that gender roles for his generation were no longer so clear because many women wanted to keep working and so the roles were gradually changing among young people, though for his parent's generation they were very clear-cut. He personally wanted to do everything 'half and half' including raising the children. Yet, when I asked Nobu about what he wished for in marriage he found it difficult to talk about, saying only that there would be so many changes between now and getting married that he felt unable to say.

Whilst Nobu wanted to marry and have children he said that: "At the moment my work..." and trailed off. He was very aware of the fact that he was not at a place in his life to settle down. He was still undecided about what he was going to do, and was conscious that he was not really considered good marriage material given his temporary work and lack of stability (see Chapter 3 for a more in-depth discussion of this). Although he was a little muted whilst talking about this he soon perked up when I asked him if he ever wanted to get married in the future. He stated decisively: "At 35 I'll get married", as if it were already a decided fact. I asked if it had been decided, and he said: "Decided, decided. Already from a long time ago, from a long time ago, from around high school, it has been 35." Thinking of arranged marriages I probed further asking why and how it was decided. He replied: "Well, that's... erm... my sixth sense [laughs heartily]." I must have looked askance because he confirmed it stating: "Right, right. I think it's sixth sense." He went on to say that he had also been to a fortune-teller and they also said that whoever he dates from the age of thirty-five will be good to marry, and that when he heard that he thought, "Bingo!"

Nobu was sensitive and communicative, but he also thought that men and women did not really understand what the other was thinking or feeling and that men and women were different. However, he seemed unable to articulate why he thought this. He was convinced that it would be highly unlikely for him to be able to understand whoever he ends up with because he thought that it was rare to meet anyone (male or female) that can really be understood. Thus, if he did not understand something when in a relationship he did not do anything about it because he thought that it was usual and natural to not understand.

Freeterism

Although identified to me as a freeter, and although he thought that he could easily be thought to be a freeter Nobu did not really identify himself strongly as such. He did not think much of labelling himself or anyone, regardless of the

category. However, at times he referred to himself as an artist. This non-identification with freeters is, however, understandable when looking at what his image and perception of freeters was.

For Nobu the image of a freeter was, after some thought, someone who is necessary to Japan. After a pause he said: "My image of freeters is of people who work in a convenience store, that's my image. Not a regular worker, of course, but a part-time worker who works 100% [full-time]." He went on to say that convenience stores were the businesses increasing the most, and therefore freeter numbers would also increase. Moreover, he said laughingly that if there were no freeters there would be no convenience stores, and as these are necessary freeters are also necessary. When he was in the UK he would always see people from other countries working and he thought that employers could pay them low wages. However, Nobu considered that having many people from other countries working was something that Japan could not/would not do, and thus he considered that freeters are very necessary, stating: "[They] will not disappear. I think they are necessary people."

Nobu therefore did not see himself within his own image of a freeter. Not only did he do jobs that were quite different to that of a convenience store clerk, it was also, I would suggest, due to his background, class and status. Being an educated art major from a middle-class family that owned tea fields and a small sized business, he did not imagine himself and his work to be linked to freeters. As discussed in Chapter 3, some research has suggested that it is largely lower class and less educated individuals who become freeters (cf. Murakami 2006; Tarōmaru and Toshirō 2006). Effectively Nobu classified freeters as being Japan's version of an immigrant class: necessary for the economy. Japan appears to be unlikely to welcome large-scale immigration in the near future (Johnston 2008), thus a native, low-paid, flexible workforce has become key to keeping company overheads low, even as young men are being berated for working in this way. This situation was not one that he associated himself with. First and foremost he saw himself as an artist, even though he did not believe in labels. Yet even when Nobu denied his association with freeters he mentioned that most art majors who are trying to be artists are probably freeters due to the greater degree of flexibility in part-time jobs compared to full-time contracts.

This case study was a snap-shot of various aspects of Nobu's life which I shall come back to in the discussion at the end of the chapter. Now I shall move onto Takeshi, another man in his late twenties who was in a similar transitional stage.

Takeshi

I had known Takeshi since before my fieldwork began. We met in the local Starbucks where he worked and had started exchanging pleasantries in 2003. The following year we became friendlier when a small group of us, three Japanese, two Americans and I, would meet up every Wednesday evening at 7 p.m. for a few hours of language exchange. As he was usually working he would pop out during his break and join us.

Takeshi dressed and acted like the surfer that he was. He was often in flip-flops, shorts and t-shirts, even when it was not quite warm enough to be sporting them and he appeared to embody a more active, sporting type of masculinity (cf. Roberson 2005). He seemed a typical surfer guy; relaxed, friendly, outgoing, and he had travelled extensively. Throughout the years of knowing Takeshi casually it became apparent that, though outgoing, he was also somewhat highly-strung and seemingly unable to focus his attention for great lengths of time. He often looked distractedly at other places whilst talking and listening and he would regularly sit down even when not invited and start chatting; which is not really common in Japan. He seemed unaware that his behaviour made some people uncomfortable and he felt that he had many friends. When I returned to Hamamatsu for fieldwork I met him again in the local Starbucks. After hearing what I was doing he became quite guarded and said that he knew no freeters to whom he could introduce me. Throughout the year, as we met occasionally through mutual friends and in Starbucks, and after learning that I was working part-time at the cinema, he became more interested and agreed to an interview.

Family Background

Takeshi was, when I first met him, living alone in central Hamamatsu in a 1k (studio - one room + kitchen) apartment. However, during fieldwork he made the move back to his parent's house in a well-off middle-class neighbourhood of Hamamatsu. His reason for the move was that his parents needed his help now that they were getting older and he intimated that this included financial help. His father had been a teacher, but was now retired and his mother a housewife and part-time worker. Given that his father would have likely been on a good pension, it is probable that the move was more beneficial (financially) for him than for his parents. All in all, they were a 'typical' middle-class family. He was the youngest of three siblings and had an older sister and brother who were both living with their spouses. Takeshi got on well with his siblings and nowadays has

a good relationship with his parents: "Now it is good with my parents, there is more time to talk than before. Well, but now I make time and try [to talk to them]." However, before this had not been the case. When I asked what it had been like before he said:

> I didn't like them so much. Even though I didn't dislike them we didn't get on well. So, after that I started living alone...it's enjoyable to live alone. When you go home to your parents various things are said, right? Before, that was a bit... [he laughed], before I didn't like that much, but now I feel it can't be helped.

After living alone for ten years he had been initially a little worried about moving back into their house, however he said that overall it had been fine.

Education and Employment

After graduating from a regular high school Takeshi moved to Kyoto to attend *Kansai Gaikokugo Daigaku* (Kansai Foreign Language University) where he studied international languages. He studied English as par for the course, but his chosen language was Italian: "But, I didn't study much whilst at university [laughs]. I wanted to travel in the holidays, so I worked and saved money ... So, I don't understand so much Italian..." Takeshi seemed a little rueful that his language skills were not better and mentioned a few times that he would like to go back to Italy and re-learn the language whilst living there.

When I met Takeshi (in 2003) he worked almost exclusively at Starbucks doing five or six shifts a week. He then took an extra job at Toho cinema for a few months, and consequently knew a few of my colleagues. However, he had been placed in the store section which he had been unhappy about due to the inability to move around; he left after just three months. Takeshi had wanted to continue working at Starbucks, but due to the pay (800 yen/£3.33 an hour) he decided in 2004/5 to also begin working at a factory that made air ducts. Their rate of pay was substantially higher, at 1,300 yen (£5.42) an hour, so he began to cut down his Starbucks shifts to work more at the factory. After being there for two years he was offered a full-time (*seishain*) position and accepted it: "The job itself was the same... I accepted it because I was able to become a regular employee, because I was able to receive security, and because what I had to do [for the job] was the same." Moreover, he felt it offered a safe (*antei*) path, stability and the ability to take paid holiday (*renkyū*). Thus for Takeshi (and most freeters in that position) it made a lot of sense to become a *shain*. Takeshi was not, however, very happy with the job, saying that it was something that he only wanted to do for the present time. Even with overtime pay, his salary was never more than 200,000

yen a month (£833), which with social insurance and pension payments, was usually closer to 170,000 yen a month (£708). This was, however, more than Toho or Starbucks workers could earn; factory jobs pay more than service sector jobs, but they also have a bad reputation, known for involving the three K's – *kitsui, kiken, kitanai* (hard, dangerous and dirty). For these reasons many people I knew were not inclined to work in a factory. Takeshi meanwhile felt that the wage was really low (*sugoi yasui*) for the job he did.

Whilst working at the factory Takeshi continued to work at Starbucks, but just one shift a week: "This is unusual. Most workers would not be allowed to do that, but I have been here a long time, and am on good terms... so it's ok." He enjoyed the Starbucks job far more than the factory job because he felt he could communicate with many different people, including people he had never met. Moreover, he had the chance to talk to many foreigners; something that he enjoyed doing.

On top of the factory job and Starbucks Takeshi was also a member of Amway.[4] He had joined Amway about five years before (in 2002) through the introduction of a mutual friend. When I asked whether it was difficult he replied:

> It's enjoyable, difficult etc. However there is much to study, really a lot ...like communication and mental management also. Various things such as economics as well ... anything becomes study. Gradually, although I don't make much money, I learn a lot and it's enjoyable. It's amazing, I can do whatever I like, and I can make many friends...

Although there were all these positives he had originally thought that he would be able to sell much more than he had:

> But, Hamamatsu is a bit difficult [he laughed]. Do you understand 'conservative'? Don't you think Hamamatsu is conservative? Therefore it's a bit difficult. Consequently it's said that the cities are easier. Hamamatsu

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[4] Amway, a contraction of 'American Way,' is a direct selling, or network marketing business. Amway members sell products (beauty, home care, vitamins etc), but also invite those people who they are selling to, to become sellers as well. Therefore, if I were to introduce you to Amway and you became a seller, I would receive a proportion of what you sold. Then if you introduced your friend, you would get a proportion of their sales, and I would get a smaller proportion of theirs (but I would not receive a proportion of the sales of whoever your friend's friend introduced). Thus the idea is to expand your network of sales and sellers to gradually increase your monthly sales. On achieving certain targets members move up the chain and can potentially earn a great deal of money. One woman I knew was earning about 200,000yen (£833) a month based on her sales and her networks' sales, and this was at the lower middle level. The Japanese Amway page is: http://www.amway.co.jp/. For an English description of Amway and its philosophy see: http://www.amway.co.uk/. Also see Butterfield (1985) and Fadzillah (2005).

people give that kind of feeling of being conservative.

Despite the fact that he was not yet earning much through Amway he seemed to derive much satisfaction from being involved and this was not just because of all he could learn, but because he felt he could control his time and work environment by doing Amway. When talking about work he said: "I like working but...only working is not good ... I want time for myself. Working is not life. Japanese people work really hard don't they?!" He thought that the way of thinking in Japan (focusing always on working) was "crazy":

> Working is natural, working very hard is normal in Japan... People think working hard is beautiful ... I don't think so. I think work is the way to get money. So, we need money to live. How can I say... work is for our life, but in Japan life is for working (*we both laugh*). It's strange .... My friends go to work at eight o'clock [a.m.] and come home at about ten o'clock [p.m.] (*shakes his head*).

Takeshi felt envious about working styles in the UK and in other countries where people can take two or three weeks off at a time of their choosing to go on holiday. He felt that if he were to do that he would be fired – and he most likely would. He was pessimistic about Japan changing its work ethic and also bemoaned the fact that for his summer holidays he only got five days off, and that he had to take them during Obon[5] when the factory was closed, and when it was most expensive to travel anywhere because travel companies significantly bump up the costs of holidays and travel at that time. He was therefore planning on staying close to home and taking the opportunity to go surfing every day.

Aspirations/plans

Takeshi's plans revolved around his involvement with Amway. When I specifically asked what he wanted he said: "Various things... Well... I want to do Amway. I want more time... Yes, I want time. I absolutely want time." His aim was to earn enough money through Amway so that he would not have to work in the future. As such he was a regular attendee of local Amway meetings and inspirational speeches given by top Japanese Amway sellers. He spent most of his time when

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[5] Obon is a Japanese Buddhist custom of honouring the deceased. It takes place between the 13th and 15th of the seventh month, which is either in July or August (depending on whether the solar or lunar calendar is being followed). It has become a time for companies to shut (for varying lengths of time – usually one week) for the summer holiday. In Hamamatsu all the factories and most companies close during the same week for Obon, meaning that everyone was on holiday at the same time. It makes it, however, almost impossible for workers to tend extended holidays at a time of their choosing.

not at work trying to get more people involved in Amway and buying their products to increase his sales. Moreover, it was the thing that he was trying his hardest at (*ichiban ganbatte iru*). This was his main aspiration and he could not really conceive of it not occurring, or rather, did not want to think of the possibility of it not happening; or if he did, he did not want to discuss it with me.

Romance and Relationships

Takeshi was single the entire time I knew him. He had had a girlfriend for a couple of years whilst at university, but not since and he seemed quite unhappy with this fact. On one of the last times we met up I asked whether he had met anyone yet and he shook his head with a mournful grimace: "For a long time no-one, but I would like someone..." Before I left Japan to start the PhD in 2005 Takeshi had become quite friendly with a couple of my girlfriends, one of whom, Risako, he exchanged e-mails with. Risako was interested in being friends with him, but after a few months she confided in me that she had started to not respond. The frequency and way he wrote made her feel uncomfortable. Moreover, his way of communicating with people; not being reserved – made others uncomfortable. Takeshi seemed to be trying a more open way of interacting with people, which was often perhaps misunderstood. His approach to women he liked seemed to be off-putting and disconcerting to many. Takeshi, however, attributed his lack of a girlfriend to bad timing, saying that women he liked usually had boyfriends. It seems likely that though some of these women did have boyfriends, a few probably fabricated the existence of one as a way to dismiss his advances. This was one of the common strategies employed by young women I knew to ward off unwanted attention.

When talking about women he said that he was looking for someone who was positive, kind (*yasashii*), someone who wasn't "*kitsui*". I was initially slightly confused at his use of the word '*kitsui*' which I had always thought meant tight or difficult. I asked him to elaborate and he suggested we look it up in my dictionary. As I scrolled down it came to 'strong-minded' and he let out a laugh and energetically said: "That's it, that's it! ... I'm not good at (*nigatte*) strong minded (*kitsui*) women. They are tiring (*tsukareru*), and I cannot relax with them (*rerakusu dekinai*)." Knowing that he went surfing a lot, I asked whether he had met any female surfers whom he liked and he shook his head animatedly with a slight grimace. I asked if this was because they are *kitsui*, but he shook his head and said that they "look like men" (*otokoppoi miechatta*), and that they were tanned to a really dark colour. To be physically feminine in Japan is to be as white

as possible, dainty and delicate (Ashikari 2003).[6] Surfers tend to be well tanned and, though not overly muscled, to have muscle tone. When I asked him if it was therefore about them being tanned too dark he backtracked slightly and said that it was not so much the tan, but that they were too boyish for him.

When questioned about his current female co-workers Takeshi screwed up his face and said that they were all "old misses" (*orudo missu*); that they are all in their thirties and forties, and unmarried. With this statement he let out a nervous laugh (perhaps somewhat in reaction to my slightly surprised expression) and said: "Well, some are divorced, some not married." Whilst being divorced or not married was not, he said, an impediment and was rather "a shame" (*shōganai*), all the women he worked with were, he thought, negative. He was rather looking for someone who was positive, kind, feminine and *sunao* (translated as obedient, docile, supple, flexible, and tame).

Takeshi wanted to get married and have children in the future. He was open about his wife working full-time, but only until they had children. Subsequently he thought that it would be difficult (*muzukashii*) and that he would want her to be at home with the children, to look after them and the home. He anticipated being the main breadwinner.

Freeterism

Although Takeshi was a freeter when I initially met him and seemed happy to embrace that label at the time by stating that he was a freeter who wanted to travel and surf; as he got older, and after his job contract changed, he slowly began to dissociate himself from the category. This was apparent when I first spoke with him about my research; he was very non-committal and did not seem that keen to speak with me, or alternatively to offer to introduce me to any freeters that he knew. Takeshi's image of a freeter was basically someone working on a part-time contract, which he did not now fit because of his regular contract. Once given the opportunity of a *shain* contract with its attendant job security, and ability to take paid holiday, he seized the chance. His self-identification more recently resided in Amway and with seeing himself as an entrepreneur. In this sense he seemed to want to distance himself from common perceptions of freeters; that they are either hopeless dream-chasers or losers with little work

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[6] This is also the case in other Asian countries, for example in Thailand (Mills 2001).

ethic. Takeshi maintained the aim to make it big with Amway and subsequently cease working, which was a dream that other Amway members I knew who were working full-time and part-time also shared.

Age, Life Course, and Work

Age has great relevance and affect on life and work choices, for both men and women in Japan (cf. Ando 2004). For men fulfilling expected roles first occurs through work, and then later, through marriage and family. Thus expectations regarding work, age and life course are closely linked. For both Nobu and Takeshi being in their late twenties indicated a time when they felt they needed to get real about making some decisions. This was illustrated by Nobu's statement that he was 'thinking, thinking, thinking' about his future, and his subsequent decision to try and find a stable Japanese language teaching post that would support him in his aim to produce, exhibit and sell his artwork. For Takeshi this can be seen by the way he seized the opportunity to move beyond unstable employment into a regular position stating that it would give him stability, whilst he also strove to succeed in Amway. Other freeters felt similarly. For example, Koji, a twenty-six year old cinema worker had been attempting to enter a secure *seishain* position for a couple of years – he had taken the manager exam three times,[7] but unfortunately failed each time. Whilst his father had offered to help him get a position in the import/export company he worked in, Koji was worried about the implications of accepting his help: "If I start there, I cannot quit at all..." Yet he was increasingly feeling that the time had come to change his freeter lifestyle.

In their early and mid-twenties these men had been content to work in the unstable employment sphere, but as their late twenties rolled around this had become a more untenable position for a number of reasons. Nobu (and Nobu's family by extension) faced significant social pressure from the community due to widespread views that art was a suitable hobby, but not a suitable job. These views were clearly expressed by neighbours in his rural village and also by his parents. Whilst it was acceptable for him to be unsure of his future three years before, it was becoming less so. Furthermore, Nobu himself felt that it was time to start making some decisions about his future. He was feeling more pressure to decide on a path rather than just continuing as he had been for the previous three

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[7] Only managers were on full-time (*seishain*) contracts at the cinema. All other workers were on part-time contracts.

years.

For Takeshi, the low wages of his part-time jobs prompted his move to the marginally higher paid factory work. Having the security of a regular contract gave him a more comfortable footing on which to try and achieve higher earnings through Amway, without having to worry about putting in extra shifts and working six days a week as opposed to five. Moving back to his parent's house and having a more stable employment environment thus allowed him to focus more on his Amway ambitions. Becoming economically successful (or comfortable) was an increasingly pressing concern for Takeshi, not only because he wanted to be able to work less in the future. Given that his view of gender roles was quite traditional, and that he wanted his future wife to mainly be at home should they have children, he was aware that he needed to get onto a more stable financial footing before marrying. Moreover, as many women still want to marry economically secure men (as discussed in Chapter 3) this was also likely to have been a consideration. By taking a regular contract and moving home to 'help' his parents he also expressed the ability to be a 'responsible man,' and this could be seen as a way of making himself more marriageable (cf. Raymo and Iwasawa 2005). This was a far cry from the image he had been giving in his earlier twenties: that of the independent and carefree surfer/hopeful entrepreneur.

Whilst the majority of freeters in their late twenties were feeling similar pressures and beginning to think about what to do in order to balance their desires with social expectations, some continued to resist. Ishiyama, another twenty-six year old cinema freeter, felt considerable pressure from his family, particularly his father, to find something stable. However, he had no plans to alter what he was doing:

> For me, this job is ok. I am trying to be a script writer. I studied to be an editor at a vocational college (*senmon gakkō*) because I wanted to support writers. After I finished I found a full-time job as a junior editor, but I did not really enjoy it, so I quit. I joined the cinema to learn about film making because I want to make a film. I want to write. So now I am trying to write. It is not going so well. As I get older I have fewer ideas. And it is difficult to become successful, but I want to keep trying. My father wants me to get a proper job … we don't get on well. I don't respect him. Now I don't talk to him.

Others didn't feel pressure from parents or cohorts, but more generally from society, from *seken*. A twenty-seven year old freeter, another budding musician, worked in a convenience store:

> When I was younger it was ok to do this. It felt fine. But now I am starting to feel that maybe it is not ok. Maybe making money, having a stable job, is

necessary and my band should be a hobby. Until now my band has been my priority. Now I feel pressure from outside. I feel impatient (*aseri ha kanjite iru*).

Yet other (though fewer) men fully rejected outside pressures. Ryusuke, a 29 year old freeter who worked part-time in the passport office, was adamant that he didn't want to find full-time work. After meeting a fellow musician he was inspired: "I found my originality." He felt, however, somewhat free of general life course expectations: "I'm never going to get married, so there is no need for me to worry about being a breadwinner." Although Ryusuke did not outrightly out himself as gay, he was highly effeminate in his speech and gestures. Significantly, he felt that although social pressure existed, he was outside of it, and therefore this left him feeling free of these obligations. Another man, Yusuke, a twenty-nine year old musician, also placed himself outside of wider social expectations:

> Although I suppose people could call me a freeter, I don't really think I am. I am a musician, a composer, a DJ, a music producer. All my friends are outside the norm – none of them wants to live the typical life. I could never be a salaryman. I have opinions and I cannot work under people who do not listen to my opinions.

Yusuke lived at home with his parents in an affluent neighbourhood of Hamamatsu, rent free. His father worked for Yamaha music and encouraged his son's ambitions. Furthermore, his only sister also lived at home and worked as a freelance graphic designer. For Yusuke there was no pressing pressure – his parents were content with his decisions, his peer group were also solidly opposed to living a 'regular' life, and he had no girlfriend and thus no pressing marriage possibilities.

Whilst there is significant societal pressure for Japanese men in their mid- to late- twenties to grow up and get 'proper' jobs, there is also employment pressure as it is generally considered to be harder to get into full-time employment the older one gets. Moreover, there is also the perception that most (large) companies want to hire new graduates, that is men aged 22 (cf. Brinton and Ngo 1993; Hendry 2003; Levine 1983), or at least those in their early- to mid-twenties, over those who are in their late twenties. Younger employees are thought to be more malleable (Genda 2005). In addition, younger workers are paid less, which in the recent economic climate is significant. Indeed more companies are hiring freeters and *haken* workers because not only are they cheaper, but they are easily able to

fire them[8] or lay them off should they need to (something that has been abundantly clear in 2009 (cf. Fukue 2008, 2009) – thousands of temporary workers have been summarily laid off effectively minimising the need to make core regular workers redundant).

It is also pertinent that many employers looking to recruit new regular workers do not consider irregular work to constitute viable work experience (Genda 2005; Kosugi 2003). Rather, men who have worked in irregular jobs tend to be seen to have limited skills, making it more difficult the older one gets to find regular employment. Indeed most local job advertising magazines such as *Duomo* are full of adverts advertising for regular employees with age-limits of between the ages of 32 and 35 (though 32 seemed to be the most common).[9] Thus if men want to enter the world of regular employment the pressure to do so starts to become more intense as men move into their late twenties. Nobu and Takeshi had both found (potentially) stable employment opportunities, though Nobu was not yet successful in getting a regular job, although in part because he was not sure if he really wanted one. Both men maintained their primary objective of pursuing their dreams. Thus work itself and loyalty to a company or job were not at the centre of their lives. Work was reduced to a way of financing their ambitions and a way of life, rather than being the core of life itself.

Though it has been said that many people in Japan want a better work-life balance (cf. Fujimoto 2004) early twenty-first century working ideals for men appear to still be quite rigid. This, though, may be changing. Fujimoto's (2004) sociological study of work and family life across the life course indicates that although the majority of men expressed preference to allocate their time evenly across work and family they continued to advocate traditional ways of working,

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[8] Technically it is illegal to fire an employee who is on a regular contract, though companies are allowed to suggest that they voluntarily resign (Mathews 2004).

[9] This is not to say that men after the age of 35 cannot find jobs. Indeed people do continue to change jobs. However, when discussing breaking *into* the regular employment market for the first time, then it becomes much more pertinent and much more difficult for freeters to find a company who will employ them. I was told that it tends to be easier in smaller companies. The government itself seems to be looking to change this attitude somewhat by opening up places for one hundred freeters in their twenties and thirties to take the civil service exam (Anon 2006b). Generally the age limit for this exam is just twenty-one and applicants must have graduated from high school (ibid.).

thus maintaining normative ideals of work and masculinity.[10] However, the only age group that deviated from this when looking at ideal time allocations given for work and private life were those men under the age of thirty; who wanted to spend half their time at work, and half at home. Although Fujimoto concludes that the majority of people in Japan realise the importance of a better work-life balance, he also states that deviating from the accepted norms of working is "still unlikely to be accepted" (2004: 13). His findings are significant; not only does this support, for example, Nobu, Takeshi and Koji's view of work–life balance, but it shows that younger people's work/life ideals may slowly be changing. This consequently could lead to significant changes in normative notions of masculinity which remains that of the loyal salaryman and breadwinner, as discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

Despite their insistence on pursuing their dreams, Nobu and Takeshi were, however, afraid of being in irregular employment as they moved towards their thirties. Takeshi had been able to solve this by becoming a salaried employee, but Nobu remained troubled. The earning potential of irregular workers remains low over the life course compared to earning potential of regular salaried employees (Ashby 2004; Torii 2005). Moreover, without job security, sick pay and paid holidays their chances of marriage decrease (or become more difficult) because of the instability inherent in irregular work (cf. Murakami 2006). One of the reasons given for the low birth-rate in Japan is the concern that people have about their economic situation and whether they can afford to have children, thus marrying a freeter is a concern for many women (ibid.). Consequently irregular workers tend to be at the bottom of the eligible male category. As discussed in Chapter 3, almost every woman I spoke to, of whatever age, categorically said she would not want to marry a freeter, even if she loved him. She would rather part ways and find a safer option; someone who could, on surface credentials at least, offer a secure path.

Other male freeters in their late twenties that I interviewed were also becoming concerned as they got closer to thirty, but the men who were most concerned were those with girlfriends from whom they experienced significant pressure to enter the regular employment sector. Koji was one such man. He had been with

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[10] See McDowell (2003) for an interesting analysis of the effects of macro-economic shifts, the casualisation of the labour market, and continuation of traditional gendered ideas of work among the working-class in the UK.

his girlfriend for two years and she had made it abundantly clear that it was getting time to shape up or ship out. Most of these men were under no illusion that if they did not they would most likely end up single. Nobu and Takeshi, though single, were also aware of how irregular work was viewed and were concerned because marriage was definitely something they both wanted in the future. Other men, like Ryusuke, Ishiyama, and Yusuke were seemingly unconcerned – none of them anticipated marriage as part of their near-future plans. Ryusuke felt that he would never marry, Yusuke was adamant that he would marry someone similar to him who shared his bohemian lifestyle, and Ishiyama was painfully shy and had never had a girlfriend. He felt that marriage was probably not something likely to happen.

Though Nobu and Takeshi appear to be beginning to conform to wider social expectations of men in their late twenties, as illustrated through their relationship with regular work, both men continued to negotiate these expectations by holding onto and pursuing their wider goals. Regular employment was desired as a means to provide a stable salary whilst pursuing their objectives. Neither was planning to give up their dreams and settle into just a regular job. Whilst this may appear, superficially, to buck the trend of hard-working salarymen, it is not actually such a radical way of thinking. Flexibility in jobs and careers clearly existed before and after the Second World War with people changing jobs and trying new things. Matsunaga (2000a), in her research on a retail store in the early 1990s, discusses older middle-aged men reminiscing about their various job changes and irregular employment when they were younger (in the 1960/70s). However, in the post-war period, the nation and mainstream ideal appears to have become stuck on the notion that being in so-called lifetime employment is best; being in a regular job and sticking to it, are necessary components of manhood. Whilst the mass media has in recent years been proclaiming the tradition of lifetime employment to be at an end (Yoshida 2001), as Mathews (2004) and others (cf. Brinton and Ngo 1993; Goodman 2005; Roberson 1995; Sugimoto 2003) point out, lifetime employment has only ever been enjoyed by a minority of male middle-class white-collar workers. Therefore, whilst many Japanese scholars have discussed youth and their lack of a work ethic by highlighting their apparent intention to not work regularly, it is clear that for many, changing jobs and working flexibly goes back a long way.

Consequently, although Nobu and Takeshi are engaging with a social discourse that proclaims regular work to be the way men *should* work, it is a relatively new

discourse linked to post-war ideals, the bubble economy and dominant ideals of masculinity. What they are doing, however, as freeters, is not new. Nevertheless, the fear of being unable to gain a foot in the door of regular employment is valid, especially for young men who have lived through the uncertainty of the post-bubble employment system.

Responsibility, Adulthood and Masculinity

As argued in Chapter 1 ideas about responsibility (*sekinin*) abound in Japan and it is a core component of what it means to be an adult (*ichininmae*). Although *sekinin* is not often explicitly mentioned in academic texts, the link between responsibility and adulthood is clear. McVeigh (2004: 104) notes that when talking about adults youth gave answers that could be categorised into a number of different "conceptual domains". Adults were, in order of highest importance first, 1) Able – they could do anything and do it correctly/neatly; 2) Other-oriented – adults become (or should become) role models for younger people; 3) Independent – they are not reliant on parents and are thus free, they are able to live in society alone, follow their own path, live by their 'own power', and make their own livelihood; 4) Confident – they understand themselves and are self-possessed. They are able to act resolutely, are decisive and have opinions; 5) Discerning – can calmly and accurately judge situations and subsequently take responsibility for their judgements; 6) They are over twenty years old, can vote, drink, smoke etc (McVeigh 2004: 103-104).

These views of adulthood are important because, as argued in Chapter 1, they illustrate that responsible action is one of the core components of what it means to be an adult in Japan. Although responsibility encompasses characteristics and behaviours expected of all Japanese there are also gender differences between them. For example, men are said to become full adults (and therefore responsible) once they have completed the school to (full-time) work transition (cf. Roberson 1995). Roberson states that this is particularly important for men as their social identification comes most permanently through work. Meanwhile, the expected role of wives and mothers is said to complete women's full transition to adulthood (ibid.). It is not just about social identification though; for men, a large part of normative ideals of masculinity (as already discussed in Chapter 2) revolves around being the main responsible breadwinner of a household.

Whilst neither Nobu nor Takeshi (or the others) were yet at a point of being able to get married, they were both looking to take on more responsibilities in their

lives, for themselves and others, whilst also negotiating these (adult) expectations. Nobu had been helping his family considerably with the tea harvesting each year; however he planned to move back to Nagoya to pursue his art and to support himself financially, hopefully by working as a full-time Japanese language teacher; a role imbued with responsibility given that it is a teaching role. However, Nobu can still be seen to be struggling with what to do in the future. Much of this struggle appears to be from conflicting feelings of what he *should* do (what he felt his parents wanted him to do) and what *he* wanted to do. Nobu was the only person in his family to go to university, and this was most likely a big achievement for his family, who were originally in a rural low-status occupation. Although now a middle-class family (in both income and status), presumably they sought a different life for him, one that was potentially less physically strenuous and more stable (economically) than their own had been. However, against expectations Nobu had returned to the mountains and was doing the same jobs his father and grandfather had done before him, and he also wanted to pursue an economically unstable profession by being an artist. In essence Nobu was attempting to pick out an acceptable compromise by training to be a language teacher which he could do full-time whilst doing his artwork by night. Takeshi, however, had recently moved home to help his parents. Considering that previously he had not got on well with them and had found living with them very difficult this was quite a big move that represented a turn away from the selfishness of youth, to being more 'responsible' and therefore more adult.

Being responsible though did not mean that there were no contradictions in their feelings about work. Though Takeshi had a regular job, he stated that he only took the contract because it bore no extra responsibilities. Mathews (2004) suggests that this attitude is part of the generation gap in Japan; older men view loyalty to the company as essential and often bemoan how youth are no longer devoted to their companies. However, young workers are all too aware that they are unlikely to receive so-called lifetime employment, even if they have a permanent contract, so they tend to think of staying only as long as it takes to learn the skills they need before moving on to the next company (ibid.). Although Mathews (2004) discusses middle-class white-collar employees this view was shared by many students I worked with who had not yet entered the regular work force and to an extent by some freeters as well. For example, Akihiro, a twenty-eight year old freeter and artist, who worked in a factory assembling cabinets, wondered what the point of *seishain* work was:

> I often think, 'what is the point of becoming a regular worker?' It really isn't as stable as everyone thinks. The company could easily make us redundant if they needed to, even if we were on a regular contract... Lifetime employment is a fiction. I think it is better to work, gain good skills, and then move on to something better if possible.

Yet his opinion was not reflected in the views of the majority of freeters I knew. Akihiro was philosophical about the realities of the employment system, but he was also dating a British woman who had her own highly successful career as a designer. She was supportive of his artistic endeavours and they were planning on moving back to the UK. The majority of freeters I knew, however, had no plan to move permanently overseas and were more concerned with getting *into* regular employment first before thinking about gaining skills and moving on.

In their own ways, through their new negotiations with work, Nobu, Takeshi and other freeters like Koji, were moving further away from the category of male youth (as discussed in the last chapter) and into the expectations of full adulthood as their ages, experiences and wider societal expectations prompted them to make decisions about their current lives and futures. However, much like men in their early twenties, peer groups remained important in this transition, both in terms of affirming decisions and prompting them as shall now be discussed.

The Camaraderie of Peers

Peers, or their absence, had, as in the cases in the previous chapter, a great effect on the freeters in their late twenties. For Nobu, moving to the countryside and being effectively without a peer cohort because his small village was made up mainly of people over the age of sixty, made him change his goals as already discussed. However, it was through meeting Yuriko and her varied group of friends that he was re-inspired and wanted to become an artist again. Aside from Yuriko's group he had no friends in the area; some old friends were still in Nagoya and he occasionally met up with them at big events such as weddings; whilst others had gone back to their hometowns. Thus, meeting and socialising with Yuriko and her group seemed to prompt him back to thinking about what he really wanted to do with his life (cf. Vale de Almeida 1996). Nobu's lack of peer group interaction on his return from university in some respects gave him a liminal space in which to immerse himself in village life and postpone other decisions, yet it also put him in a position of scrutiny under an older rural generation that can be seen as the bearers of tradition, morality and upholders of 'proper' societal expectations (cf. Traphagan 2004). However, as he became friendly with people around his age via Yuriko he began to reassess his life and its

direction.

Takeshi meanwhile had three groups of peers; those at the factory, those at Starbucks and those at Amway. He felt his happiest with fellow Amway members, whom he counted as friends, and with whom he shared a major aspiration, and with his fellow Starbucks colleagues; most of whom had similarly travelled and lived abroad for various amounts of time. Both groups shared aspects of his lifestyle and could reinforce his aspirations (cf. Nisbett 2006, 2007). He felt supported and understood by these groups, who he considered to be positive go-getters that had aims in life, which served to mutually reinforce his own feelings about his lifestyle and aspirations. This was in contrast to his feelings about his factory cohort, who he described as being negative (especially the women). He had no close friends at the factory, did not socialise with colleagues, and maintained a certain amount of distance. Given that he felt no loyalty and no desire to remain in the job longer than he needed to, refraining from developing relations would presumably make leaving easier. However, it could also be speculated that this had a class/education dimension attached to it; many factory workers not being university graduates. Thus, his ideals and aspirations were reinforced through his Amway and Starbucks colleagues, who he felt shared similar views on lifestyles and work ethics.

A further important aspect to consider is the marriages that were beginning to occur in both Takeshi and Nobu's peer groups. The average age for first marriages (in 2007) was 30 for men, and 28.2 for women (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2007c), an age which both Nobu and Takeshi were nearing. One of Takeshi's friends already had children and a regular job, and though he did not want this man's life due to his long working hours, he did want some economic stability. I would suggest that seeing their peers begin to marry, have families and settle down had a large effect on their ways of thinking and prompted them to think more about their own positions and the appropriate behaviour of men their age.

Physicality, Gender Roles and Masculinity

Nobu, Takeshi and other freeters used their bodies in a variety of ways to express the core ideas of themselves, and their masculine identities. Clammer (1997: 68) has stated that:

> Shopping ... is the buying of identity. This is true of all cultures where shopping takes place, and the consumption even of 'necessities' in situations where there is some choice reflects decisions about self, taste,

images of the body and social distinctions.

The clothes and accessories that my male informants adorned themselves in did indeed say a lot, not just about their ideas of themselves, but was also indicative of other views – including, interestingly, those of gender roles.

As mentioned in the introduction to Nobu's case study, he was kooky in his style. Though his clothes were relatively run of the mill – fashionable t-shirts and smart jeans – he had a prominent wispy goatee, wore heavy rimmed rectangular glasses, and was also often sporting a cowboy hat to complete his look. Looking at him it was easy to see his artiness. Moreover, through his body language he expressed sensitivity; by his ability to listen, realise when he was not understood and re-explain. On the surface he appeared to fit into an artistic/arty sort of masculinity. However, he also worked in very physical jobs; as a tree surgeon and tea harvester, both of which required physical strength. He therefore appropriated dual types of physical masculinity in his own constructions of himself. Many of the musical or artistic freeters, like Nobu, similarly went out on a fashion limb in usually conservative Hamamatsu. For example, Yusuke, a twenty-nine year old musician was often seen in black and white horizontally striped tops, with accompanying black waistcoat and French beret. Often seen sporting books on philosophy, psychology, modern art, poetry, and at times anthropology, he was keen to put across his intellectual and artistic personality. Takeshi though, was seemingly more clear-cut, more conservative and typical in his style. As described earlier he looked like a typical surfer: often in knee length short, t-shirts and flip-flops. He was always on the go, active, and appeared to embody a more sporting type of masculinity, as discussed in Chapter 2 (cf. Roberson 2005).

Interestingly, when looking at how they presented themselves to society their fashion was often broadly indicative of their views of gender roles and what they expected from relationships. There was also a class dimension. Whilst I am not suggesting that *everyone* dressed in such a way as to make it apparent what their ideas of gender roles were, there were some common themes. Nobu, true to his arty/sensitive side ideally wanted gender roles to be split fifty-fifty, though he tagged on a qualifier to this stating that it might not end up that way, as it would depend on their jobs. However, ideally this is what he wanted. He wanted to share raising the children equally, to have a good work-life balance and spend time with someone who has aims, and who he can have an enjoyable time with. Nobu grew up in an ostensibly working-class family where all members worked long hours, thus everyone pitching in seemed normal to him, though gender

differences were apparent through his statement that the roles (in marriage) would depend on the working situation they found themselves in. A number of authors have noted that working-class men may be more active at home and in the community, and though they might not have more egalitarian gender roles per se, their wives were often out working (cf. Bestor 1989; Roberson 1995, 2003).

Yusuke, however, had quite complex feelings about gender roles. Growing up in a firmly middle-class family with a father who was a salaryman and a mother who was a professional housewife, he expected that he would, if he married, ideally have to support the family: "I think that the majority of women in Japan want men to be the breadwinner." But ideally that was not what he wanted: "I want to meet a woman who wants to be equal in everything, who is artistic and making her living with her art, her passion. I want to share all the chores and support each other." Yusuke struggled to reconcile what he wanted with what he thought women wanted and expected: "Really, I think I won't be able to get married. It is already hard to make enough money for myself. I cannot support myself fully, so I cannot support a family. I think it is important to be true to myself so I guess I may end up single..."

Takeshi, meanwhile, was much more invested in post-war middle-class ideals of gender roles. Though into sports himself he wanted someone who was not into sports, not strong-minded, but someone malleable, easy to deal with who would take on a more traditional (middle-class) female gender role as housewife, and bearer/raiser of children. This, presumably, would leave him free to pursue his interests and aspirations. He had also grown up in a middle-class family with a mother who stayed at home, which is clearly linked to being middle-class in Japan (cf. Fujimura-Fanselow and Kameda 1995; Hara 1995; Iwahori 1999; Iwao 1993; Lebra 1984, 1993, 1999; Lock 1999). Furthermore, the kind of sporting type of masculinity that Takeshi sought to embody remains consistent with traditional gender roles, linked as it is to samurai codes of behaviour that have come to be likewise embodied in the dominant post-war ideal of the salaryman, as discussed in Chapter 2. Thus for him, traditional ideas of gender roles appeared both normal and natural.

It is clear that, as both Clammer (1997) and Mathew's (1996: 724) suggest, picking and choosing consumption objects – in this case their fashion – to be "creators of self" was more than just wanting to look nice. These young men all sought to say something about themselves by the way they presented their physical bodies, and in that way also highlight the links between self-presentation,

their values and their sense of themselves in the world (cf. Foucault 1988; Hacking 1986; Mahmood 2001). As Clammer notes:

> The self can be conceived by analogy with a work of art: as itself the product of a dialectical relationship between interior cultivation and external canons of acceptance. The mask and the reality are thus in a sense the same, or two aspects of the totality. Shopping – the material construction and adornment of this dialectical self – takes on an almost metaphysical significance as a result, since this self-identity must be constantly reaffirmed in ways that are socially visible as well as aesthetically pleasing. Shopping, however, is not just simple acquisition – it has symbolic, spatial, economic, class and gender aspects, and we need to turn to disentangling and clarifying these.

(1997: 69-70)

Conclusion

The late twenties for Japanese men represents a time when actual transitions to adulthood are expected. The protective bubble around young males in their early twenties, which implicitly allows youth to try out new things and pursue dreams, no longer surrounds men in their late twenties. This chapter has shown predominantly how two men negotiated the pressure (from themselves and society) to begin working 'properly' and to make the first major transition to adulthood by being financially independent through having a stable job. It can be seen that the late twenties is a time of considerable pressure for young men to start to grow up, get real and make some concrete decisions about what they are going to do. On the one hand, this pressure comes from, 1) an acute awareness that they had limited time to get into regular employment before becoming too old, by dint of age limits; 2) the prevalent view that their work experiences have equipped them with limited or no skills; and 3) the idea that companies want to employ younger graduates. On the other hand, there were parental pressures and expectations to contend with. Not everyone experienced them; for example, Yusuke had incredibly supportive parents, Ishiyama and Ryusuke positioned themselves outside of social norms and expectations by outrightly resisting them (a move viewed as childish in wider society). But most of the young men I knew felt unable to entirely resist these pressures. Nobu's parents wanted him to get a regular job and live a regular life which he was negotiating. In many respects Takeshi was already doing this as well by gaining regular employment at a factory. However, although they were both concerned enough about their futures and economic prospects to engage with regular work they also both continued to resist living normally (*futsū ni*) in various ways as well, as shown by their ambivalence to Japanese working styles and their insistence on pursuing their

dreams.

Furthermore, the (expected) time to marry was fast approaching and as university friends and acquaintances began to marry and have children this also affected their choices and decisions. It brought home the fact that their peers, and thus they themselves, were at an age when responsibility and the expectation to make families was coming to the fore, causing them to reassess and think of their lives in different ways. Nobu and Takeshi were thus at junctures, and both attempted to distance themselves from the category of freeter by highlighting what they felt best represented them: artist and entrepreneur.

From the case studies it can be seen that both men have clearly moved away from identifying with youth into a more adult stage, but they are yet to be considered full adults despite being in their late twenties. As they vacillate between, and, for Takeshi, embrace, stable employment and societal expectations, what they want to do and achieve remains at the fore. Although they have been taking on more responsibility in their lives they are unattached and ultimately remain responsible only for themselves. They therefore continue to have a space in which they are able to explore and pursue their aims and ambitions before becoming fully adult men.

Whilst many male freeters make the transition to regular employment (and hence to a more adult-like state) by their late twenties or early thirties, some choose not to do so or are unable to do so, whilst others (though far fewer) make the unusual decision to quit their regular employment to become freeters to pursue as yet unachieved aspirations. The following chapter will explore how men in their thirties negotiate freeterhood in relation to expected life course, societal expectations and their constructions of adult manhood.

Chapter 6: Over the Hill?

Men in their thirties are expected to have become, or be in the latter stages of becoming adults. In popular conception the time for playing about should be over; they should have achieved or be in the process of achieving the major role transitions of stable employment and marriage. But what happens to freeters who cannot find regular employment? Or when a man turns his back on regular employment and becomes a freeter later in life?

As discussed in the previous chapter, the search for regular work whilst a freeter in their mid-twenties can be an intimidating challenge, but for those men in their thirties it becomes increasingly impossible to find a 'permanent' regular position. The longer men are in irregular work the harder it is to break out of. It is thought to show an inability to commit and an inability to endure (especially if they have quit a regular position), both of which indicate unmanly and immature behaviour, which can consequently have repercussions on a man's opportunities to get hired as a regular worker. The repercussions of failing to find a job can have a large effect on self-esteem and on their constructions of self and manhood. Moreover, fear of failure, and fear of committing to a job which may ultimately not be fulfilling, seemed to be quite paralysing for some.

Not all men in their thirties, however, desire permanent regular positions. Some have actively turned their back on the world of regular work and are pursuing alternative ways of living. This chapter consequently explores the diverse positions and life views of men in their thirties and illustrates how, after a certain age (around 35) it becomes more possible for some men to turn their backs on what they feel is expected of them. Some, especially those in their late thirties felt that they had already put in their time in regular (*seishain*) jobs and that it was increasingly important to do what they wanted with their lives instead of what was expected, whereas others still aspired to stable positions and 'regular' lives.

This chapter consequently explores three main case studies of men in their thirties. It aims to illustrate the complexities of their lives, their reasons for working as freeters, and how their current choices are affected by class and education. Age, ideas of adulthood and stage of life are also largely implicated in the ways they engage with being a freeter and how they envisage their futures.

Kentaro

I met Kentaro whilst working in the cinema. He started working there two or

three months after me, but I soon learned that he had, in fact, previously worked there a few years before. He was consequently the *sempai* (senior) of some of the members of my section. In contrast to new recruits he had a confident manner and knew many of the long-term employees as well as the way that things worked in the cinema, including the work-place politics. At 33 years of age he was the oldest male section member; the older members were all housewives working part-time. When he introduced himself to me I was opening a showing of a film, but as most customers had already entered the screen I was just waiting for any stragglers to come along and was therefore quite free. He looked me up and down discreetly, said hello with a slight bow and a serious expression, followed by a smile. Unlike most other new recruits, he seemed unfazed by my 'foreignness', largely, I later learned, because he had seen me working there when he had visited to see films, and heard about me through other members of staff.

Kentaro had a wide face, high forehead and spiky anime-esque hair and he reminded me slightly of Arita Teppei, a well-known Japanese comedian who hosts a number of talk-shows. He was prone to maintaining eye contact for long periods, which was often a little disconcerting, and at times he had an almost dead quality in his eyes. His manner was brisk, but friendly. He expressed a number of times his interest in football and talked often about his favourite British players and teams. When a group of the guys once joked during a shift about coming over to the UK to visit and see some football matches he got really excited and started making plans, even going so far as to later in the evening ask whether the coming September would be a good time for him to come.

Kentaro generally worked the night shift – from 5 or 6 p.m. until 1 a.m. so our shifts usually overlapped and we had many chances to chat informally at work. When nearing the end of my fieldwork I asked Kentaro if he would meet for an interview, and he said that he would be happy to, but seemed a little nervous at the prospect. After exchanging phone numbers we later set up a day and time to meet. Originally we decided to meet at a small cafe near the cinema. It had seats both inside and out and was situated in a small busy plaza that connected two sides of the main shopping and entertainment area of Zaza city.[1] It was a blazing

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[1] Zaza city is one of the main areas for shopping in the city centre. It is split into two main buildings connected on the second floor by a tunnel/corridor. In the 'central' building there were some restaurants and a new bookstore in the basement; then three floors of clothes, shoes and bag shops (clothes being the most representative); the fourth floor was a medical floor housing a doctors clinic and optometrist; and the fifth floor housed a

hot day and when I arrived early I took the opportunity to take a seat inside, which was cool on account of the air-conditioning. After Kentaro was about ten minutes late I sent him a text message, but got an error message back. He arrived shortly after, but as he didn't seem to see me inside I went out to meet him. When I suggested going in he hesitated and seemed uncomfortable. After ascertaining that I had eaten lunch (it was 2 p.m.) and he had not, I suggested we go into the cafe so he could eat, but Kentaro remained reticent,[2] perhaps because it was too close to the cinema and an area that many of our colleagues went in their spare time and on days off. Kentaro suggested that we find somewhere else for lunch and mentioned a cafe in the railway station.[3] He seemed nervous as we walked and didn't seem sure of what to talk about which was somewhat in contrast to how he was at work. I started conversations that, at that point, didn't go very far. He seemed, instead, to be intent on getting into the cafe we were heading to. However, after getting to the cafe and ordering food he relaxed and conversation began to flow.

Family Background

Kentaro grew up on the small island of Shikoku in a very small town/village in the middle of the island, surrounded by mountains: "It is really countryside. I left because it was too quiet. I wanted to live somewhere big, somewhere lively (*nigiyaka*)." His father was a taxi driver and his mother a housewife and part-time worker. Though working-class they also had a small plot of land where his mother grew enough rice that they never had to buy any, and they also had a mountain (*yama mo aru yo... yama matte iru rashii*), so although working-class

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meeting area (often used by Japanese language teachers and NPOs), and the Young Job Station – an initiative to help young people find jobs. The 'West' building consisted of a small supermarket in the basement, a coffee shop, bank machines, and a tailor; the ground floor consisted mainly of clothes shops, a Mos Burger and a Starbucks; the second floor was a Toys R Us, and a small arcade; the third was the cinema; the fourth also belonged to the cinema and was where the projection machines were held; the fifth was parking. Above these floors was an apartment complex (in both the central and western buildings).

[2] His reticence did not seem to be about money, as the cafe was cheap (selling pasta dishes and cake sets from 500yen (about £2.50), although he may not have liked the food on offer.

[3] The station building housed a shopping complex called May One, and the top floor consisted of cafes and restaurants.

in employment terms they also had some land.[4] He was the eldest of two children. Kentaro's brother was 25 (eight years younger than him), and was working as a salesman in Tokyo as a *seishain*. They were not particularly close but there was no animosity either. He shrugged and said: "I get on well with my family. But I am not interested in living in Shikoku again... I suppose that if my parents need me when they get older I will have to go back, but I don't want to." As the eldest son he foresaw that the responsibility of looking after his parents in their old age would be down to him.[5] However, Kentaro held some hope that he wouldn't have to: "There is a chance that my younger brother would move back... but probably it will be me. If it becomes necessary then it will be that way." He was, however, unwilling to think about or discuss it further and instead asked about my family as a way of getting off the subject.

Education and Employment

As a teenager Kentaro decided that he wanted to move to Osaka (a large city on the main island of Japan). After graduating from high school at age eighteen he left home and attended a *senmon gakkō* where he studied accounting: "I wasn't really interested in accounting at all, but I chose it because one of my teachers said that there were many jobs available in accounting." After graduating from the *senmon gakkō* at age twenty Kentaro achieved his goal of moving to Osaka after securing regular employment at a car parts manufacturer.

Kentaro was placed in the office doing general administrative jobs, but to his great disappointment was transferred to Hamamatsu after only a year spent in Osaka. He expressed regret that he did not have the chance to really experience the city or get to know it well, and spoke with some nostalgia and fondness of it. The move to a smallish city like Hamamatsu was not what he wanted and after four years with the company (three of which were in Hamamatsu), Kentaro quit. Although he quit the company he did not then move to a bigger city, as might have been expected, but stayed in Hamamatsu, saying that he had not been able

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[4] According to Steven (1983) this would put them in the peasantry class: "In Japan ... the bulk of agricultural land is divided into minute holdings, which are owned and operated by peasant families" (Steven 1983: 95). Given, however, that they do not sell any of their produce and earn all their income from low-status jobs and his father was educated to only junior high school level, I have consequently described them as working-class.

[5] In practice this responsibility often ends up being handled by the wife of the eldest son (cf. Ogawa and Retherford 1993). However, if Kentaro remains single then he will likely be expected to shoulder the responsibility.

to afford the expense of moving. Kentaro was quite vague about his reasons for quitting: "Why did I quit? My co-workers were ok, we got on fine. One of the *onesan*[6] quit shortly before, and so I decided to leave too." He seemed reluctant to talk about it further, but I got the distinct impression from our conversations that there were some difficulties in his relations with other co-workers.[7] When I asked him more about the conditions of work Kentaro said: "The conditions of work were ok and the pay was good. I received a bonus twice a year, but really, it was boring (*tsumaranakatta*)."

After quitting he worked at a pachinko parlour[8] for three months to save enough money to put down the deposit for his apartment. Kentaro's reason for taking the job was to save enough money to transfer his apartment contract into his own name. Whilst working for the car parts manufacturing company he had been living in a subsidised apartment that the company had found for him very close to the centre of the city. He wanted to remain living in the centre, and in the apartment he had been in since moving to Hamamatsu, so his ex-company and landlord agreed that he could take over the contract. As he was taking it over as an individual Kentaro had to put down the equivalent of about three months' rent to secure the place, so he needed to work somewhere with a relatively good hourly rate of pay to be able to get the money together.

At the time of quitting his job Kentaro didn't tell his parents about it:

> I didn't want to worry them. I think they would have been worried about money and what I was going to do. I rang my grandmother though. She lives in Nagoya and we talked about it. Finally we decided that I should tell them only after I finished working at the pachinko parlour, and after I had

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[6] Lit. trans. older sister, but in this context it refers more to an older female who he felt close to.

[7] Working with Kentaro at the cinema I saw that although friendly with people he was at times aloof and held himself back. This may have been partly due to not knowing many of the newer workers who had started since he had left, but even with those who had worked at the same time as him there was a distance. Furthermore, being older, of the same kind of age as some of the more senior managers in the Hamamatsu branch, he may have felt disinclined to really mix with many of the students and younger freeters that made up the majority of the work-force.

[8] Pachinko parlours are large neon lit halls consisting of long rows of vertical pinball machines. It is a popular pastime, especially with the working-classes. Pachinko parlours (as well as most of the sex industry) are generally run by organised gangs (yakuza). As gambling is illegal in Japan people 'purchase' small round metal balls to use in the machines. If you win, you win the small silver balls. These can then be exchanged within the pachinko parlour for some prizes, which can then be cashed in at another location (Sibbitt 1997).

paid the deposit and initial rent on the apartment.

Although Kentaro said his decision to not tell his parents was to save them worry it could also be attributed to the negative associations surrounding pachinko. Not only was it not the kind of 'reputable' place to work with its associations to gangs, gambling and illegal activity, but may also have been considered quite a step down the status ladder from a good job at a good company. There was also little for him to gain by mentioning it save for probably having to face his parents' disapproval and concern. At least by having secured his apartment and being able to show that he was somewhat financially stable Kentaro was able to reassure his parents about his intentions to find another regular position again.

After the pachinko parlour Kentaro worked in a restaurant at a local department store: "I thought about becoming a *seishain* there, but eventually I decided not to. There were a lot of people working there. My co-workers were nice, but many had been there a long time. If a regular position became available they would have been offered it before me. So there was less chance to become a regular worker quickly." After working there for about a year he quit and started work at the cinema, which was at that time a Virgin Cinema, whereupon he worked five days a week and also did the night shift at a local convenience store a couple of times a week. The rate of pay at the cinema was low, so the night shift at the convenience store, at 1000 yen (£4.16) an hour, was used to boost his monthly income. Just after Toho took over in 2003, Kentaro stopped working at the cinema, apparently because a customer had lodged a complaint against him. The management recommended that he 'take some time off'. Kentaro was adamant that he hadn't done what the customer accused him of: he was evasive about it and just said that it was about some Pokémon[9] goods, and that even though he had did nothing wrong they still made him leave for a few weeks. After visiting his family home for the summer Obon holidays[10] he returned to Hamamatsu, but on his return wasn't given many shifts and so started looking for new jobs:

> I had to leave. I couldn't pay my rent because they were giving me very few shifts. Before that I had wanted to maybe become a regular worker at the cinema. I was thinking about taking the manager exam, but then when the

[9] Pokémon refers to 'pocket monsters' – of which there are over four hundred characters. It started as a video game, made by Nintendo, and then became hugely popular. It was merchandised into *anime*, *manga*, films, trading cards, books, and toys (cf. Allison 2006; Tobin 2004).

[10] See footnote 5 in Chapter 5 for an explanation of Obon.

cinema was taken over by Toho I felt less interested. And then, because of the situation with the customer, it would have been impossible. So I started looking for a different job.

Kentaro found a new job at a small gadgets shop called Ranking Queen which has outlets across Japan, and had been working there since as a part-time employee.

Aspirations/plans

Kentaro's main aspiration was to attain a salaried position again. Consequently when he began working with Ranking Queen he made clear to them at the outset that he would like to become a salaried employee with them. There was the possibility of a permanent position opening up the following year (2008), in Tokyo. As a result Kentaro had recently returned to the cinema for two or three shifts a week because he was, he said, trying to save money:

> If I become a regular employee [at Ranking Queen] there is a high possibility that I will be transferred. I want to be transferred to Tokyo. I have friends there and it is a big city. But if I am transferred I will need money to find a new apartment and for the move.

Kentaro was hoping that the move and the position would become a reality. He seemed distinctly bored of Hamamatsu and ready for something new.

Romance and Relationships

Kentaro was single and had no girlfriend when we met. When I asked about previous partners he mentioned he had had a few, but that they had all been much younger than him (in their early-twenties). He was reticent to talk about the age gap, but it can be speculated that there are a number of reasons why he dated women much younger than him. Women his own age were more likely to be looking for someone they could build a life with; on reaching their late twenties and early thirties all the women I knew said that they were not just looking for someone who was fun, but were also looking for someone who they could build their lives with; who were marriageable material, of which Kentaro, by dint of being a freeter, was not. Women in their early twenties were less likely to be looking for husbands and more 'up for a good time'.

His longest relationship had been just three months. Kentaro seemed quite uncomfortable at this point although he had effectively initiated the conversation by asking about my relationship with my boyfriend. This had led on to a discussion of gender roles and onto my asking about his relationship status. The brevity of his longest relationship perhaps reflects bad choices. Indeed, when I asked Kentaro about this, he attributed it to their personalities 'not matching'

(*seikaku awanakatta*). Kentaro also had traditional ideas of gender roles. He asked what my boyfriend did to 'help' me when I was so busy with research, inferring that the household chores were my responsibility and that my boyfriend was only helping out at a time of unusual busyness. He expressed surprise when I told him that I do relatively little cooking and the rest of the chores we shared.

Freeterism

When we had spoken about my research during shifts at the cinema Kentaro had clearly labelled himself as a freeter, yet his image of a freeter was:

> Someone who lives with their parents, sometimes works, and goes out and plays. I think that Japanese society has a bad image of freeters, but because I have worked with freeters I do not have any bad image.

From his experiences working in part-time jobs he thought that the majority of freeters were female, but that the image of a freeter evoked ideas of both men and women. Kentaro thus implied that 1) he did not really consider himself to be a freeter, and 2) that if he had not worked with freeters he would perhaps have formed a negative opinion of them. He held himself apart from other freeters, which surprised me given that he had previously said himself that he was a freeter. When I asked him about it he tilted his head to the side and said: "Mmm, people might think that I am a freeter, but I work regularly (*futsū ni*) so I don't think I really am." His reasoning was that because he worked regularly, five days a week, he was different from other 'typical' freeters: "If I was not working at all, or was only working a few shifts a week then maybe I would think I was a freeter, but I am working properly, can pay for my food and rent and am living my life independently." He consequently did not really consider himself to be one, and therefore didn't categorise himself as anything other than someone who was working regularly. This was important to him. Working independently, being a 'proper' adult man by paying his own way, relying only on himself, being responsible etc was crucial to his ideas of self. This was also perhaps why he kept himself aloof from many of the younger workers and students, instead spending time with older 'adult' workers.

Kentaro consciously used the category of freeter as a way to present himself to me, whilst not identifying himself with the category. He could understand why people would place him in the category and it seemed that he was happy to place himself there for the purposes of my interviews, but he drew the line at thinking of himself as a freeter, given that his ideas largely followed mainstream discourse that freeters worked little or not at all and were reliant on families for subsistence.

Although there was much uncertainty in his life he sought to resist internalising the discourses of uncertainty in the media. Moreover, it illustrates that 'being a freeter', or in the category of freeter, does not always lead onto people thinking of themselves in the same terms (cf. Day 2007).

The fact that Kentaro had previously worked as a regular employee is also relevant because he used it to differentiate himself from other freeters. In his view it gave him a different status than that of the people he thought of as 'real' (*hontō no*) freeters. Outwardly, Kentaro was unconcerned by his precarious position in the job market. Yet his desire to become a regular employee again seemed to belie this apparent unconcern. The fact that he had always wanted to get back into a regular salaried position, but had been unable to due to factors outside of his control, such as the unavailability of positions in the places he chose to work, and the difficulty of gaining them through part-time work, also speaks to the fact that though in a sense 'waiting' for a position to come up, Kentaro had positioned himself in places where there were opportunities for advancement, though this had so far forestalled. With his most recent job at Ranking Queen there seemed to be a good chance for him to become a regular employee again before the following year was finished.

Given that this prospect was as of yet unconfirmed Kentaro seemed to derive comfort and confidence when talking about his friend in Tokyo, who was married with a child, and who worked as a freeter. He apparently earned about 350,000yen (£1458) a month, thereby being financially able to provide for both wife and child so long as he does not get sick and need to take time off. So although Kentaro would like to be a regular employee, he thought that he could still make enough money in Tokyo and get married even if he were unable to achieve his desire of becoming a *seishain*.

Yoshio

Yoshio was 32 years old and at the time we met was taking a Hello Work supported computer course to try and enhance his possibilities of finding regular employment. I met him through Akane, who was attending the same course. When I told her about my research she said that there were two men who would possibly be good for me to speak to. One of them was Yoshio, who she described as very interesting due to his part-time work experiences. She made much of the

fact that he had worked as a host. Hosts work in much the same manner as hostesses,[11] though with a female clientele. A host's job is essentially to show women a good time by looking good, talking with them, flattering and flirting, lighting cigarettes, and basically doing whatever makes the customer feel good to make her want to stay in his company. Generally bottles, not just glasses, of alcohol are bought and these are drunk by the customer and the host attending to her, and her group if she is with one. Prices are massively over-inflated so a night out at a host bar can be extremely expensive – as much as a month's earnings depending on the amount people drink and the calibre of the bar. When the customer stops drinking they are encouraged to buy more and if they refuse to keep drinking they are politely, but firmly, shown the door. This is a rule generally known by all who frequent such clubs, though apparently some customers try and get round it (cf. Takeyama 2005). In Hamamatsu, hosts were usually clearly identifiable by their fashion and style: trendy black suits, longish/shoulder-length dyed brown hair, well-plucked eyebrows, and fashionable (usually pointy, in 2007) shoes. Furthermore, they could regularly be seen chain-smoking outside convenience stores late at night or early in the morning. I assumed that Yoshio would be out-going, talkative, confident (at least on the surface), and at ease with women (and I was therefore unconcerned about the fact that we had not met before), but I could not have been more wrong.

The day before we were to meet I met with Akane to talk with the other man she wanted to introduce me to. She mentioned that she was unsure if the following day's meeting would take place because Yoshio had suddenly seemed uneasy about having agreed to meet me. He had been nervous and had left the school early saying that he felt ill. She was therefore uncertain whether we could meet and mentioned that she would contact me the following day nearer the time to let me know if it would be possible. She e-mailed early the following day stating that Yoshio was in fact okay to meet up: he agreed after having talked to the classmate that I had talked with the previous day. However, I had wanted to ask Akane not to be present when I talked with Yoshio. Her presence the day before had had a significant effect on the way the meeting had progressed. She had often interjected with her own views, and as she had been older the man I had talked

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[11] In Japan hostesses generally facilitate customers having an enjoyable evening. This usually includes joining them for drinks and lively conversation, lighting cigarettes etc. For a more detailed analysis of hostess clubs see Allison (1994).

with often deferred to her opinions out of politeness. I had therefore asked her prior to meeting Yoshio if she could leave after introducing us, to which she had agreed.

When they walked up to me Yoshio had his head down slightly and looked apprehensive. He was wearing a white short-sleeved t-shirt with silver glittery writing on it, as was in fashion at the time, and a pair of light coloured close-fitting jeans. He was tall and very slim. He didn't look 32 and initially I thought he was in his mid-twenties. Though polite when we introduced ourselves he came across as nervous and insecure. Outside the cafe Akane mentioned that when they were walking over she had told Yoshio that she was going to leave after introducing us, but he had apparently protested and asked her to stay, stating that he was nervous. I said that it was fine and Akane replied that she would just sit and listen, and would see how he felt after a little while. After we got drinks and sat down Yoshio seemed to feel more comfortable and as we talked and he realised that we could communicate with relatively few problems he seemed to relax further. He was, however, very shy and though he would answer my questions did not pose any questions of any sort to me, not even about my research, which was unusual compared to all the other people I talked with. His host training did, however, become apparent when I lifted my over-filled coffee cup and promptly spilled a large amount across the table. He jumped into action, got napkins to mop up the mess and asked if I had burnt myself and was I okay? This was the only point during the meeting that he had seemed truly comfortable, playing a role he knew how to play. After about fifteen minutes of the three of us sitting in small-talk Akane asked Yoshio if he would be okay if she left. After a slight pause, and what seemed to be some slight embarrassment, he nodded faintly and said that he thought that maybe it would be ok (*tabun daijōbu*), though he still seemed to be somewhat unsure.

Family Background

It was difficult to deduce anything about Yoshio's family background as he was quite reticent on the topic. He lived on his own in the family home: all other members of the family had slowly moved out. Yoshio made no mention of his father at all, and spoke only of his mother's battle with cancer a few years before, which, he insinuated, she had recovered from. They apparently got on well, but he seemed uncomfortable talking about his family and I did not push him. Yoshio had siblings, but again he was vague about what there were doing and where they now lived, though he did mention a sister who was married with children.

Education and Employment

Yoshio quit high school in the middle of the second year:

> When I was at high school I worked part-time at a restaurant and was earning money. I did not really see the point of high school. I did not really understand the teachers, and felt I did not fit there. I could not see the point of finishing.

From his education background alone it is relatively easy to ascertain that he is working-class, and not likely to move up the class ladder due to the restrictions that not finishing high school places on people within Japanese society (cf. Dore 1997 (1976)). As a result he felt that his job opportunities were quite restricted. He had done a wide variety of jobs, from working in restaurants, pachinko parlours, in moving companies, sales, in a second hand book store and a host club. The sales job, he said: "was probably the most difficult. Every day I had quotas that I had to fill. I thought that they were impossible to achieve. In the end I felt that I was useless and no good at all." Without hesitation he said that the best job he had had was at a second hand bookstore:

> I really enjoyed working with the customers, most of whom were young, and the relationship amongst staff was really good. My boss and supervisor were good people (*ii hito*) who were happy to listen to staff's opinions. I felt free to express my thoughts and opinions about work and that made the working environment much better ... I felt free (*jiyu na kanji*), it was really enjoyable (*sugoku tanoshikatta*), and it was a constructive place to work (*kensetsuteki ni*).

When I asked why he had stopped working there he said:

> I stopped working because I was mentally/emotionally weak (*seishinteki ni yowai kara*). My mother had become ill with cancer and had gone to hospital. It was very busy at work and my body got weak. Then I got mentally/emotionally weaker. In the end my physical condition was destroyed (*taichō kuzushitatte*). I became unable to work and so handed in my resignation.

Yoshio initially described his most recent job as being at a *nomiya* (bar). When I asked further what kind of bar, he asked: "Do you know what a host club is?" When I nodded he said: "Well, that feeling." He continued:

> It was a really difficult job because I prefer to listen rather than speak. And in that job it is necessary to speak a lot and make conversation with women. I also had to drink as part of the job, but not get drunk...that was really hard. But we had to drink to keep the women company and to sell them more alcohol.

Though the bar was of the 'feeling' of a host club Yoshio stated that it was not really a 'proper' one because men were also allowed to come in, although very few actually did. It was a house rule that customers had to drink when there so if

someone wanted to stop he had to either convince them to keep drinking or if they refused he would have to ask them to leave. In this, his most recent job, he worked six days a week with every shift involving drinking alcohol. Working hours were generally 10 p.m. to 7 a.m., but there was also the task of opening the bar. This was shared among the workers, and whoever was doing the preparation had to be there earlier (at 8 or 9 p.m.). After every shift there was also a meeting about the previous night. Furthermore, if customers wanted an extension to the opening hours then they would stay open longer. Generally, however, he would be able to get home by lunchtime. "I worked there," he said, "until I broke my body (*karada wo kowashita*)." When talking about it he looked physically tired as if even the memory of it tired him: "Before I quit I was talking to one of my co-workers who had a second job, at a convenience store. When he told me about it he said immediately that I would not be able to do both jobs because it was too exhausting." Yoshio implied that his co-workers were aware of the exhaustion he felt. Furthermore, he insinuated that they suggested that he was not strong enough, emotionally or physically, to be able to take on a second job as many of them did.

At the host club all the workers were considered part-time 'regulars'. They didn't receive bonuses, but instead received a portion of the turnover, so Yoshio received hours worked plus a portion of the drinks sold. At the end of his year there he was on 1300yen (£5.42) an hour which he thought was a bit cheap considering that it was night work. He said to me that he was 28 when he worked in the host club, however, when thinking about it he realised that he had actually been older (he was almost 30 when he began working there and 31 when he left). However, he used to tell all the customers that he was 28. He was keen to appear youthful to customers - all the other men working there were late teens or in their early twenties and apart from his manager and one other man he was the oldest.

Aspirations/plans

I asked what Yoshio wanted to do after his computer course and after a short pause he said that he was thinking about doing something related to design. He felt, however, that it was not the kind of job that he could get right away because he had no prior experience: "Companies want people with experience, and I have none. So I don't know if I can ever get such a job. But if I study design and get some experience then maybe I will be able to find a position in a small company." Large companies are far more competitive to get into, and with his lack of a high school diploma he stood a zero chance of securing employment in a large

company as a *seishain*. Smaller companies, though, are more flexible and if he had substantial experience in design, or design related jobs, he might have a better chance of gaining employment, probably first as a contract worker (*keiyaku shain*) and then if they were happy with him and his work, possibly into a *seishain* position if one were available. This was one of the reasons why Yoshio wanted to be more proficient at the computer and thus was taking a course in Microsoft Excel and Access.

Considering that he wanted to do something in design it seemed strange that he had not decided to do a design course, or even a homepage building course which was offered as part of the Hello Work supported scheme that he was on. Even though Yoshio was aware of the potential difficulties in finding a job in design given his lack of experience and qualifications he had instead opted to do courses that would be more useful in general office jobs. This suggests that the desire to work in design was said for effect or as something of a pipe dream, which he knew was probably unattainable given his age, and his educational and employment background. He therefore opted rather to do a course that would give him more usable skills and open up the possibility of finding a relatively stable office job, and perhaps, if lucky, as a regular worker. Yoshio mentioned that his ideas were a bit vague and that: "Although I want to do design work I also want to do this and that (*kore ga yaritai, are ga yaritai*)." Consequently, looking for what he wanted to do was difficult because he wanted to try many things. Yet he was dissatisfied with his low wages and thought that in his next job, if he could become a *seishain*, he could get a better wage, do the same job, have the same working time each day, and have the same responsibility (*sekinin*). This seemed to be what Yoshio was yearning for at that time. He wanted to have stability in work and the possibility of rising wages and bonuses as he got older. However, during our meetings he seemed very pessimistic about his ability to achieve it.

I have clearly shown in previous chapters that men in their twenties are generally considered to still have the option of finding full-time work. Furthermore, when young they are 'allowed' to procrastinate or gain alternative experiences *to an extent* before being expected to grow up and work properly. Being a thirty-something in irregular employment is, however, much trickier. Almost every advertisement for 'regular' positions in job magazines gives an age cut-off point of 30, 32, or at the latest, 35. Being 32 Yoshio was almost at his last chance for getting onto a 'stable' path. So perhaps this desire to get 'proper' work was a last ditch attempt as he realised that the clock was ticking and he was soon to be left

on the pile of those who are 'unwanted' by companies. Whether he would be able to attain his desire is debatable because many companies would be unlikely to look at his application for regular work sympathetically given the array of jobs he had done (including the slightly disreputable job of host), his lack of education, and the fact that he was unmarried and with no children.

Yoshio's aim to get into regular employment was also clearly driven by concerns over what would happen to him as he got older and had no financial security. He paid into the national social insurance scheme (*shakai hoken*), which meant he was entitled to subsidised medical care, but he had not paid into the pension system, so he had no pension for his future and he also had no savings. He had been living alone since his early twenties with an average monthly take-home pay of about 150,000 yen (excepting when he worked as a host when he brought home more each month): approximately £700 after social insurance had been taken out. Moreover, after utilities and rent were paid it was, Yoshio said, financially too tight to pay into the pension scheme. This led (and leads to) great insecurity about the future. Furthermore, if he were to get sick and were unable to work he would have no income for whatever time he took off and would probably, if sick for a long time, be forced to resign. Of course, he could apply for social welfare checks, but there is a social stigma attached to doing this in Japan (Stevens 1997: 136) and I sensed that this was something that he would not want to do, hence a possible reason for his desire to have employment stability.

Romance and Relationships

Yoshio's desire to work full-time was also, it would seem, very much influenced by his romantic relationship at that time. When I asked whether he was dating anyone he seemed slightly surprised at the question, but after a slight pause he confirmed that he did, in fact, have a girlfriend – about whom I had already heard through Akane. His girlfriend was working as a regular employee in her parents' firm. I tried to ask how old she was and he was evasive and did not answer my question; but I had been told by Akane previously that she was about 39 years old, so a few years older than him, and in a stable job – a career woman of sorts. He also did not mention how they met, except to say that it was through a friends' friend. However, when we talked about friends he said that he did not really have any good friends anymore, because those he had considered close were now married. They therefore did not have time to meet him. This made me wonder if they did not, perhaps, meet at the host club. It is not unusual for hosts to form romantic relationships with customers (cf. Takeyama 2005). When we met

Yoshio and his girlfriend had been dating for a year, which would have overlapped with the time that he was working at the host bar. Moreover, a single career woman with limited time to meet people and a wish to feel somewhat special and feminine is not an uncommon sight in host bars (ibid.).

When talking about their relationship Yoshio said:

> I want us to live together and get married, but it is impossible now because I am not working ... I think we can only go to the next step after I am on a stable path (*antei michi*). But I worry, because I think that it will be difficult for me to get on a stable path.

Moreover, he mentioned, quite strongly, that not only did he not know if he could find a job that he really wanted to do, he also was unable to guarantee that he would be able to stick to it if he found it. This led me to wonder whether he really wanted the stability professed or if he was saying what he felt he was expected to want, and was therefore buying into the discourse that adult men *should* have a 'proper' job in order to be a 'proper' man and a 'proper' adult. Perhaps this desire was for the sake of being able to continue the relationship with his girlfriend, but also because men in their thirties who are still freeters are looked on more negatively than those in their twenties.

Freeterism

Yoshio said that he definitely thought that he was a freeter: "Freeters have no stability (*antei shinai*) and they are doing various jobs; they job-hop and quit if they don't like the job." This contrasted quite significantly with Kentaro, who, though with a similar image of what a freeter was did not identify himself as such, mainly because he considered his financial independence, and the fact that he lived alone, to not be characteristic of a freeter lifestyle. This did not really factor into Yoshio's ideas, though he himself lived alone and was financially independent of parents. He instead identified with the lack of security (work-wise and financially) in both his image of himself, and of freeters. Yoshio was clearly concerned about the repercussions of remaining a freeter. He wanted to get married, but could not meet his girlfriend's parents due to his employment situation: "My girlfriend's parents would never allow her to marry a freeter..." He needed to be in stable employment for his dream of marriage to become a possibility.

Hideo

Hideo was 37 years old when we met. We met through the head of a Japanese

language NPO in Hamamatsu. At the time he was teaching Japanese both privately and as a volunteer through the organisation, for which he was being paid a small amount of about 2000 yen (£8.33) for two hours. The head of the NPO had told me about Hideo, and vice versa. Although not a typical freeter he was described, and described himself, as one.

The NPO head had mentioned that Hideo ran a bi-monthly meeting for students of Japanese to be able to meet and communicate informally with ordinary Japanese people (rather than teachers). It took place every other week, at a local restaurant, on the second and fourth Tuesday of the month from 8-10 p.m. The Japanese participants had to pay a small amount to attend and got one drink free; whereas non-Japanese did not have to pay anything, but were expected to buy at least one drink. Whilst this set-up had the potential to be a fun way of meeting different Japanese people, it was actually quite formulaic and lacked imagination. At every meeting everyone had to introduce themselves in Japanese and as most people who attended were the same each week it seemed quite pointless. Moreover, it made new foreign attendees quite nervous when they were asked to stand and give a self-introduction to the group in the middle of the small restaurant. In addition, it also often interrupted interesting conversations that were happening.

After hearing about the group from the head of the NPO I resolved to go to the next meeting. Due to a prior appointment I arrived a little late, during the introductions. When it got to my turn I stood up, introduced myself and what I was doing: most people had assumed I was an English teacher so seemed surprised and asked a number of questions relating to my research. Hideo smiled and nodded encouragingly. We did not have much of a chance to talk that evening, but he appeared to be relaxed and confident although he added 'ne'[12] to the end of every sentence which made me wonder if he were a little nervous talking in front of people. There were few foreigners in attendance and when I was leaving Hideo made me promise that I would attend the next meeting.

The next time we met was at the NPO Christmas party. Again, he appeared confident and comfortable in his surroundings. He was wearing a traditional Nepalese hat that was colourful and sat tall on his head, and a jumper that he had

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[12] 'ne' is often used as a way of asking for agreement when talking, or to soften one's opinion.

bought from Peru. He took control of the games at the party and quietened everyone down to play bingo. Hideo seemed to enjoy his time at the front of the crowd and I had the impression that he was a confident and active person who would be fairly relaxed and easy to talk to. In January (2007) we met up for our first interview; we agreed to meet at the local Starbucks in Zaza city at 11 a.m. I arrived earlier and ordered a tall coffee. Whilst waiting at the counter he arrived and after seeing that I had ordered became really flustered. He fluttered between me and the service counter and when I asked what I could order him he demurred and insisted on going to the counter alone. I felt that I had made a mistake ordering first, but had done so because in our previous interactions he had seemed relaxed and at ease. I had not thought that ordering a coffee before he arrived would have unsettled him, though this appeared to be the case. His general disposition was markedly different from the events that I had seen him at previously: he appeared serious and nervous. Hideo commented that he did not usually go to coffee shops and that the last time he had been in that particular one had been the year before in spring, thus some of his apparent nervousness may have been because he was uncertain of the environment. It seems more likely, however, that he was unsure how to behave because we were meeting for an interview, something that was unfamiliar. Hideo was used to being in control of events and seemed uncomfortable when he felt he wasn't.

Family Background

Hideo lived at home with his parents and younger brother, and paid no rent. His father had been an elementary school teacher and his mother a professional housewife, indicating that he was from a firmly middle-class family. Hideo appeared to have an uneasy relationship at home. He thought that his parents were worried about him and his future, but that they were more worried about his younger brother who was a NEET. His own relationship with his brother was particularly difficult and he seemed to have no time or respect for him: "he doesn't even *try* to do anything."

Hideo had a strong desire to be successful (as shall be described below) and this seemed more pressing to him when he talked about his brother. He appeared to want to vindicate himself within his family, to differentiate himself from his brother in the eyes of his parents. He also had a sister who was a year younger than him, who was married with three children. Having two sons who were not in 'regular' employment, one who had quit a high status and stable job, the other who had never really done anything, was probably quite shameful and

disappointing for his middle-class parents. This probable disappointment seemed apparent when he said that his father did not speak to him much, and that they do not get on well. However, he thought that his parents would be really happy if he were successful in making money with his business ideas (described more below).

Education and Employment

Hideo had graduated from one of the top private universities in Japan where he had studied German. His route into university had not been an easy one. He failed the entrance examination the first time round and so took a year out to study at a cram school to retake the tests. Whilst there it was his aim to become a university teacher, but he said that it was very competitive and he was not clever enough so failed to become a postgraduate and continue his studies. However, graduates from such top universities are part of an educational elite, so although he may have been modest, his graduation from such a prestigious university carried much weight in Japanese society. After graduating he was accepted into the civil service – a desirable end point for students from elite universities – and worked at the local city hall. These jobs are difficult to get and usually only the graduates of the most prestigious schools and universities are offered them. They offer true life-time employment in an employment environment that increasingly does not. Hideo was, however, initially very reticent to speak about this time in his life. When talking about work he was quite evasive so I mentioned that I had heard that he used to work at the city hall. On hearing me say this, his head snapped up and I was sharply asked who had told me. Before letting me answer, he quite testily told me that he generally did not tell people about having worked at city hall, and that it was about his privacy. After settling Hideo consented to talk about it with me for my research, but on the agreement that I would not speak of it to the other people he worked with because he felt that it was not their business.[13] His sharp response and reluctance to speak about it was, however, not just about privacy. Hideo had quit a job that was well-known for its stability and perks. The wages and bonuses were good. He had quit to do something inherently unstable and entrepreneurial, more of which is below. It would seem that he feared that his education and employment background would somehow

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[13] Hideo was happy for me to use it in my thesis. As indicated in the Introduction, all names and some smaller details have been changed to ensure anonymity.

disadvantage him and he did not want to deal with peoples' reactions to his status.

Hideo had quit the civil service in March 2004, at the age of 34. Being unmarried and quitting such a stable job is seen as a somewhat crazy thing to do by most people in Japan, although the fact that he was unmarried worked in his favour a little – if he had been married and quit it would have been seen as highly irresponsible unless he quit for another job, or to run a viable new company. Hideo had worked at the city hall for twelve years: "The work was so boring ... and the people there ... they were not my kind of people. I did not really fit in and I often argued with my co-workers." When I tried to ask more he responded with: "I don't fit with people (*hito to awanai*)," and left it at that. He seemed a lot more comfortable being around foreigners than around Japanese people and spent much of his free time when he worked at city hall organising various meetings and activities to encourage cross-cultural communication between Japanese and foreign residents.

Aspirations/plans

After having worked for twelve years in a lucrative job with no large commitments; no wife, no children, no home (he lived with his parents) Hideo was clear that he wanted to be a successful entrepreneur: "After I left [the civil service] I decided that I wanted to set up my own company. I feel that it would be better to be the boss (*shachō*) than an employee."[14] His dream was to set up a company under the title of a Non Profit Organisation, but to be able to make profit from it. However, he had yet to make this a reality, and the head of the NPO who introduced me to Hideo almost scoffed at his plans. She seemed to be quite unimpressed by him and there was real tension between the two. She had set up a successful NPO so 'knew what it took', and she implied a number of times that he had neither the determination nor the imagination to do it. No love was lost between them, and I wondered if his anger at my knowing that he had worked at city hall was more about her having told me (she was one of the few people that knew), than anger at my actually knowing. Aside from wishing to set up his own profitable NPO he also wanted to set up an international exchange and study abroad program (*ryūgaku*).

Four months after quitting the city hall job, in July 2004, Hideo set up the bi-

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[14] See Yuehong Zhang (2001) for an interesting ethnography of private entrepreneurial masculinities in contemporary China.

monthly meeting for foreigners and Japanese (described above). He also took a course in teaching Japanese and had been teaching at the NPO and at a Brazilian school since. In addition to teaching he had been trying to create Portuguese and Indonesian language courses for Japanese speakers. The idea being that since there was a large Brazilian population in Hamamatsu, many of whom did not speak fluent Japanese, learning Portuguese would facilitate communication between the Japanese and Brazilian communities. He had taught himself Portuguese through friends and from travelling for three months through South America - though to which level I am not sure.

During my fieldwork Hideo also began to get involved in a pyramid style business (similar to Amway), which featured just one product; a health drink that had apparently been very popular in the USA and Australia. Hideo was trying to promote and sell the drink, and also network to get more people involved in the business to raise his profits. He was very excited and animated about the product and the business aspect and saw it as a great opportunity to make money. Throughout the year earning funds seemed to become more prominent and on one occasion he implied that his savings were decreasing and money was starting to become an issue. He was therefore keeping himself busy and trying to find new ways to earn money, though he was not yet being particularly profitable.

Romance and Relationships

At the age of 37 with no financial security it becomes increasingly difficult to get married in Japan. When we first met Hideo did not have a girlfriend and was quite adamant that he was not interested in relationships or marriage. However, this and his outlook changed radically once he started seeing someone. He softened and seemed to be enjoying the idea: "I never wanted to get married, but maybe it would be ok..." he said with a slight smile. This relationship did not last, however, and when we met up again before I left the field Hideo was back to being negative about relationships and marriage: "I prefer to be alone. I don't want to always have to think about someone else, and that is marriage." On the whole, however, I think he was not unhappy with the idea of not getting married. He mentioned a few times that having to consider someone else all the time was not something that particularly appealed to him. And this seemed to be characteristic of his life as a whole. He did not want to have to work 'with' people, he had argued a lot with his ex-co-workers, and he would prefer to be in the position of 'decision-maker' where he would not have to really justify his decisions or actions to his employees. Although Hideo was active and interested

in people, and with being around foreign people particularly, he seemed happiest when he was doing his own thing.

Freeterism

Hideo had a really positive view of freeters and a rather negative view of the Japanese employment system: "I think it is healthy to work 'as you like'. Working for a company is stressful, and it can make people feel ill. So I think it is better to work freely as a freeter." Hideo seemed to tap into this idea of freedom when he said:

> I am definitely a freeter – I work as much and whenever I like. My work is piecemeal (*barabara*) ... Japanese society only looks at freeters from an economic perspective. But as many companies go bankrupt there is no guarantee of employment even as a regular worker.

This was an interesting perspective given that civil servants are one of the few groups of workers who are basically guaranteed a job for life. Hideo continued:

> I think that it is better to work more freely ... I think it is not fair that society suggests that freeters are bad (*yokunai*). This makes people feel that they are doing something wrong, and I think that that is not right.

Hideo seemed to draw very much on his own experiences when talking about freeters and was perhaps struggling with the repercussions of quitting his civil service job. For a man who had been in a position of high status, who had graduated from one of the best private universities in Japan to then be in a position that is looked on quite negatively by mass media and popular opinion may have been difficult, and was probably one of the reasons that he did not feel comfortable talking about his previous work experience. It seemed that he felt that if people knew that he had been in such a good position prior to being a freeter they would judge him even more severely than if they just considered him to be a wannabe entrepreneur. Moreover, his decision to become a Japanese language teacher and to try to set up international exchanges and language programs were all roles that entailed positions of some status, as generally the status of teachers (*sensei*) is one that is quite high.

Hideo, having experienced stability in a job, yearned for freedom in his work. He found employment at the city hall to be stifling and stressful and wanted to be around people that shared his opinions. Yet at the same time he was a little concerned that his savings were running out. Hideo's drive to do well at the pyramid scheme he had joined and all his other projects point to his having some financial concerns for the future.

These snap shots of the lives of three men illustrate that though with very different backgrounds, lives, experiences and aspirations there were clear elements of similarity. None of them had strong friendship bases, none had successful relationships with women. Yet their choices and aspirations were all clearly influenced by their backgrounds, resources and ages.

I'm a Freeter! ... I'm Not!

The discourse surrounding freeters and what constitutes an adult man had a large affect on the way that these three men thought of themselves, what they were doing and what they wanted to do. Kentaro rejected the idea that he was a freeter and presented himself as an independent adult man, Yoshio was realistic that being a freeter was what he was, and Hideo embraced the idea of freeterism, even though on the surface he definitely did not fit the definitions, or even the images, given that he worked as a part-time teacher. Their identification or non-identification with being a freeter was not only related to the choices they have made in their lives, but also their educational and occupational backgrounds, and to the way they related with dominant notions of adult manhood.

Hideo had become sick of working in a regular job, always beholden to someone and enmeshed in office politics. He wanted to go out on his own, set up his own company and be the boss. For him, working as a freeter was a good thing – it represented freedom, whereas working for companies was a source of stress and illness. Not being married, living with well-off parents, and not having to pay rent also gave him a significant amount of (financial) space in which to bite the bullet and leave his job.

Kentaro, in contrast, was 'waiting' for a regular position to open up. He had quit his permanent job due to boredom, but now wanted to have an element of security in his life. He had consciously positioned himself in places where *seishain* positions were *likely* to come up. Kentaro had an uneasy relationship with the term 'freeter'. Whilst suggesting that he *technically* fit into the category, emotionally, and when thinking about himself, he felt that the term just did not fit him. For him, freeters were not independent, were not working 'regular' hours. They were playing more than working, and he implied that although they were perhaps nice people they were not as responsible as he considered himself to be. The idea of 'responsibility' was, for Kentaro, not about the type of contract that he held, but his way of working and living. He was seeking to show himself to be an adult. At 33 he did not want to be classified as an immature, irresponsible man

who was not working properly. Instead, he wanted to be seen to be an adult, irrespective of his job contract. Nevertheless, at the same time, he was seeking a stable job contract. Unlike Hideo, Kentaro had rent and bills to pay and no cushioning. He had his accountancy qualification, but also had a work background that, excepting his original regular job, was devoid of the kind of work experience that employers look for: service sector part-time jobs not being considered to be viable experience, as already discussed in Chapter 5.

Yoshio, meanwhile, identified strongly with being a freeter, largely because of the insecurity that 'being a freeter' implied. Financially and for his future he felt that he was in an increasingly untenable position, with opportunities to have a 'stable' life fast running out. Yet, although he talked of wanting to find a *seishain* position and was taking steps towards that by trying to improve his employability through taking the computer course, he was not overly optimistic about his chances. He was more realistic and aware of his own tendencies; feeling that if he did not like a job, he would quit, even if it were the desired regular position. The motivating factor appeared to be the romantic relationship that he wanted to move forward, but felt unable to because of his financial instability and lack of a stable path.

The Effect of Education and Class

Education level and class played a role in the attitudes taken by the three men in whether they identified themselves as freeters or not. Hideo was educated to a high level, from a firmly middle-class family. Kentaro meanwhile, was educated to vocational level. His father was a taxi driver, his mother a part-time worker and housewife. They were therefore working-class; although they owned some land. Yoshio, however, was firmly working-class. Furthermore, he had very little formal education and his employment experience was almost all in the service sector, thus adding to his inability to find the kind of work that he hoped he could do.

The working-class men were more concerned, perhaps, about their futures than Hideo was. Yoshio, in particular, was especially structurally disadvantaged regarding his ability to find a *seishain* position. He was easily the most concerned about his financial situation, largely, it would seem, because he was aware of the acute difficulties facing him in getting a salaried position and the fact that he had no safety net. With very little education and useable work experience he was limited in what he would be able to achieve and was worried about his future and the future of his romantic relationship.

Kentaro, with his previous work experience and higher educational attainment, was more likely to have a better chance of becoming a 'regular' worker again. Yet, whilst Kentaro appeared convinced of his ability to get a regular position he also took comfort from the fact that if this did not occur his friend in Tokyo had proved that it was possible to have enough money to live and support a family as a freeter. However, the majority of freeters (that I knew at least) do not earn 350,000 yen a month, even in Tokyo.

Hideo, though with dwindling savings, was the only one of these three to be living at home, rent-free. Blessed with a stellar elite university education, and considerable work experience behind him, he also had a certain amount of cushioning – should he fail other options were available for him. If all else failed and he was unsuccessful with his entrepreneurial dreams, he had something to fall back on: teaching Japanese. Being able to appropriate the positive image of free and easy freeters made him feel good about leaving the security of his job, it made him feel like an adventurer – venturing places his co-workers might dream of going, but never do. Should he fail, he would have a much better chance than the other two at getting employed as a *seishain* again. Ironically, he was the only one who definitely did not want this.

The Search for a Meaningful Life

All three men were in their thirties, a time when 'playing about' and gaining experience is supposed to be over. They were all supposed to be, by this time, responsible adult men. None of them, however, had stable employment, none were married, and only one had a girlfriend. Hideo had rejected the expected life course when he was mid-way through living it. Kentaro decided to try for something different when in his twenties, when it is acceptable to try out other jobs, but thus far had been unable to get back into a system that he appeared to want to be a part of. And Yoshio, through his lack of formal education, had never been able to get a regular position and had gone from job to job, whilst harbouring the hope that one day, he might just get onto that stable path, but with no idea whether he would wish to remain on it, as it would depend on the job. For all three having a job that they enjoyed was evidently important. Kentaro and Hideo both quit jobs that they were 'bored' at, and had difficulties with co-workers.

However, what was clear about the men in their thirties, is that whilst, similarly to the men in their twenties, they were looking for meaningful work, they were

really seeking a meaningful *life* regardless of the consequences (cf. Mathews 1996, 2003). Many of the men in their twenties still had a foot in both camps – they had the time still to search for *seishain* positions should they wish to, and many of them did. But the risk for men in their thirties is much higher. There comes a point, already discussed, of an age when you are no longer *able* to have a foot in both camps. For the men in their early thirties, time was still there, just about on their side – though education level and background played a role in just how much on their side it was. Kentaro had the possibility, still, to find a *seishain* position – and he had hedged his bets with the place he was working at. Yoshio, however, with no qualifications, was desperately seeking to give himself more possibilities by gaining some vocational qualifications in computing. Men in their late thirties, however, had already hedged their bets. Hideo had done something radical – he was the only man I met who had given up his stable work, salary increases and bi-yearly bonuses for a life of relative insecurity. The risk, for him, was worth it, and indeed, as already mentioned, he had some cushioning should he fail, so the risk was therefore less risky. For Hideo a meaningful life was most important. Another freeter I met in his late thirties, Taro, concurred.

Taro was also 38 years old when we met. A shy, but friendly man he also taught Japanese to Brazilians and other foreign residents. Yet he also felt that he was a freeter: "I was an original freeter. I have always worked in this way – done service sector jobs and more recently teaching Japanese to save money to travel." For Taro, his search to have a meaningful life had led him outside of Japan's shores:

> I don't want to stop travelling and seeing the world. That is why I come back to earn money, and leave again. ... When I first went to Africa I thought 'ahhh this is it!' For four months I did nothing. I made friends, I travelled, I lived, and I thought, 'let's travel...this is good'. Now when I return to Japan I think about my next trip ... I do not fit well in Japan. How do I explain? Erm... In Japanese society, I am supposed to get married, be a breadwinner, work full-time and be settled. But, that is not me. I don't want to do that... I would like to marry, but ... not like that...

Taro, like Hideo, was adamant that life was more than work, and having a meaningful life was more important, for both these men, than doing what they felt was expected of them. Indeed, Hideo had spent over thirteen years doing just such a thing and found it wanting. Although both sets of parents were disappointed with their decisions, and although their friends and counterparts were married and living settled lives, neither of these men felt the urge to give up what they felt made their lives meaningful. They were committed to their decisions and, in the end, this was accepted by the people around them. However, given that both men were in their late thirties and unmarried gave them more

space – much like the men in their early twenties. It was consequently men in their late twenties and early thirties that most strongly felt the pressures of social expectations; who were betwixt and between what they *wanted* to do and what they felt they *should* do. However, as men aged, as they made their choices, committed to them and dealt with the consequences, they were able to carve our meaningful lives for themselves.

To Marry or Not to Marry

The desire to marry, or not to marry played a fundamental role in attitudes to regular employment. Similar to men in their late twenties, this desire and the presence or absence of women in their lives significantly affected their relationships to work and the attractiveness of a 'stable' life.

Yoshio, Kentaro, and other freeters in their early thirties who wished to get married, were far more invested in ideas of stability, but, again, like the men in their late twenties, not at any cost. Yoshio, despite wanting to marry his girlfriend, was unsure as to whether he would be able to continue with a regular job if he got one, Kentaro didn't want to be bored at work, but also was adamant that should he marry he would be the main breadwinner. Another freeter, Masao, felt similarly. Having been with his girlfriend, also a freeter, for six years (and lived together for three of them) they both felt that the time for marriage was upon them. He was looking for a regular position and consequently was working only three days a week, whilst his girlfriend, Sumiko worked seven. However, although Masao was looking for work, he was not exactly motivated: "I should get a *seishain* position. I will need one if we get married. But I feel a lot of pressure about it..." His girlfriend, Sumiko interjected: "I don't want to work seven days a week anymore. I want to get married. I want to be a housewife and work part-time, two or three days a week. It is not my responsibility to keep earning all the money." At this Masao just sighed. The pressure to live up to expectations of the roles that men and women are expected to take within relationships and families was one that depressed him. Although he had qualifications in IT they were ten years out of date and he had failed a job interview on this account. All of these men remained on the borders – wanting the stability that went with regular employment, but wanting it on their own terms. Furthermore, when thinking about marriage they focused rather on the pressures and responsibilities they perceived to be inherent rather than on any idea that marriage and children might give meaning to their lives.

For men who were disinclined to marry, life was much simpler. The need to be appealable, to live up to gendered expectations of what men are supposed to do, was a mute point. Hideo, though he wobbled slightly after getting a girlfriend, was generally adamant that he felt better off alone; it meant that he didn't have to consider anyone's feelings and could do what makes him happy. Taro, although he hadn't ruled out marriage, was certain that he only wanted to be with someone who understood him and his way of living life. This was something he felt was unlikely to happen. He therefore did not consider marriage to be a definite in his future. He also was consequently able to focus on creating a life that was meaningful for himself (and him alone). By not having to live up to these gendered expectations they were able to re-negotiate what it meant to be an adult man for themselves.

Conclusion

What is clear for the men in their thirties is that *seken* (societal norms, values, and expectations) only really remained important in their self-identifications if they continued to feel invested in post-war gender roles that stipulate what men and women are supposed to do. Yet, ultimately, sacrifices had to be made. The men who were set on pursuing their own path for a meaningful life had largely given up on the prospect of marriage (much like some career women have done). Whereas the men who were still determined, or continued to strive towards finding meaningful, but stable work, continued to feel conflicted about doing something they felt they should be doing versus doing what they wanted to do. Hence each man suggested that they would do regular work only in so far as they enjoyed it. If it wasn't enjoyable they would quit.

Although Hideo and Kentaro felt, in their own ways, that they were responsible men with character qualities linked to adult manhood neither were viewed as particularly desirable catches. Hideo was thought to not have the endurance (or imagination) needed to set up a company. He was disinclined to have to care about anyone, or consider their feelings, which he made quite clear. He wanted to go out alone and do his own thing. These were all things which were considered to be quite immature in others' eyes. Though technically an adult at 38, he had still not socially *become* one properly. Kentaro, meanwhile, had never had a long relationship and only ever dated much younger women, had trouble getting on well with co-workers, and was quite a loner. He did not portray an image of a steady adult man that was particularly attractive. Yoshio, however, was well aware that he was not considered a desirable catch, hence his desire to get into

stable employment before meeting his girlfriend's family. He readily acknowledged his unstable employment position, and his weaknesses; he had broken his body and felt that he was mentally/spiritually weak (*seishinteki ni yowai*). Rather than stressing his adult-like qualities as many of the other men did (for example, his ability to financially support himself with no extra help), Yoshio instead identified with the more negative aspects of being a freeter; with his inability to have a secure lifestyle.

By not giving up (*akirameru*) their 'freedom', or their freeter lifestyles, these men were in a sense yet to become mature social selves. For, if, as suggested in the Introduction, one of the ways to mature selfhood is through the ability to resign oneself to what must be done, then these men can be seen to be shirking normative ideas of social becoming. Their (at times shaky) determination to seek meaningful lives regardless of the long term consequences was also generally undesirable to women, as Chapter 3 clearly showed. Thus, remaining, or choosing to be, a freeter whilst in the thirties, was quite a gamble. Some attempted, like Kentaro, Yoshio, and Masao to hedge their bets. Others, like Hideo and Taro, remained committed to their work and lifestyles regardless of the social consequences.

The following chapter seeks to contextualise the lives of female freeters. Did they have similar feelings of pressure to get onto stable paths? How did they feel about being a freeter? Were the pressures they were under different to the men's? The next chapter explores four short case studies to provide a comparative angle to the case studies of male freeters so far presented. This is followed by a juxtaposed discussion of male and female freeters to explore the gendered nature of social expectations and the strong role that women played in the choices that male freeters made.

Chapter 7: Biding time until marriage?

Narratives of female freeters regarding their lives and futures were quite different to those of male freeters. Although their case studies resonate with male freeters in certain areas – for example, in their desire to achieve specific ambitions – the ways in which female freeters related to the category of freeter and more generally to work differed significantly from their male counterparts. This was, I will show, largely due to the gendered discourse of work and the ways that people consequently engage with them in gendered ways. The vast majority of the women I knew shared an ultimate conviction that they would get married and have children in the future and this consequently helped shape their attitudes to work and personal fulfilment.

I have decided to show a cross-section of ages in this chapter. This is because not only are the women included here fairly representative of women I met of similar ages, but because age played a significant role in men's reactions and justifications of being a freeter. It was, however, far less important in the women's narratives of work and therefore feeds into my argument that age is crucially linked to discourses of work and adult manhood and plays a large role in the ways that men strategise and deal with being a freeter. In contrast, women's feelings about work were not significantly affected by their ages. They were not particularly concerned about not being able to get *into* regular employment after a certain age[1] as much as about feeling like they would be frozen out after marriage and children, or feeling that they would have to give up work after having children due to the demands of childcare (Creighton 1996; Okano 2009; Tanaka 1995; Tarōmaru 2007). The majority were, however, on the whole less concerned about this than about their marriage prospects (cf. Bernstein 1996; Brinton 1992; Kendall 1996; Mills 1998; Mori 1996).

The case studies in this chapter are presented in a somewhat similar way to those of the male freeters in the preceding chapters. Each person is shown as a case study snapshot to give an overall feel of who they are, where they have come from, what they feel about being a freeter, and what they aspire to in the future. This is followed by a discussion bringing together the main points and illustrating how

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[1] Though it is just as difficult, if not more so, for women to get a regular job as they get older especially if they have only even done part-time or temping jobs (cf. Fujimura-Fanselow 1995; Roberts 1994; Tanaka 1995).

and why they differ from those of the men.

'I'm single and fat. Will I ever get married?'

Nami, a 20 year old woman, had recently returned from nine-months in Australia where she had been on an exchange program studying English. She had lived with a home-stay family and was, she said, keen to speak in English with me which happened but rarely. After graduating from her course she began working at the cinema in the Box Section.

Although good-looking and quite popular she was one of the shyest and most unconfident women I met during my research. Whilst I am sure she was shy it often appeared that she played (consciously or unconsciously) on her 'weakness' to get attention. It often worked, though it seemed to be annoying for some people we worked with. On one particular occasion when she had been invited out for drinks with some people of her section she insisted pleadingly that I walk out into the lobby with her (my shift had ended at the same time) saying: "I don't want to go on my own, please come with me!" When we got to the end of the corridor that led into the main lobby she saw one of the members she was to go drinking with, a friendly guy in his late twenties. She hid around the corner shaking her head at me saying: "Ahh, I don't want to go! I don't want to go!" I tried to reassure her that he was really nice and the others would arrive shortly, but she replied: "But I don't know him! I don't want to, I don't want to! (*iya da, iya da*)." Whilst this kind of vulnerability brings to mind stereotypical ideals of femininity – being girlish and innocent (cf. Wald 1998), and was often perceived as cute by some, it was also, at other times not respected. I heard some of the male workers comment on her prettiness, but also on how young she was. On another occasion at a meal we attended with eight other co-workers I heard her complaining that she had a headache. I sat forward to see if she was okay and saw her leaning her head back on the pillar behind her basically removing herself from the conversation of the table. This drew slightly exasperated looks between two of the women in particular and some of the men also looked at her, though not in a particularly kind way, before turning to other people and renewing their conversations without her. Thus, although her attention-seeking gained her attention it was not always positive. Given that many of our co-workers were also in their early twenties her young age won her very few points.

Nami seemed content to remain at the cinema for the near future though at times she would bemoan that she had no idea what she wanted to do in the future. This

was usually followed with a comment along the lines of being unsure as to whether she would be able to get married, even though this was what she wanted. Yet each time I heard this, the other women surrounding her would reassure her that it didn't really matter what job she did. Keiko, a 26-year-old co-worker put it most succinctly when she replied: "It's totally ok not to know what you want to do... You can think about it after you get married." Nami replied that she wasn't sure if she ever could get married and continued: "I've been single for a year and a half, and I'm getting fat" (which was far from the case). Yet Keiko and the other women rejected these claims and reiterated that she could do different jobs in the meantime, and it was no matter if a woman did not know what she wanted to do.

Despite these reassurances Nami appeared to be mildly obsessed about whether she would ever get married. Often in the locker room she would bring up popular celebrities with co-workers, gossip about their marriages and lament her own chances. On one occasion she said: "I don't know if I can ever get married, but I want to be married by the time I am 35. Now I cannot meet people – I get up and come here [the cinema], and that's it. I have no chance to meet anyone." Although there were plenty of young men working in the cinema she, on the surface, discounted any of them. However, with some probing she revealed that there were a couple she thought were nice (both university students not freeters), but was too shy to make any kind of move. Other than her burning desire to find a boyfriend and marry, Nami talked about still wanting to travel. However, although she mentioned wanting to save money to take a one-month trip to Europe it was problematic largely because: "I always want to buy this and that, and then I cannot save anything."

Despite her lamentations about not knowing what to do Nami was unconcerned about being a freeter. On being asked about her image of freeters and what she thought of them she was non-committal: "I am a freeter, I work part-time. I don't really mind about it." Regarding men being freeters she also said little: "I wouldn't mind dating a freeter... that would be ok I think. But marriage...erm... probably not. Part-time work is not so stable."

Many of the other women working at the cinema in their early twenties also did not know yet what they wanted to do. Yet for most this was considered a very minor issue largely because they were confident that they would get married. Aya, a recent university graduate, found a full-time position after graduating with a local travel company. Before she started work she said: "It's a job. I don't think it looks very interesting, but it's stable, it gives me experience and I can meet many

people." After starting she stated: "It's fine for now. In the future I hope to get married and have children. At that time I will quit this job I think and when my children get older I will go back to work." A very normal pattern of work for women in Japan (cf. Brinton 1992, 1993; Creighton 1996; Iwao 1993; Lebra 1984; Roberts 1994; Rosenberger 1996).

'I'm losing weight for him'

When I first met Midori she had just finished studying English at a *tandai* (two-year college/university) in Tokyo and had moved back in with her parents in Hamamatsu. She was 22 years old and had started working three jobs: at a local Starbucks, a cram school teaching evening classes, and the cinema. She was planning to work for two years to save enough money to study in the United States.

Whilst studying English Midori also took part in a student-exchange program. She lived with a home-stay family in San Francisco for a year, which she loved, and remained close to the family going back to visit them when she could. Ideally her plan was to return to live in San Francisco after saving enough money to study. However, recently Midori had come to think that it might not be the best option:

> It makes more sense to go somewhere where there is something I want to do, instead of going somewhere I want, but having nothing to do there ... I've found a course in Los Angeles that specialises in film distribution. The course is a year and a half, but it will cost about 900,000 yen [£3750] for the tuition fees and I don't know yet how much living expenses will be. I have no time to start figuring it out yet because at the moment I work almost every day.

Working six days a week was, for Midori, a necessity if she was to save that amount in two years. She had considered studying abroad straight after high school, but decided to go first to a *tandai* to study English and then subsequently to save money. This was primarily because her family's financial priorities lay elsewhere:

> Although my parents are supportive of my wish to study abroad my younger brother [aged 16] is probably going to go to university. My dad especially is putting a lot of pressure on him. Anyway, university is expensive so they have to focus on him... If I had an emergency then they would help me financially, but basically the money is needed for him. And they did support me [financially] when I was studying at the *tandai* in Tokyo.

The cram school position was the most lucrative; there she earned about 1,500 yen (£6.25) an hour, followed by Starbucks which paid 1,000 yen (£4.16) and the

cinema which was 800 yen (£3.33) an hour. Yet it was the Starbucks job that she enjoyed the most:

> In Toho there is a big difference between the managers and the rest of the staff. It is quite cold [the relationships], but Starbucks is not like that. I respect the workers at Starbucks. Even if someone is a manager, a regular worker, or a part-time worker there isn't much distance between them and everyone gets on well ... ... When I work in Starbucks the shift goes very fast, but in Toho I am always checking the time and thinking, 'is it only that time?' The day passes too slowly at the cinema. I would like to quit Toho and work only at Starbucks, but at the moment there are no extra shifts available.

She spoke little about the cram school, just saying that it was stressful. Throughout my fieldwork she worked at the cinema on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays during the day, and at the cram school on Wednesday and Thursday evenings. Her Starbucks shifts were on Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays, leaving Tuesday as her day off each week. Midori felt this was ok though: "I'm not like most freeters because I am saving for a purpose and am working a lot of hours. Most freeters only work a few shifts each week." Saving to study abroad validated the long hours she worked and made it worthwhile as she could see the light at the end of the tunnel. However, as the year progressed she found it difficult to sustain such a gruelling work schedule and over the summer took four days off to recuperate a little – an unusual thing for the focused Midori.

Midori was single and was yet to have or find a boyfriend. She had developed a crush on one of her cram-school co-workers, and although not fat she was convinced that she needed to be thinner to have a chance: "If you want to get a boyfriend you need to be thin." She was short and a little stout, but not fat in any sense of the word. However, she was dissatisfied with her body shape, like so many of the other young already thin women with whom I worked. She had therefore begun doing 'Billy's Boot Camp' – an American fitness DVD that became all the rage whilst I was in the field. Furthermore, she was walking to and from work as much as she could – a thirty minute walk to the Starbucks, a forty-five minute walk to the cinema and cram school. Even after losing 4kg she was determined to carry on and get thinner. Her idea that women need to be thin and pleasing on the eye seemed to have originated from a specific episode at high school that subsequently affected her a great deal:

> When I was in the first year of high school I decided to ask a friend of mine out. We had been friends since junior high school and I liked him a lot. We got on well. However, when I asked him he replied, 'Midori, men want to show/boast about their girlfriends (*jiman shitai*), and I wouldn't be able to do that about you'. I didn't know if he was joking or serious... It began a

downward spiral for me.

Although she had been a good student getting good grades, after that she became so depressed that halfway through the first year of high school she left the school. At the beginning of the next academic year she redid the first year at a new school: "It was the lowest point of my life and a really difficult time."

She remained convinced that being thin was the key to finding a boyfriend and to getting anywhere with her crush. One day, as we walked towards the street where the cram school was located she stopped me, peered down the street and lowering her voice as if afraid of being overheard said: "You see down there? That's where the cram school is that I work. That's where he [her crush] is. He is a regular worker so is probably there now..." She found it hard to tear her gaze away. When I asked more about him she said:

> He's 28 and really nice. When I started the job I found it really difficult. I thought that I wouldn't be able to do it and I nearly quit. It was so stressful and I was so tired and stressed and down that when I answered the phone my voice had no strength and people around me were worried about me ... that I might be so down that I would commit suicide (*jisatsu suru*) [said with a slight laugh]. But really, I did think I might die (*hontō ni shinchau to omotta*). At this time he talked to me and listened to my worries and gave me advice that was really helpful and I am really grateful about that.

She went on: "I don't know if he has a girlfriend, but if he does then I'll just run away (*nigeru*) back to San Francisco!" Finally she said: "I think that to have a chance to be his girlfriend I need to be thinner, so I'm doing it [losing weight] for him."

Although Midori wanted to get into film distribution and wanted to live in America, perhaps for forever, she did not want to be a career woman at the expense of all else. She also wanted to marry and have children. Her desire to move back to the USA was to take a course that she thought might lead to interesting work, but also to travel, use her English, and explore another country. Furthermore, Midori gave the impression that she felt a certain freedom in the USA that was lacking in her life in Japan. Whilst Midori remained affected by the previous rejection and was desperate to be thinner, thinking that that would secure her a boyfriend (cf. Bordo 1989; Hesse-Biber 1996), she was confident that she would marry and that her future would work out fine.

'Stability is the most important thing'

Yuko was an extremely quiet, shy 25 year old who worked in the office of the cinema when we met. Her main role was to calculate how many people came to

the cinema the previous day, what films they saw, and how much money each film had made. This information was then sent to Head Office after Yuko had collated it. Before getting to know her I had only heard her voice each morning over the wireless radio when fetching the day's deliveries and I had heard her spoken about by co-workers, usually accompanied with some mild irritation expressed by a raised eyebrow or a dismissive look. Much of the irritation appeared to derive from her 'slowness'. She was very sluggish in her actions and seemed, at times, slow to grasp what was required of her. I often saw people exchange glances when she was doing the accounts (unhurriedly), or when her voice came over the *musen* (wireless radio). She would often mumble and on a number of occasions people made faces and said: "Huh, did you understand that?" followed by a shake of the head. Shortly after there would be an irritated: "Could you repeat that again?" Yuko meanwhile seemed blindly oblivious to this subtle irritation, but also gave the impression of wanting to be forgotten about — her shoulders were perpetually hunched and she was timid in her actions and reactions.

About three months after I started working at the cinema the office manager asked Yuko to work on the Floor section for the day. This was standard - ideally every member of staff was supposed to have basic training in all sections so that if there were staffing problems someone from another section could fill in. The Floor section was chronically understaffed, had been for a few weeks, and it looked unlikely to change until the exam period was over and the student workers were available to work on weekdays. On the day Yuko was asked to work on our section, I was asked to run her through the ropes. She was to shadow me for the morning and then 'open' and 'close'[2] some of the screens herself in the afternoon. Speed and accuracy were essential in the role, especially in busy times. Often we ended up careening around the cinema at breakneck speed (whilst trying not to make this too visible to customers) to get everything done on time. Consequently, most new recruits or staff with no experience on the section would take copious notes. Yuko, however, took none. Moreover, she did not actively think about what was to come next. She would walk off up the aisle to clean without realising that the overhead light was needed to be able to see and then have to run back to do it, thereby already losing time. When having to speak over the radio she would ask

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[2] This is described in more detail in the 'Toho Cinema and participant-observation' section of the Introduction.

me each time what she needed to say instead of writing it down and referring back to it. Also, she had no real idea of personal space (which in Japan is even wider than in the UK). Throughout the day there were numerous occasions when I nearly walked into her, or turned around and she was so close I had to step back. This was not isolated to that day however. Whenever we met for coffee outside of work she would stand so close to me in the queue that if I needed to move slightly to make room for someone to move past I would inadvertently step on her. Although we became friends I could also understand how others who did not know her well would get annoyed.

My initial thoughts on Yuko were thus that she was timid and a little slow. Yet after spending more time with her I learnt that this was not entirely correct. Whilst slow in her actions and reactions she was far from slow intellectually.[3] She had graduated from Shizuoka University of Arts and Culture (*Shizuoka Bunka Geijitsu Daigaku*) after a four year degree in International Culture and Economy (*Kokusai Bunka to Keizai*). Whilst studying she had worked at the cinema in the Box section, but quit after finding a permanent position as an English and Economics teacher at a local cram school after graduation. She stayed there as a regular worker for a year before leaving, largely as a result of illness derived from exhaustion. She would start working at 8 a.m. (so would leave her home at 7 a.m.) and would work until 11.30 p.m. at night which was problematic because she would often miss the last bus home. Regularly she got only four or five hours sleep. When I asked why she did not drive to work (she had a license), she said: "I was so tired every day that I was afraid I would get into an accident, and I did not want my students to experience that shock/trauma if that happened." She described how (like Yoshio in Chapter 6) she 'broke her body' (*karada wo kowashita*) at the school, quit as a result, and subsequently returned to the cinema where she was placed in the office.

After three months, however, the managers transferred her out of the office and back to the Box section. Although more people were needed, it was more likely that her two co-workers had made their dissatisfaction clear to the managers. She was not unhappy about this development, however, stating that:

> Recently I realised that some people I thought were really nice [in the

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[3] It is possible that she was well-aware of co-workers subtle digs and critiques and she used slowness as a subtle form of resistance (cf. Scott 1985).

> office] have an *omote* and *ura*.[4] Before, I didn't think they were like that ...
> In front of our superiors (*ue no hito*) they are friendly and smiley, but when
> they are not there they are different and not so nice. Lately I haven't felt
> very comfortable working with them.

Yuko seemed surprised and upset about it which further reiterated how naive and
seemingly unaware she was about the politics that raged throughout the cinema
workforce.

Yuko's relationship with her family was generally okay. Her father was a regional
manager of an opticians and her mother worked at the same place as a 'junior
employee' (*junshain*).[5] Yuko stressed that her mother's job as a junior employee
was more important than that of the part-timers: "Junior employees are one
below a full-time employee, but one above part-time workers." Indeed, the
implication of the term *junshain* is that you are 'almost' a *seishain*. Yuko got on
well with her mother stating: "She listens to me and we talk a lot," but had a more
complicated relationship with her father: "Now our relationship is much better,
but a year ago it was terrible. We didn't speak to each other ... we didn't even say
'good morning'." When I asked what had precipitated this she said:

> He couldn't understand me and didn't agree with my way of thinking. He
> thinks 'this way' [she moved her hand definitively in one direction] but I
> think 'this way' [indicating an opposite direction]. He wouldn't listen to my
> reasons for quitting [the cram school job]. I think he should understand
> that it is my way of thinking and it's my life, so he should try and
> understand my decisions.

Yuko was clearly still upset about this, however she went on: "Lately it is much
better; he has started listening to me more." Yuko was much more at ease with
women than with men and often mentioned that though she would like to be
friends with more men she was not sure how to talk to them.

With a rueful smile and a slight shrug Yuko said: "I would really like to have a
boyfriend, and I want to get married and have children. I thought I would be
married by the age of 24, but I'm not..." Yuko dated her last boyfriend for just a

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[4] Put rather simply, *omote*, is the face or front which is perceived as the correct surface,
publicly acceptable and 'above board' areas, whereas *ura* represents the back or
concealed side which is publicly unacceptable or, at times, illegal (Sugimoto 2003).

[5] According to the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (2006a) report on
employment, employees are split into three groups – full-time workers (*seishain*), Part-
timers (*pāto*) and Others (*sono ta*). Part-timers are those workers who work shorter
hours (contractually) than the full-time workers, thus including 'junior employees'
(*junshain*). They usually have to have their contracts renewed each year, unlike regular
seishain.

month:

> I split up with him because he was slovenly (*darashinai*) and I don't like
> that ... I want someone who does things properly (*shikkari shiteiru*) -
> someone who is serious about work and relationships and will do them
> right. Also it is important to be with someone who has kindness (*yasashisa*)
> and sincerity/honesty (*seijitsu*), and someone who laughs at the same
> things that I do.

I asked whether she would consider dating a fellow freeter and she replied: "I
would never date or marry a freeter. Their wage is low; there is no bonus, no sick
pay, and no holiday pay. I would never feel stable (*antei*), it is too insecure
(*fuan*)." She went on: "I am not sure if I want to keep working after getting
married – either is fine for me. But when I have children I will definitely stop
working and be a full-time housewife (*sengyō shufu*). I want to have that
experience."

Yuko was very concerned with stability. It was something she craved. All of her
efforts to find a job were concentrated on looking for something that was full-
time. Whilst she was adamant that she wanted to get married and have children
she had so far not achieved this. Indeed, she had yet to have a long relationship
with anyone. Thus, she was not altogether sure as to whether she would be able to
marry. Unlike the majority of female freeters I knew she was consequently intent
on finding secure full-time employment for herself, and was, at the time, seeking
to become a civil servant by studying the requisite entrance exams. Unlike many
of the male freeters she was not, however, seeking to hold onto her dreams or
aspirations and feeling conflicted about doing what she thought she wanted to do
as opposed to what she felt she should do. Ultimately she wanted something
stable, something she enjoyed that did not 'break her body'. In almost all our
meetings when we talked about work or the future she would mention this, but
remained hopeful that she would marry and have children in the future.

'Chasing Takarazuka, and then, marriage'

Keiko, a loud brash woman of 26, began working at the cinema about two months
after I did. Initially I was under the impression that she had worked there before
– she was instantly chatty and outspoken with everyone – quite unusual for new
recruits who were usually exceptionally quiet and shy for the first couple of weeks
before gradually becoming more sociable. Keiko, however, was hired with the
intention to replace Rina, the floor leader, who was shortly leaving. She basically
managed the day-to-day running of the section and worked closely with the floor
manager.

Unlike many of my female co-workers Keiko was loud, opinionated and talked exceptionally fast – so fast that at times I was left lost and frustrated. She would often adopt silly voices, but not girly helpless ones like Nami often used to gain attention. Keiko was more ironic, and prone to using alternative voices as a tool to mock. For example, I was at the end of a long and tiring shift one day when she was speaking particularly fast. I couldn't keep up and asked her whether she could slow down a little whereupon she started talking in an exaggeratedly slow manner in an alternative voice – as if she were talking to someone she thought was stupid. A few moments later she switched into her normal voice and asked if that had been any better. I grinned at her and said: "Much better," to which she responded more seriously that she would try and speak a little slower. She was never able to though. Speaking at a hundred miles an hour using copious local slang was just part of who she was.

Keiko had worked in a variety of jobs before coming to the cinema. She had worked as a regular full-time employee at two places – the first at an *Este* salon (aesthetics salon – beauty parlour), the second as a wedding planner,[6] but she did not enjoy working as a regular worker:

> I don't want to work in a regular job. I like the freedom being a freeter gives me. When I was a regular worker I couldn't take holidays easily and I wanted to take all my paid holiday which is not really acceptable, so it was difficult. …I quit because I wanted more freedom.

At the time her father was transferred to Kanagawa[7] for his job (as a salaryman) so she moved with him and joined a temping agency. She said: "I moved because at that time I was chasing *Johnny's* and *Takarazuka*[8] so it was convenient to be in Tokyo." The temping agency dispatched her first to work at Tokyo Disneyland,

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[6] For a look at the world of body aesthetics and beauty services in Japanese beauty parlour's, see Miller (2006). For the Japanese wedding industry, see Goldstein-Gidoni (1996).

[7] Kanagawa is part of the Greater Tokyo area. Yokohama city is the capital of Kanagawa prefecture and is situated just 40 minutes by train from the centre of Tokyo.

[8] *Johnny's Jimusho* is a male talent agency, headed by Johnny Kitagawa. It heads up most of the big male stars, many of whom started as backing dancers (Darling-Wolf 2003, 2004a). Takarazuka, meanwhile, is one of the biggest theatre groups in Japan. It features an all female cast who play both female and male roles. Actors in the troupe decide early in their training to play either male *or* female roles, but actors very rarely then change this designation later in their career. Takarazuka has a huge, almost exclusively female, fan base (cf. Nakamura and Matsuo 2003; Robertson 1991, 1998). When Keiko refers to 'chasing Johnny's and Takarazuka' it means that she follows them around the country as much as she can going to tours and performances. It is the sign of a committed fan and takes a great deal of money.

but she lasted just a month, saying: "I didn't like it, so I quit." She then became a waitress at a *manga* cafe[9] for a short while before moving back to Kakegawa City (close to Hamamatsu) and starting work at Toho.

Although working at Toho was, she said, more enjoyable than her other jobs it also made her ill. After Rina, the floor leader left, it was largely down to Keiko to take over the day-to-day running of the section. At the time staffing shortages were so bad that she was working long shifts six days a week. Only Keiko and two other women were available during the weekdays to work, plus me, but I was working only three days a week due to other research commitments. Usually a minimum of four people were needed to staff the floor section, but at busy times this was not enough and five or six people were needed. The two other women who worked the day-shift, Kumiko and Sawano, were both married with children and therefore had other commitments that the management recognised and allowed for. It was consequently Keiko, as the 'free' unencumbered freeter, who was called on to pick up the slack. She often bemoaned that the managers were putting her down for shifts everyday, but that it couldn't be helped (*shōganai*). As a result of this gruelling schedule and the pressures of being expected to largely run the floor so soon after joining, Keiko developed a stomach illness which doctors put down to stress and tiredness. They advised her to rest as much as possible which she scoffed at saying that there was no chance because there was no-one else available to cover her shifts and run the floor. Although she would not hesitate to leave a social engagement if she felt tired, work was another matter and she took her responsibilities seriously. Yet, at the same time she said a couple of times: "If it gets too much or I start not enjoying it much then I will just quit." She felt better having this get-out.

The vast majority of her expendable income went on 'chasing' Takarazuka (cf. Robertson 1998). Her mother was apparently a more avid Johnny's fan than Keiko and they often went to concerts together, but recently she had focused more of her time and resources on attending Takarazuka performances: "I've been to all the Takarazuka theatres. I never wanted to do it myself but I love watching it." When I asked her more about it she said: "It is so cool (*kakko ii*),

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[9] Manga cafe's emerged in the 1990s. They are stocked full of different types of comic books which customers can peruse over their food and drink. Many provide internet service, and a growing number are open all hours - 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (Ito 2005).

and the women who play the men have a really masculine atmosphere (*otokoppoi no kanji*)." Although I professed a great interest to see a show and although she suggested we go together the next time she took the night bus up to Tokyo, it never came to pass. Like so many other freeters I knew she was keen to keep me at a bit of a distance personally. This was partly due to the fact that we had not known each other for that long, but it was also a common characteristic among the freeters I knew – they kept their work and social spheres largely separate – having work-friends and 'real' friends, and most had no intention of mixing them.

Keiko was very focused on the present. She was keen to do well in her job and keep going with it as long as it was enjoyable, but her focus and enjoyment were more on the fruits her labour could buy – on chasing Takarazuka and Johnny's. She was nonchalant about her future: "I don't know what I want to do. I can work at different jobs until I get married and then I don't have to worry about it anymore." She enthusiastically joined in with the many conversations taking place in the locker room about men and desired characteristics, but was clear that though kindness and shared humour were important, a man's job was of equal concern. Keiko was clear that there was little point worrying about desired jobs for herself and adamant that this was something that could be thought of *after* marriage, not before. Marriage was, Keiko believed, more important to sort out first. She anticipated that once married she would have the time and leisure to really consider what it was that she would like to do work-wise. Whenever the topic of work came up in the locker room this is what she would espouse to the room.

'Independent living and no kids, thanks'

Akemi was a confident, intelligent and smiley 34 year old who carefully considered her opinions, but was direct with them. She had a broad pretty face with dead straight hair that reached between her chin and shoulders and a heavy straight fringe. She worked in a Starbucks which she enjoyed and had been there for: "A few years now."

After graduating from a *senmon gakkō* she found full-time employment at a bus company as a tour guide. She worked for a year but then quit, largely down to experiencing sexual harassment on the job. Akemi said:

> There was a strong hierarchy in the company. If the bus driver wanted to go

> out for drinks I had to go with him even if I didn't want to because I was the
> newest worker. I was always the last to go to bed and the first to get up. I
> was not allowed to take a bath until all my seniors had finished[10] and
> because I was new I had to do a lot of extra preparation for each trip so that
> I would be able to give the right information to the customers. After a year I
> couldn't do it anymore, so I quit. Since then I have been a freeter.

However, she set herself apart from 'normal' freeters stating: "I am not really a typical freeter because I can live properly on my own (*chanto seikatsu dekiru*)." She earns enough money to live independently of her parents. And this independence was something she was keen to hold onto. Her parents, she said, had been okay with this development, but were worried about her, mainly because she was not yet married. Akemi, however, was adamant that this was not something she wanted: "I don't want to ever get married," she said, "and I don't want to have children. I have had long relationships before and I would be happy to meet someone and be with them, but I don't want to get married or have children." Although she said little more about this she seemed keen to stress her love of being independent.

Over the years Akemi had done quite a lot of travelling abroad particularly in the USA and in Europe, usually for a month or two at a time. Furthermore she was a great fan of live music, though not Japanese music: "I don't really like Japanese music, the music I really like is mostly from the UK. At the moment I love the Arctic Monkeys." The income that she had left each month after paying her rent and bills went on saving for her next trip and going to live gigs when she could.

Akemi was the only woman I met in the course of fieldwork who definitively did not want to get married and did not want children. Significantly she was living and working in Tokyo and was surrounded by freeters – not only in her workplace but also many of her friends were doing similar things – attempting to create alternative lifestyles for themselves as artists or musicians, or aiming to travel and see the world. Hamamatsu, however, was far more conservative. Freeters were often surrounded by university students and regular workers. Normative gender and lifestyle discourses were strong. Women had no qualms that ultimately they would marry and with that came various responsibilities.

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[10] It is common practice in Japan that guests and people considered to be in a senior position, for example, the father (household head) or boss, or senior workers, be given the courtesy of bathing first. This is because everyone uses the same bathwater. People clean themselves properly outside the bath and then get into the bath to soak and relax. Subordinates, or in this case the youngest worker, are therefore the last to bathe.

Thus for them, being a freeter was a transitory stage. Most were happy to experience what they wanted whilst young and 'free' before marrying and settling down.

Consumption versus Becoming *Something*

Although the women in this chapter are clearly quite different from one another in temperaments, experiences and how they came to be freeters, the way they engaged with the discourse surrounding freeters and their expectations and aspirations for the future were markedly different from their male counterparts. For women personal fulfilment came through the consumption that their work facilitated: they were saving to travel or study abroad - some were more successful than others – the one's who had less success usually attributed this to being unable to resist shopping (cf. Miller 1998). Alternatively, they were using the money they earned to consume in other ways – to follow Takarazuka, or regularly go to live concerts. Men, however, were generally seeking fulfilment through the very work itself – they wanted to become *something*. With the expectation that they should become responsible breadwinners often in mind, being a freeter meant very different things to the men – it cut to the core of the kind of person, the kind of *man*, that wider society perceived them to be. Therefore their strategies of dealing with this, in particular the way they stressed their dreams and future plans, revolved more around the kinds of work they did or wanted to do. Although, as the preceding chapters have shown, male freeters tended to have ambitions that often came across as pipedreams, for example, wanting to open a cafe (but having no capital), for most, their ambitions were directly linked to the world of work and livelihood as opposed to consumption and travel. Even though many were simultaneously seeking to create alternative lifestyles by engaging in alternative types of work from what they felt was mainstream, ultimately they continued to frame this pursuit of something different in terms of the work itself. In most cases their aspirations revolved around what kinds of work they wanted to do, rather than what they would do outside of work.

Aside from a common desire for meaning and freedom in their lives, three themes – apprehension, failure and resignation – consistently came into my conversations with male freeters. Under their often jaunty proclamations about their lives and aspirations they would usually become pensive and worried when talking about their futures. There was a pervasive atmosphere of insecurity, resignation and a strong desire to *not* have to do something. This was in contrast

to the majority of women with whom I met and spoke. The female freeters were generally upbeat about their work lives. Nevertheless, they were also worried, though about different things: their weight, their ability to attract a husband, get married, and ultimately fulfil what many felt was expected of them as adult women.

The following discussion seeks to explore why the men were so concerned about their futures. It illustrates that socio-economic and educational background played a key role, alongside normative gendered ideals, in not only their narratives, but also the way they negotiated social pressures and personal desires, in complex and differing ways.

Insecurities

Educational and family backgrounds played a key role in how many freeters thought about their lifestyles and futures. Many of the male freeters with university degrees felt considerable pressure from their parents to get into regular white-collar employment, to do what they felt they were *supposed* to do. This was conspicuously absent in the narratives of the majority of female freeters. Some of the men had consequently set themselves clear age cut-offs for achieving their goals. Kenji, for example, mentioned in Chapter 4, was a 24 year old wannabe musician: "After the age of 26 it is difficult to get into regular employment. I need to have experience in regular work. If my band never becomes successful what will I do? So I have given myself two years to make it big. If I don't, I'll quit..." He went on: "My uncle keeps pressuring me to give up and move to London. His son doesn't want to take over the business, he's doing other things; and neither does my brother, he's just not interested. So it will probably have to be me." Making it big in the music business would be his get-out clause – he would become free of his obligations to the family business and could choose his own path – but he was 'realistic' enough to know that failure was a real possibility.

Resistance, resignation and apprehension were closely intertwined. On the one hand Kenji was resisting his family's expectations though he was afraid of letting them down, but he was also resigned and even a little comforted that in the end he probably would take over the family business. Therefore although he was attempting to carve out a different lifestyle for himself centred on music, he was also aware that in the future he would probably give in to his family's expectations and take over the running of the London business. At the same time, Kenji was not sure that he was cut out for it and worried that he didn't have a

business mind. Yet, for him, and some of the others such as Nobu (Chapter 5) and Shiro (Chapter 4) who also had parents who owned their own businesses, there was more room to manoeuvre – they had a certain freedom to pursue their aspirations and to (potentially) get financial support from their families in their quest to achieve their goals. There was a safety net – an underlying current of feeling that in the future, once they were older, they could take over the business or at least would have a place in the running of it. This, though somewhat comforting, was also quite oppressive for some as they sought to escape the pre-planned lives they felt were mapped out for them. Many other freeters had no such connections or possibilities in their futures – their families did not own companies or have much financial capital – and this led to greater apprehension on their part.

One of the biggest general concerns among many of the men, particularly those in their mid- to late-twenties, was that they would become stuck in irregular work. Again, female freeters were not concerned about this, as the vast majority were sure that they would marry and continue to work part-time. Many men, however, felt sure that after they reached their thirties they would become cut-off from being able to enter a company as a regular worker. As a consequence of feeling this many were afraid of *not* getting into regular work. They anticipated that life would become difficult if they stayed a freeter – they would find it hard to marry, they would be financially unstable, have no salary if they became ill, and furthermore, no pension. However, their ability to get into stable employment was largely delineated by their educational achievements, or lack thereof.

For many of the high school and junior high school graduates the aim was not a grand dream of musical stardom or entrepreneurial success, but was actually to get a regular full-time position (though with some caveats). Yoshio's aspiration, for example, mentioned in Chapter 6, was to against all the odds find a regular job. He was not particularly hopeful, but he was increasingly worried about what would happen in his life if he didn't find one. Kentaro, meanwhile, a man with a vocational college education who had quit a regular job a few years before and had long lived independently, was banking on getting offered a regular contract with the company in which he was working part-time. Indeed, for the previous five years or so he had been attempting to re-enter the world of regular work, to no avail. He comforted himself with the prospect that even if he remained a freeter it might not be so bad – his friend in Tokyo had a wife and child, and he was a freeter, so surely it was doable to build and sustain a life on irregular work?

Yet, underneath his jaunty facade it was clear that he was concerned.

At the same time, the vast majority of the men I met, particularly those who had graduated from universities, were pessimistic about the realities of regular work and whether or not permanent jobs even really existed given the continued recession. Akihiro, a 28 year old artist, summed it up when he said: "I often think, 'what is the point of becoming a regular worker?' It really isn't as stable as everyone thinks. The company could easily make us redundant if they needed to..." Yet, having stepped off the mainstream path, worry over their futures remained.

Whilst some of the men in their thirties had made a conscious choice to leave regular work and pursue something different there were also times that their insecurities would come through. Hideo, a 38 year old wannabe entrepreneur discussed in Chapter 6, mentioned with a nervous laugh that his savings were starting to run out and he really needed his business ideas to work. Not long after this he joined a networking group which was endeavouring to sell a health drink that was apparently hugely popular in America and Australia. He began aggressively trying to drum up interest in it. Hideo remained optimistic that he had made the right decision to quit his regular job, yet he was not convinced that everything would be alright. What made it more manageable, however, was that he was living with his parents, paying minimal rent, and was financially able to take risks and see where he ended up. Although the things that these male freeters were apprehensive of differed they were all worried about their futures, particularly around future work and, for most, marriage prospects. They were seeking to create alternative lifestyles for themselves, but were afraid of what would happen if they were to ultimately fail.

Gendered Pressures

Significantly female freeters felt none of the pressure that male counterparts felt regarding their work choices. The majority of female freeters I knew (and other women – students, temp workers and even some full-time workers) consistently mentioned that it did not really matter what type of job they did because ultimately in a few years time they wanted to get married and settle down. Once they had married and had children they intended to give up work (at least while their children were small) and that later, after their children were in school, they foresaw that they would work part-time to have some freedom and supplement the family income. These attitudes all correspond to normative ideals of adult

womanhood – women are still primarily imagined and expected to fulfil the role of 'good wife, wise mother' first, and working woman second, in Hamamatsu at least. For them, working part-time was not socially unacceptable – rather it was the norm. Part-time work continues to be seen as 'natural' because of the expectation that women will get married, have children, temporarily retire from the workforce, and return later in a part-time capacity (cf. Brinton 1992, 1993; Creighton 1996; Iwao 1993; Lebra 1984; Roberts 1994; Rosenberger 1996). Although there are many women that continue to work full-time after having children most of my interviewees felt that this was not desirable.

Only Yuko, of all my female informants, felt particularly driven to get into regular work, but this was arguably due to her desire for stability and because she was unsure as to whether she would be able to get married. Nami also felt unsure of her future and ability to marry and had no idea what she wanted to do in life, but was often given support by co-workers in the locker room who insisted that it didn't matter that she didn't know what she wanted to do because in the end she would get married and have children anyway. For male freeters no such reassurance was at hand. Instead many were plagued with feelings of pressure about what they were to end up doing. For those women who did not want to marry and who were seeking stable employment there was still no real negativity regarding their work choices *per se* – working full-time as a young woman was also totally acceptable. Instead the pressure for them came most forcefully around the topic of marriage and children.

Failing the Self/Society?

Through expressions of resignation about the future and a generally pessimistic feeling about whether they would succeed in creating their chosen lifestyles some of the men felt that giving up on their aspirations would be a failure – a failure to the self. Simultaneously, many of them felt that they wanted to get married, have children and be the main breadwinner. Although this was not necessarily incompatible with the lifestyles they aspired to have, they still spoke of a feeling of incompatibility. Why was this? It becomes a little clearer when looking at their ideas of gender roles after marriage: whilst the majority of men were very happy for their wives to work they still anticipated being the main breadwinner who brings home the lion's share of the family income (not unlike men in the UK and elsewhere as well) (cf. McDowell 2003; Osella and Osella 2006). Thus for them financial instability was incompatible with being the core provider. Indeed, as illustrated throughout the thesis, women overwhelmingly concurred – none of

them would really consider marrying a freeter. It would just be too unstable. Furthermore, many of the male freeters felt that if they were to get married they would have to put their wives' (and childrens') feelings and welfare above their own aspirations. This led many of the men to state that they did not want to get married soon, but only in the future once they were leading financially stable lifestyles. Not all the men I met felt that marriage and creating an alternative lifestyle were incompatible, but they were in the minority, and they also continued to espouse that they intended to be the core provider in the event of marriage.

Of those men who aspired to find a regular job most were afraid of what would happen to them if they did not find such work. The prospect of a lifetime in irregular employment with little chance to move in different directions due to their lack of (the right kind of) work experience and educational credentials was not one they wanted to consider. Yet, most did not seriously think that they would be successful. Interestingly, in the resignation that many of the men expressed, it seemed as if they *expected* to fail. For instance, as discussed in Chapter 4, Kazuyuki expressed a desire to become a professional street dancer and to open a café in the future. Yet both seemed like pipe-dreams: sometimes he mentioned that it was unlikely that he would ever become professional because street dance is not only popular, but also highly competitive. Furthermore, having no capital to open a café nor having a family that had any spare cash to assist him in such a venture, he seemed to be saying it to give himself more status – knowing that most people thought that freeters who had dreams were 'ok' as opposed to those who were just drifting.

The expectation of failing made itself manifest in varying ways. Among university and college educated men there were generally two opposing possibilities that male freeters raised for their futures. They would either: (1) continue as a freeter whilst attempting to make it big as a musician, dancer or entrepreneur; perhaps not get married (unless they became financially successful); and have the door of regular employment slam shut (they felt) in their mid-thirties. Or, (2) at some point those whose dreams were to find alternative work from that of the stereotypical salaryman would give up on whatever their dream was and attempt to find stable, regular work, thereby most likely (they felt) being able to get married and live a stable, regular life. In these two scenarios a sense of failure was endemic. In the first, by continued pursuit of their aspirations into their thirties they were in a sense potentially failing (in the future) at being a 'proper' adult

man because they would be unable to become a core breadwinner, unable to provide stability. Yet in the second scenario they felt that they would have failed themselves by shelving their aspirations and succumbing to a lifestyle that many had been seeking a move away from. Accompanying this second scenario was a feeling of resignation, of the attitude that it would be, in the event, 'shōganai' (can't be helped). Some were able to bridge the gap between these two positions, for example, Takeshi had recently accepted a regular contract at the factory he had been working at in order to give his life more stability, whilst still attempting to become a successful Amway entrepreneur. As discussed in Chapter 5, he was, however, not getting very far and complained that this was because the people in Hamamatsu were 'conservative'. Takeshi was able to do both, however, because the work itself that he was doing had not changed in any way – it was the same factory line he had worked on before and the same hours, he just had a more secure contract.

It is important to note, however, that not all the men felt that they were failing. Yet, importantly these were men either without girlfriends and/or a desire to marry, or who had placed themselves outside of the pressures they felt were endemic, by either leaving the country or by dating foreign women who they felt didn't expect them to be breadwinners.

Girlfriends, Pressure and Resignation

The presence of girlfriends was thus pivotal to many of the men's feelings about their futures and work prospects. Resignation was a particularly potent feeling among men who had serious girlfriends and among men who were in their late twenties. Many who were beginning to earnestly seek regular work talked of how they were being pushed or pressured by their long-term girlfriends. Indeed Sumiko (Chapter 6) made it quite clear to her fiancé, Masao, that he had to find a regular job before getting married because she did not want to keep working six or seven days a week. For him this was clearly not something he particularly wanted to do and whilst talking with them it was obviously a source of tension and resignation on his part. Although resignation is culturally seen as a route to maturity, which both Sumiko and Masao were aware of, Masao resisted and yet was resigned to this normative route to adult manhood. The role women played in the choices that men made about their futures, or felt that they would have to make, should not be under-estimated. As I have shown clearly throughout the thesis, the women I met were clear that they were seeking a man who would be the core provider. This is further confirmed when looking at what traits they felt

were desirable in a man (stable, decisive, ability to endure, breadwinner etc.) as was clearly shown in Chapter 3. Their expectations of what a man should do and be in effect created the pressures that many of the men felt. Yet, importantly, men also created these pressures for themselves because they expected women to want them to be the breadwinner, and to be in stable employment.

Koji (aged 24), like Masao, also felt pressure from his long-term girlfriend. He had been working at the cinema for about five years when we met, and in the year I did fieldwork he had tried unsuccessfully for the third time to become a manager. He was dejected at the most recent failure and mentioned that his girlfriend would not be happy. She was an elementary school English teacher who had made it clear that he needed to get a proper job. Koji's family were well known in the small town he was from because his grandfather and father had owned a small chain of suit shops in the area. When Koji was in high school, however, the family business had gone bust. At the time he had wanted to be a motorcar racer so he quit high school and got a job at the local race-track: "I'm the oldest child and I wanted to help with money. I felt that I should help. But, to be honest, I wanted to try racing. I didn't like school – I felt 'what is the point?' For me, it felt like a waste of time, so I dropped out and started racing." After realising that race car driving wasn't for him he found a job at the cinema. His father meanwhile had found a job in an import/export business and made it clear to Koji that he could get him a job there if he wanted one. Yet Koji was reticent about this, saying to me a couple of times that he was afraid of committing to it: "If I take this job I can't quit it if I don't like it. My father works there ...so there is nothing I can do if I don't like it." His options were, he felt, dwindling. With his long-term girlfriend making it clear that she could not marry a freeter and putting pressure on him to find stable work he began to start thinking of what options he had. Not long after I left the field Koji wrote to tell me that he had in fact taken a regular job at the company his father works for. Keeping up-to-date with his Mixi[11] entries since it seems he is still there, but not having the easiest of times – at times stating that he felt that lately all he does is fail and make mistakes.

For Yoshio (Chapter 6), a regular job was also the aim. This was also largely precipitated as a result of being in a relationship with a career woman whose parents, he said, would never allow her to be with a freeter. Furthermore, he had

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[11] Mixi is a Japanese social networking site (http://mixi.jp/).

clear gendered ideas about marriage: "I want to get married, but I want to be able to provide a stable life. We cannot get married until I find stable work… But I cannot guarantee that I won't quit a regular job if I get one." He wanted it, yet didn't. He had had the experience of 'breaking his body' and was loathe to have to work in such a way that it might happen again. He was afraid of what he saw as the realities of regular work – long hours and a job that could be stressful and not always enjoyable – but also did not want to remain in the irregular employment sphere. Time was running out, but he also seemed resigned to the possibility that he wouldn't be able to get work: "My work history is not so good. I don't have a university degree, and my work experience is varied. Companies don't want people who have had lots of different jobs and have only graduated from a junior high school. They don't want people who will quit."

The prospect of quitting, or wanting to quit a job, was a common concern among my informants. Many felt that once they had a regular job they needed to commit to it thereby making quitting difficult and undesirable. Many wanted a job that they felt they could easily walk away from, if they needed to. Yet, the act of quitting is seen (by the women I knew and society in general) to be both immature and proof of their inability to endure difficult situations. Male freeters, already aware of the negative discourses surrounding their working style and life choices, were reticent to commit to jobs that they then felt they might want to leave. They were thus in a double bind – looked down upon for not being able to commit, not being decisive and responsible, yet if they did commit and subsequently decide that it was not what they wanted to do in the long run, they were consequently regarded as men who cannot *gaman*, who are irresponsible and not reliable.

Although Koji, Masao and Yoshio had similar education backgrounds and were in serious romantic relationships (all had been with their girlfriends for about two years) their responses to the pressure to get into regular work differed, as were their feelings of resignation regarding their future work and life choices. Yet the vast majority of men I knew felt these pressures and felt stuck in-between their desires and what they felt were societal demands. A very few of the male freeters did not feel much resignation regarding work choices and opportunities. Hideo, for example, had given up a well-paid civil servant job, and Taro had spent most of his twenties travelling and living in Africa and was now working as a Japanese language teacher with plans to go abroad again. Neither felt resigned – they had proactively made their decisions about how they wanted to live their lives and

were doing just that, though they were both concerned about their future finances. Significantly neither were in relationships, both were in their late thirties living in their parental homes, and they had both faced their parents' disapproval of their actions and carved out their own paths regardless.

Implications for Adulthood

The pressures and disapproval that male freeters feel regarding their work choices, and those that women feel around marriage, directly implicates normative notions of adulthood. During a recent visit to Japan I was reminded of this when I managed to re-meet a number of friends. One evening, at dinner with a family I used to meet with regularly, the *Obasan* updated me on all the goings-on among the people who got together almost every week when I was in the field. Her daughter, who was unable to attend, had married only a few months earlier, and a freeter I met through the family had just found a regular position working at a school and had thus finished his freeter days. Between mouthfuls of rice she grinned and exclaimed: "Everyone is becoming an adult aye!" (*Minna, otona ni naru yo!*). For her, there was a clear link between adult and non-adult status as the attainment of marriage and regular secure work. Before this point in time she obviously regarded them as not-adults, neither children, but still very much (as they still are) in the becoming. This is implicitly present in the negative discourses explored in chapter 3 that question (male) freeters' reliability, responsibility, work ethic, and motivations, and suggest that they are neither good marriage material or able to let go of their mothers' apron strings.

Many people, like Shiho, a 34-year old *haken* worker, suggested that it was work status that both began and demarcated the process of adulthood: "People become adults when they start working… working full-time… Male freeters are not adults." Gender was explicitly part of her analysis: female freeters were excluded from her portrayal of the links between full-time work and adulthood, perhaps because for women waged labour in the post-war period is not linked explicitly to adulthood. Specifically talking about women, Shiho said: "If they can cook, clean, do all the jobs their mother's can do – that is adulthood (*ichininmae*)." Shiho maintained a clear gender divide regarding the attainment of adulthood: women were to become adults when they were able to do all that their mother's could do, men when they earned money, learnt to be patient and had a stable job. Economic independence was often linked to adulthood by other people I knew as well:

> If people make enough money to live alone, pay all their rent and bills, and take care of their family – that is *ichininmae* (adulthood)... ...Also, if they are patient (*gaman*) for everything, even if they cannot understand something, for example, at work, if they find it hard or they do not understand, but they stay patient and keep trying – that is *ichininmae*.

From such a perspective, male freeters, regardless of their age, were not adults if they were reliant financially on others, if they could not care for a family and could not be finally independent. Matsui, a 40 year old man, was unsure what constituted adulthood in contemporary Japan:

> Before, when I was younger, men became adults after entering a company and experiencing and learning to do all the different jobs, and after learning all the different behaviours, for example, how to act and what to say at different times and in different situations, but now I am not sure if it is that way – freeters don't learn those things because they are not working in companies in the same way.

This idea that becoming an adult is about learning to do what is expected, playing the right role at the right time with the correct speech, was also echoed by Miyuki, a 26 year old freeter: "Being an adult is being able to do the things you should do (*yarubeki koto ga dekiru*), and not relying on anyone – being able to pay all the rent, bills, food etc." Relying only on the self was important in her view of adulthood. For Miyuki, men's journey to adulthood revolved more around work than women's, specifically on being able to master all aspects of the job they are doing. However, importantly, Miyuki also thought that the process was different for everyone: the ways people achieve this financial independence, and the way they learn to do what they should do differs for every individual and was not linked to particular types of job contract.

Other informants went further in their ideas of what constituted adulthood. For Rie it was clearly an ongoing process:

> Getting a job, doing it well and becoming competent in all aspects of it are part of becoming an adult. ...the coming of age ceremony [*seijin shiki*][12] is really the first step. Then it's getting a job and learning how to do it. Then it's marriage, but marriage is still *only* the beginning – it's not the end at all. Becoming an adult is a long process.

Although gender was part of it Rie thought that it was not of overwhelming importance. Men and women basically had to go through similar processes to

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[12] *Seijin shiki*, the Coming of Age day, is held on the second Monday of January each year. All those people who turned twenty the previous year are invited to the local city office for a ceremony to celebrate them reaching the age of majority, and to symbolise their (legal) becoming of adulthood.

reach adulthood, and it was something that she envisaged took years to achieve (cf. Martinez 2004). Trying one's best was also a key component of becoming an adult. Rie used the example of male freeters to state her point:

> For me there are two types of freeter. There are the ones with a hobby that they are pursuing – like surfing – then I think people think '*urayamashii!*'[to be envious] that they are doing something they love, and trying their hardest at it. The other type of freeter is the one who is not really doing anything. They are not trying hard at anything (*issho kenmei yattenai*). Then people wonder what they are doing; they think they are childish because they are not trying hard.

This links clearly with the fact that to *gaman* (be patient) and *ganbaru* (to try one's best) is considered to be a core part of the mature Japanese self (Kondo 1987; Smith 1983a).

With the exception of Rie who stressed the long-term becoming of adulthood, the majority of informants were talking about the generally expected route to adulthood which was significantly gendered and indelibly linked to work for men. But the tension between the expected route and what people were doing went largely uncommented on. Yet this tension and its ongoing nature are clearly present in the ethnographic chapters. Furthermore, gendered notions of adulthood and work, as outlined in this chapter, significantly affected the lives and strategies of the freeters I knew.

This chapter has sought to bring a comparative element into discussions of freeters. Not only is the discourse around freeters subtly gendered, but the narratives of male and female freeters clearly show that their experiences and identifications of being a freeter, and their aspirations for the future, are clearly gendered and affected by normative ideals and notions of adulthood. The final chapter seeks to draw together all the strands of the ethnographic chapters and conclude the thesis.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

Much of the scholarship on freeters thus far (which highlights structural difficulties and changing employment practices as the cause of freeters employment issues) overshadows freeters' own voices and subjective experiences. I have sought to redress this somewhat whilst situating their individual lives in both gendered discourses of what constitutes an adult and in contemporary economic and employment conditions that frame the opportunities of individuals. Whilst many of the freeters in this study were structurally limited – as a result of their limited education or lack of the right kind of work experience – they were not just victims without any control. Many, especially those with good educations who on the face of it could find 'good' jobs if they so wished, turned away from middle-class expectations. They clearly wanted something more: they wanted enjoyable jobs, freedom to move jobs and not be penalised for it, a job that didn't break their bodies, and a good work-life balance. Whilst many students were 'realistic' that this was not likely to be possible, the freeters I knew continued to pursue work that they felt would deliver at least some of the above. They sought to have more than was expected of them: the high school graduates who seemed set for blue-collar work wanted enjoyable, stable, white-collar work; the university graduates wanted freedom from white-collar work, they wanted to set their own hours, have financial and work-life independence, and wanted to carve out their own lifestyles instead of having them dictated by a company. All were seeking to increase their social capital and status.

Whilst this may seem impossible outside of the salaryman frame (and indeed is quite difficult), youth are simultaneously being encouraged (through popular media predominantly) to follow their dreams (Mathews 2003). And indeed, although the process of attaining success (and status) through non-salaried employment may be fraught with difficulties (and although the possibilities of actually becoming a successful entrepreneur, artist, musician, actor etc. are, of course, limited), once an individual becomes successful (and their ability to earn decent money is no longer in such constant question) their struggles are respected and applauded. However, none of the men I knew were yet 'successful' and therefore they were subjected to, and felt, normative ideals all the more strongly.

Discourses of Freeters and Gender

In much of the discourse about freeters there is a subtext that indicates that the

'problem' is not so much about freeters per se, but rather about concerns over increasing numbers of male freeters who are seen to be shirking their responsibilities as 'proper' male citizens. As explored in Chapter 2 men and women have been positioned quite specifically regarding their responsibilities to state and nation over the past one hundred and fifty years. Whilst women now have more opportunities in the work environment they continue to be constructed largely as the biological and social reproducers of the nation (Mackie 2003), whilst men continue to be constructed as the primary productive breadwinners (Dasgupta 2003; McLelland 2005; Roberson 1995, 2003). Hegemonic masculinity continues to revolve around the figure of the salaryman, whose rapid rise in the pre- and post-war period signalled the upsurge of a 'new' middle-class – a status that was emulated for the majority of the post-war period. Although in recent years the salaryman has become a figure of ridicule as well as aspiration (Fujimura-Fanselow and Kameda 1995; Roberson and Suzuki 2003a), the attributes said to be embodied by him e.g. those revolving around ideals of breadwinning, perseverance, overcoming difficulty etc. continue to be considered as desirable and are strived for in a variety of ways. Even freeters who were adamant that they would hate to be a salaryman sought to show, or felt that as they got older they had to show, that they possessed these character attributes.

I have shown that this discourse of masculinity is, then, not only about masculinity, but specifically includes normative notions of what it means to be an adult man. It therefore seems to me that rather than looking at 'middle-class' or 'working-class' masculinities as many authors do (e.g. Roberson 2003), it is more useful to look at the themes of masculinity that intersect and cross-cut class lines. The freeters in this thesis illustrate that regardless of their educational and class backgrounds they were all conflicted in various ways about what was expected of them as men in contemporary Japan.

But *why* do male freeters come to draw so heavily on images of the salaryman in their narratives? Given that freeters are often constructed as almost the antithesis of the salaryman in popular discourse, and given that women continued to frame their desires of what they wanted of men largely in terms that synced with the ideals the salaryman represents (focusing on the ability to provide stability, on responsibility, mental and spiritual toughness, decisiveness and diligence etc.) male freeters were continually bombarded with normative notions of what men should be and do. As Judith Butler so eloquently argues, gender is itself a norm: "[A] reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effect that

it names" (Butler 1993: 2). Normative gender ideals had been largely internalised by all the men I knew, and as such they could not cast off these ideals, but rather struggled with them in varying ways. However, this should also not be overstated. All of the men were active agents, they all were striving towards different goals, and it was only the men who were most invested in hetero-normative ideals, specifically those that wanted to marry, who were most conflicted.

Discourses about freeters, meanwhile, as detailed in Chapter 3, clearly highlight that they are considered to be irresponsible, uncommitted, lacking in work ethic etc. However, there was a clear gender divide. When looking closer at this through exploring informants' ideas and images of freeters it was apparent that female freeters were not considered in such a way – for women, working part-time remains normal and acceptable. Therefore there was no pressure on women to be working in more 'acceptable' ways because part-time work has been the norm in the post-war period for the majority of women (Brinton 1993; Broadbent 2001). Indeed women expected that they would marry, have families and consequently continue working part-time or not at all (depending on their class).

I have definitely not argued that there is only one type of masculinity in Japan, nor only one way of becoming a mature person. There are (and have always been) a great diversity of lifestyles and a myriad routes to maturity. However, I have argued that the ideological power of normative notions of masculinity and adulthood are highly pervasive and important in the narratives of the vast majority of freeters I knew. I suggested in the Introduction that it is perhaps useful to think of the ideals embodied in the figure of the salaryman as a 'structuring structure' (Bourdieu 2001) whose features (including breadwinning, marriage, and fatherhood) are an ideal which serves as a measure against which actual masculine performances are measured (Osella, et al. 2004: 16). For male freeters, whose performances (and chances to perform these ideals) are mediated by their structural position in the workforce, the image and ideal of the salaryman loomed large – probably because they were so far from embodying this middle-class model and because it is this ideal that is, time and again, drawn upon in the discourses surrounding freeters in the popular media and government policies as I showed in Chapter 3. Their class positions (whether they desired upward mobility or were at risk of downward), previous work experiences, the presence or absence of girlfriends (and the desire to marry), and age also mediated just how much they drew on these ideals in their narratives.

Whilst the discourse surrounding male freeters is very much about notions of

masculinity and maturity, it is also about what constitutes a productive citizen and incorporates discourses of morality and self-responsibility. Increasing numbers of freeters are a very visible reminder of the recession since the economic bubble burst at the beginning of the 1990s, of the widening gap between rich and poor, and increasing concerns about the condition of the social welfare and pension system. As shown in Chapter 3, the Japanese government has therefore been attempting to reduce freeter numbers and encourage more youth into full-time employment. However, companies want to employ a flexible labour force in order to remain competitive on the global market and therefore the irregular employment sector continues to flourish. Yet, (male) freeters are not seen to be fulfilling their social responsibilities (JILPT 2004). The negativity surrounding freeters is not just, then, about young people having less self/social responsibility than previous generations, nor about only concerns over the future of the economy, the pension and welfare system etc., but rather is imbued with a moral discourse of what it is to be an adult Japanese man. Freeters challenge normative ways of working, of *expected* life courses. As Bledsoe (2002) argues, however, life courses are contingent – they are affected by unpredictable and unforeseen events that considerably affect the course of lives and lead people into different futures.

The changes in the economic environment over the past twenty years have significantly affected freeters life-choices and chances. With companies seeking greater flexibility in their work-forces and employing more irregular employees, competition for 'regular' jobs becomes fiercer. Therefore, if freeters end up wanting to enter this employment sphere they face stiff competition and, depending on their age, work history, and education background, are usually at a considerable disadvantage. Some of the men in this thesis employed similar strategies to those described by, for example, Cross (2009), Jeffrey (2009), and Nisbett (2006, 2007) in India. They sought extra credentials and qualifications to try and put them ahead of the competition. For example, Yoshi (chapter 6) sought to improve his varied work history and lack of high school diploma with a general computing course, whereas Taro (Chapter 6) and Nobu (Chapter 5) all sought upward mobility (and greater flexibility in pursuing their aspirations) through the acquisition of a Japanese language qualification (whilst Hideo – Chapter 6 – sought to maintain his status through teaching Japanese). Others, however, sought to use the contacts and their reputations within companies to try and gain full-time employment (if they desired), for example, Kentaro (Chapter 6) and Koji (Chapter 5), or they sought to increase their success in the arena's they were

seeking to be successful in (e.g. Amway for Takeshi – see Chapter 5). In contrast, however, male freeters in their early twenties tended to emphasise their 'youth'.

The Importance of Age

Age was a crucial component to understanding the motivations of freeters. Chapter 4 clearly shows that young freeters in their early twenties were happy to ignore dominant ideas of adult manhood for the present. They were going for their aspirations and were given the space to do so, under the understanding that it was normal for youth to do just such a thing. In contrast to some other studies (cf. Durham 2000; Vigh 2006) none of them sought to transcend their status as youth, but rather they consciously employed the category and relied on the 'in-between' status (Liechty 2002) it gave them. They described themselves as still children and therefore gave themselves more time to try out alternative paths. Therefore 'youth' was not just a transitional space, but one that was liminal.

Peers were highly important in their positioning and in their feelings about their lives and futures. Kazuyuki, in particular, gained a strong sense of belonging: of mutual support and acceptance of his aspirations and views of work, life, and manhood, from his peers. Indeed, he was quite saddened when one of his friends announced he was to marry. Not only was he moving into a more adult state but he would have less time to spend with friends because it was felt that, on marriage, family comes first. Both Kazuyuki and Shiro felt that these adult responsibilities, though perhaps desired in the future, were far from the realities of their lives. They sought to spend time developing themselves and were adamant that emotionally, but also materially, they would not be ready to consider marriage until their thirties. Even though they were seeking to postpone adulthood in various ways they were still conscious of the material necessities of marriage and of the expectation to provide a stable income.

The tension between the expectations of adult manhood and personal desires became more apparent when exploring the lives of male freeters in their mid- to late-twenties in Chapter 5. They increasingly felt the pull and pressure of social expectations, and all of the men I met were in the process of deciding just how much to resist and how much to give in. Some sought to position themselves outside these demands (as much as possible) by spending the majority of their time overseas or by postponing making decisions relating to their working styles. Yet most felt that they were at turning points. Educational background and employment history significantly affected their feelings at these junctures: men

who had completed tertiary education were more confident about their work prospects than those without a high school diploma, but they all felt pressure in varying ways, as Chapter 5 explored. The presence of girlfriends and family situations also played a role in how individuals conceived of their opportunities and futures, and for some, added considerable strain. However, for some men – those who were adamant that they did not want to marry, those who were gay, or those who sought to make lives for themselves abroad – relatively little pressure was associated with this time. Whilst they were concerned about what would happen in the future with their finances they were not seeking to appear marriageable. And therefore, pressure to conform to the hetero-normative ideals of manhood was less relevant for them.

Men in their thirties, meanwhile, incorporated both positions. Some were feeling increasingly aware of their social responsibilities and seeking to find a way to fulfil what they felt their role as adult men was. Others meanwhile had made peace with their decisions to be freeters, had survived the disapproval of parents and peers, and carved their own lives irrespective of *seken*. Again, women's expectations, and a man's desire to marry or not, was of crucial importance in their decisions and their feelings about being a freeter. Vogel's (1963: 9) comment that: "The young Japanese girl hopes to marry a salary man even if his salary were lower because his life is steady, he has leisure time, and she can be free of the anxieties and work connected with independent business," remains somewhat true, among the women I worked with in Hamamatsu at least. Only one woman I knew was marrying a freeter, and she was a freeter herself. However, she was insisting her fiancé find a regular job before they got married (see To Marry or Not to Marry section in Chapter 6). All the other women I met were adamant that they wanted (and intended to) marry a man who could provide a stable life. Freeters were not considered good marriage material by any of the women I worked with.

Men (of all ages) talked of marriage in terms of duties and responsibilities. Almost none of them, with the exception of Taro (Chapter 6), talked of marriage itself as potentially adding meaning to life. Most sought to gain this meaning through the workplace or through what they were doing productively. This is made clear in Chapter 7 through the juxtaposed discussion of male and female freeters. Whilst women often sought meaning through the consumption that their work facilitated, men sought it through the work itself. Indeed, most of the anxiety that male freeters expressed was through feeling that they were not doing

what they should be doing (work-wise). They were in turns apprehensive about their futures, worried about failing (either through failing themselves by giving up trying to achieve their aspirations or failing by not giving up and consequently being unable to marry), and ultimately resigned that they most likely would end up conforming to expectations (if they could... if not they were resigned about not being able to). Of course, as already discussed, some men didn't feel this way, but the majority did.

The anxiety of male freeters therefore most forcefully revolves around their anticipated future marginality, their likely inability to get married if they continued working in irregular employment, and the realisation that as they edged closed to their thirties or mid-thirties they needed to decide whether to keep pursuing their aspirations or whether to give them up and seek a secure, regular life (*futsū na seikatsu*) instead. Age was therefore a central element in their narratives.

Self, Agency and Adulthood

Cultural constructions of maturity and gendered notions of work remain intricately tied to ideas of masculinity, selfhood, and the attainment of adult manhood, which my ethnography clearly shows through the contradictions faced by male freeters as they aged. Ideas of gendered adulthood, social expectations and norms infused all the narratives as each man came back to grapple with the ideals of what adult men should do and be in Japan, but that does not mean that people discipline themselves to the point of no return. Agency played a key role in all their narratives. Indeed, it was in exploring their choices and alternative ways of working that they were most buffeted by societal norms and made most aware of what many other young male students I knew just assumed to be the regular life course and part-and-parcel of life. Freeters are forced, by the very discourses that permeate their surroundings, to look them in the face and make their decisions.

Whilst it may be tempting (and possible) to read the case studies in this thesis as an exercise in the impossibility of breaking out of social expectations, and of the inevitability of hegemonic discourses of masculinity, this would be oversimplifying the struggles that freeters were engaged in. Norms and structures, though pervasive, do not preclude alternatives. In spite of strong normative societal pressures there is still room to manoeuvre as the case studies in this thesis show. Ideals and practice are different: whilst the men I knew felt that

dominant ideals could not be ignored, feeling like one *has* to do something or that one cannot escape certain expectations does not mean that in practice people will follow them (cf. Ortner 2006). Agency and intentionality are fundamental parts of this thesis. Whilst the dual discourses on freeters and on normative ideals of masculinity may be highly constraining, and whilst they were all worried about the futures, they all employed strategies to offset normative demands and to give them space within which to pursue alternative lifestyles that held meaning for them.

As Ortner (2006) has suggested, agency is both historically and culturally constituted. It involves intentionality and requires an active agent striving towards something. Furthermore, desires develop out of the structures of life (including out of the structures of inequality). Agency and the making and becoming of self and adulthood are thus intricately interlinked with wider social discourses and norms. By actively striving for something different whilst being buffeted by societal norms, the men in this thesis were consciously considering what would make their lives more meaningful whilst constructing themselves within these discourses in varying ways even when they were attempting to transcend them. Constructions of self and manhood are therefore intricately interrelated with wider social, cultural, and historically specific moments.

Discussions of agency have, however, been largely left out of much of the work on the anthropology of adulthood generally[1] and in Japan. Characterised primarily by a life course approach (Johnson-Hanks 2002; Schlegel and Barry III 1991) and analysis of largely structural factors affecting transitions to adulthood (Fortes 1974; Mead 1943; van Gennep 2004 (1977)), the anthropology of adulthood misses much of the tension that exists between the (self) disciplining of selves according to dominant social ideals, and agency. What we end up with is therefore only a partial picture. Transitions to, and self-understandings of, adulthood are not the be all and end all. Such an approach implies that adulthood is an end-point, an accomplishment, rather than a continual process of becoming (cf. Martinez 2004) where selves are constituted and reconstituted across the life course; for selves are made not just once, but are constantly changing and being re-negotiated.

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[1] An exception to this is the work which focuses on youth (and by extension adulthood) as a cultural category (see for example, Bucholtz 2002; Christiansen, et al. 2006; Durham 2000).

The struggle between how much to ignore dominant ideals and how much to give in is also fundamentally linked to ideas of maturity in Japan, which still seem to echo an older Confucian notion that maturity constitutes giving in to the demands of society. Whilst this may appear to take away from a discussion of both agency and multiple or alternative masculinities, they need not, as already suggested, be mutually exclusive. All of the freeters I met were seeking to make meaningful lives for themselves; for some these were outside mainstream ideals of what men should do, for others it was a struggle against structures that sought to keep them out of regular positions (such as not possessing desirable work experience or educational credentials). All of the men were conflicted in various ways; some feared that they would fail no matter what they did, others were resigned to giving in at some point in the future. Yet, both are accepted in the end. As suggested in the Introduction, resigning oneself to social expectations is a recognised route to mature selfhood (Lebra 1976), but this is not the only way. Indeed, hardship, the ability to endure and do one's best no matter what the obstacles also contribute to social maturity. Indeed the overcoming of hardships along the way is highly respected and clearly linked to manly behaviour as shown in Chapter 3.

Are Freeters 'Adults'?

Some authors (e.g. Mathews and White 2004) have stipulated that young Japanese people are now the beneficiaries of a delegitimization of the adult social order, and that this has led to a pluralisation of values and multitude of ways of becoming an adult. Whilst this may to some extent be the case, there are limits. Although the routes people take to adulthood may be diverse, the 'adult social order' continues to largely exist in its post-war gendered manifestation even if the paths to adulthood are becoming more elongated. In Hamamatsu at least, becoming an adult for men still means getting and holding onto *stable* employment, not necessarily in a large company, nor necessarily a white-collar post (running a stable business is also completely acceptable), and getting married. Having a permanent job is a visible and necessary indicator of adult status to other people. Individuals are expected to carry out the requirements of their various social roles (Kondo 1990), and in a sense they must *be* (and become) their roles to fully achieve maturity. As such, through a process of reiterated performative gestures (Butler 1999) mature selves are made.

It is here that freeters come a cropper. Freeters, due to their very position as irregular workers, find two of the core markers of adult manhood – that of stable

employment and marriage – to be elusive. Wider public discourse has dubbed them to be irresponsible (*musekinin*), indecisive (*yūjun fudan na*), unable to endure (*gaman dekinai*), not willing to try their best (*ganbaranai*) and selfish (*wagamama*) – all attributes that women considered unattractive, unmasculine and childish. For the vast majority of women I spoke with, freeters were off-limits for marriage, even if, as they sometimes professed, they loved them. Their lack of stable employment made them unattractive prospects, but it was not just the material deprivation that irregular work was thought to engender. They also felt that if a freeter had no particular purpose and was *just* a freeter then he showed a lack of good character qualities – they felt them to be irresponsible.

By not giving up (*akirameru*) their 'freedom', or their freeter lifestyles, the men in this thesis were in a sense yet to become mature social selves. For, if, as suggested in the Introduction, one of the ways to mature selfhood is through the ability to resign oneself to what must be done, then these men can be seen to be shirking normative ideas of social becoming. Their (at times shaky) determination to seek meaningful lives regardless of the long-term consequences was also generally undesirable to women, as Chapter 3 clearly showed. Thus, remaining, or choosing to be, a freeter, was quite a gamble. Furthermore, given that the transition to full-time employment is often not made by freeters until late in their twenties if at all, and given that their marriage prospects are often severely dented – depending on how long they have been a freeter and whether they do manage to attain stable full-time employment – it is therefore possible to suggest that freeters are not considered to be full adults (*shakaijin/ichininmae*). As discussed throughout the thesis, this has repercussions on how they are viewed and treated by people surrounding them, and also on how they view themselves, their choices, their relationships and their futures.

Conclusion

Although many men felt both constrained and constricted in their attempts to create alternative lifestyles, this did not stop them, however, from attempting to go for what they wanted. Yet, nor were they willing to sacrifice anything to get it – if a job were to turn out to be not what they wanted or expected they were prepared to quit. Whilst this was considered foolish by many people (women especially) these men did exhibit a type of courage. As Miyazaki (2006: 151) has stated in his work with Japanese traders: "[H]ope surfaced repeatedly...despite their repeated failures and perhaps even because of these failures." Yet hope does not, of course, necessarily lead to people doing anything to actually realise their

dreams. Crapanzano (2003: 18) suggests that: "[H]ope can in fact lead to paralysis. One can be so caught up in one's hope that one does nothing to prepare for its fulfilment." For some of the freeters in this thesis this was definitely part of it, and perhaps it is partly this that leads to much of the negative thought around them. Men who were doing something, who were actively and obviously trying to achieve realistic goals, were given some space in which to try it. Those who were 'just' dreaming, however, were often scathingly referred to. Freeters' ability to achieve their aspirations was thus not solely a result of, nor limited by, their socio-economic backgrounds. Vital to their potential success was their commitment and belief in what they were doing and in their ability to succeed.

As already discussed, whilst seeking meaningful lives, male freeters were also trapped within the moralising discourses that demand men be productive in particular ways: through their full-time labour force participation and reproduction. This is, of course, not unique to Japan. McDowell (2000, 2003), for example, explores the lives of young working-class men in the UK who, due to national and local economic restructuring, are working in low-paid service sector jobs. Whilst this has served to make financial independence far more difficult to attain, they continue to frame themselves, and be framed by, a specific class-based masculinity that positions them as future breadwinners and fathers. This is reflected in other locations as well, see for example, the Osella's work on masculinities in India (2004, 2006).

Regardless of whether or not men really do bring home most of the financial bacon in Japanese households, the majority of the men I knew clearly ascribed to the ideology of being the provider. It did not matter whether this was a reality in their own families – indeed most had mothers who worked essentially full-time in part-time positions – they all sought to achieve, or felt that they *needed* or were expected to at least *strive* to achieve a stable job with a stable salary. Many felt that marriage would be impossible without such financial stability. The women/girlfriends in their lives apparently vocalised this: women wanted and expected their future husbands to be providers. Many in Hamamatsu idealised and aspired to the life of the middle-class full-time housewife envisaging themselves as homemakers in charge of the domestic sphere.

This has led to large contradictions between what men can do and achieve, and what they feel they are expected and should achieve. Perhaps more importantly, however, was that men expected it of themselves. The life choices male freeters were making affected not just the immediate state of their wallets and lifestyles,

but also their futures; their ability to marry, have stable finances and a secure retirement. Getting a full-time *seishain* position remains both highly competitive and increasingly hard (impossible) as men age. There are clear cut-off points depending on educational background and previous work experience. This adds significant pressure, for if a man misses his window of opportunity he is effectively relegated to the irregular employment sphere for the rest of his working life. Only the men who were adamant that they did not want to marry, or those like Taro who moved abroad, felt able to transcend social expectations of appropriate adult manhood.

With so much talk of failure I could be accused of forgetting about success. For each of the men I worked with success was a highly individualistic pursuit – and one that was yet to be achieved which is why it is not a prominent part of this thesis. Men talked of their hopes, their aspirations, their dreams, and their difficulties in getting there, but not what it felt to be successful – they only envisioned being successful through the achievement of their aspirations. Success, for the government and for many of those surrounding freeters and in NPOs which aimed to help youth into employment, seemed, however, a simple matter. Fundamentally it was the entrance into secure employment, into paying pensions, and leading a normal, regular life. For the majority of men I worked with this was not their idea of success; rather this was constituted through creating a meaningful life, achieving their goals and aspirations. Since doing fieldwork some of the men I worked with have moved into permanent full-time (*seishain*) positions. Nobu, for example, has found employment in a private Brazilian school and is teaching Japanese language as a permanent member of staff. He continues to do his art, but for the moment is busy with work and fairly content with what he is doing, but he does not term it as success per se. This, much like the becoming of self, is ongoing. Whilst those surrounding him think of him as having succeeded he felt he has only succeeded in one aspect of his aspiration – that of finding secure work in which to pursue his art.

Ultimately there is a fundamental contradiction between gendered work and life course ideals and contemporary working styles. Ways of working in Japan are drastically changing. People are increasingly aware of the fact that lifetime employment does not exist for the vast majority of the workforce. Indeed, up to a third of the workforce are now employed on irregular contracts (Anon 2008c; Weathers 2009), and there is a clear indication that more employers want increasing numbers of irregular workers, or employees on fixed term contracts, to

keep their overheads low and to have greater control of the number of their workforce. Yet despite these changes the Japanese government has sought to correct this 'problem' group of men through a gendered moral discourse – indirectly stressing post-war gender ideals of the salaryman, security, devotion, and sacrifice to company and nation by attempting to correct a perceived lack of work ethic. Whilst they took action on the freeter 'issue' when, as Driscoll puts it: "the internal risk to the present and future economic and social structure of Japan became salient" (2007: 121), government policies that seek to encourage youth back into full-time employment (such as the *Wakamono Jiritsu Puran* discussed in Chapter 3) appear to have underestimated how much the game has changed. Both companies and workers are well aware of global market forces. Companies are seeking to be as competitive as possible via a cheap and flexible labour force which significantly changes the employment landscape. Workers are increasingly aware that lifetime employment is reserved for a few elite workers and attitudes towards work are consequently changing, albeit slowly.

Despite these changes, social attitudes regarding work and gender, in Hamamatsu at least, remained vested in post-war discourses of the salaryman and housewife as the *ideal* for men and women. With the current global recession holding Japan in its grip it is possible that there is a greater likelihood that attitudes towards work and gender may change due to greater employment instability and increasing numbers of people in irregular employment. Yet, during my fieldwork the attitudes of men and women were surprisingly static and in-line with dominant gender/work discourses. Women clearly wanted men to be core breadwinners who would provide a stable life. They wanted them to be responsible, decisive, and kind. Instability (economic, emotional) was something to be avoided if at all possible – it was considered to be irresponsible and childish. Male freeters wanted to create alternative lifestyles, but often had to decide if the risk was worth it.

What I've shown in this thesis, by analysing the life stories of freeters from one Japanese city, is that it is not only changing labour demands and the increase in irregular jobs that lead to the difficulties and ambivalence that are often inherent in these men's life choices. In addition, normative demands of what men should do and be, the demands that men place on themselves, and the role that women play in this process create complex and difficult situations which men (and women) have to navigate. It could be argued, therefore, in line with much of the literature positing that changing economic and social circumstances combined

with continued demands on men to be breadwinners constitutes a 'crisis of masculinity' (e.g. Kimmel and Kaufman 1994; McDowell 2003). Indeed, freeters' lives were fraught with difficulties and contradictions and they all drew on these conditions in their narratives. However, hegemonic masculinity, by its very nature, is always in crisis (Connell 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Whilst this particular time-period (the early 1990s through to the noughties) has produced perhaps more anxiety than the preceding era of economic abundance, the very nature of hegemonic ideals, which are impossible to attain for the majority of men, creates a situation whereupon masculinities are therefore always in crisis. This is not, then, a new crisis.

Furthermore, whilst I agree with much of the literature that posits that, fundamentally, dominant masculinities demand men be productive husbands/fathers and breadwinners, and that changing economic situations make the attainment of this much harder (e.g. Cha and Thébaud 2009; Gutmann 1996; McDowell 2000, 2003; Osella and Osella 2006; Osella, et al. 2004; Vale de Almeida 1996; Vigh 2006), I also suggest that, in the Japanese context at least, the role that women play in the construction of these dominant masculinities is crucial and should not be overlooked. This is often something that is acknowledged, but muted in much of the work on masculinities (e.g. Dasgupta 2003; Ishii-Kuntz 2003; McDowell 2003; Nisbett 2006). I have clearly shown throughout this thesis that gender in Japan is mutually constructed and constituted (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994). Women make (and enforce) ideologies of masculinity and manhood as much as men do, and vice versa. Men's work and lifestyle choices are therefore strongly mediated and affected by women's expectations (and men's own expectations of women's expectations!). Thus, the desire to marry (or not to marry) was a key part of freeters' abilities to pursue alternative paths. Of course, there are women in Japan who are keen to create their own alternative paths and to marry like-minded men and I am definitely not suggesting that everyone is doomed to fail. However, amongst the people I worked with in Hamamatsu, if marriage was desired then ultimately male freeters felt they needed to follow a more normative path (by at least gaining stable employment), and indeed, the women I knew clearly expected them to. It can be argued then, that women significantly affect ideas and practices of manhood (cf. Osella and Osella 2006).

Finally, I have argued that normative ideals of adulthood and cultural notions of selfhood are crucial to discussions of masculinity. In much of the literature (e.g.

Dasgupta 2004; Gutmann 1996; McDowell 2003; Osella and Osella 2006; Vale de Almeida 1996) adulthood and its links to masculinity are mentioned. However there is little analysis of what culturally constitutes adulthood and how these values and norms inform, merge with, and affect ideals of masculinity. Dominant Japanese conceptions of both maturity and selfhood (idealised notions that have normative effects) are intricately tied in with ideals of masculinity and what it means to be an adult man in the Japanese context, and this also needs to perhaps be taken into consideration more when exploring masculinities and manhood in other contexts.

Gender ideologies, then, remain highly influential when we examine the opportunities that Japanese men and women have in relation to work, lifestyles, and pursuit of aspirations, and these ideals are intricately tied in with gendered notions of maturity and selfhood that are also embedded in the structures of Japanese society (for example, in laws, education, etc.). Male freeters, in contrast to the discourses surrounding them, are neither unmotivated slackers nor unwitting victims of economic change. I have shown that attempting to create paths which deviate from the norm is a tricky endeavour; one that includes much pressure, angst, and potentially failure. However, despite the difficulties, they continued to try to create more meaningful lives for themselves with the cultural, social, and financial resources that they had. Perhaps, in the end, they are (or will be) the unwitting vanguard of a changing Japan.

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Appendix: Glossary

aikyō	grace, charm
akirame	resignation, abandonment
akirameru	to give up, resign oneself, abandon
amaeru	to ask to be indulged, to fawn
amayakasu	to indulge, to spoil
anime	animation
antei	stability
antei shinai	unstable
arubaito	side [part-time] job
bakufu	Shogunate, a system of military government
barabara	scattered, piecemeal, separate
bunmei kaika	civilisation and enlightenment
bushidō	the code of the samurai
chanto	properly, correctly, respectable
chanto hataraite iru	correctly working
chanto hatarakereba narenai	have to work properly/correctly
chanto seikatsu dekiru	can live properly
chō	a suffix indicating 'town'
daiji	a great thing, important issue
daijōbu	ok, alright
daimyō	feudal lord
dankai sedai	post-war baby boom generation
danseiteki na	manly, manlike, masculine
darashinai	slovenly, untidy
dokyō	courage, nerve
este	(short for) an esthetic
fuan	uneasiness, anxiety, fear
fukoku kyōhei	rich nation, strong military
furii arbeiter	free casual worker
futsū	normal, regular, ordinary

futsū na hito	normal/regular/ordinary person
futsū na seikatsu	normal/regular/ordinary life
gaman	endurance, patience, perseverance
gaman dekinai	cannot endure/be patient
ganbaru	do (try) one's best, persevere
ganbaranai	to not do (try) one's best
ganko	stubborn, obstinate
genjitsuteki na	realistic
giri	obligation
gokon	matchmaking party
haken	dispatch (temp) worker
haken kaisha	dispatch (temping) agency
hen na	strange, peculiar, odd, eccentric
hikeme	a sense of inferiority
honne	one's real intention, inner feelings
ichininmae	adult, grown up, respectable
ie	household
ijimerareta	was bullied
isshin ni	wholeheartedly, devotedly
issho kenmei hard	(do) as well as one can, try one's best, try
jiko sekinin	self-responsibility
jisatsu suru	to commit suicide
jiyū	freedom
junshain	junior employee
kakko ii	cool
karada wo kowashita	broken body
kawaii	cute
keiyaku shain	contract employee
kibishii	strict
kiraku na	easygoing
kitsui	severe, intense, hard
kiken na	dangerous

kitanai	dirty
komaru	have trouble, have difficulty
kurai	dark, gloomy, sombre
kurushii	painful, difficult, strenuous
makoto	sincerity
mamoru	defend, protect
marete iru	be blessed, lucky
mobo	modern boy
moga	modern girl
mura	village
musekinin	irresponsible
musen	wireless radio
muzukashii	difficult
nigatte	not good at
nigeru	to run away
nigiyaka	lively
nōgyō koko	agricultural high school
nomiya	bar
obasan	a (middle aged) lady
odayaka	calm, gentle, mild, peaceful
omikuji	written fortune/oracle
omoshiroi	interesting, fun
omote	surface, the face, front
on	duty
onegaishimasu	please
onesan	older sister
oshare	fashionable
otokoppoi no kanji	manly
otokorashisa	manly, masculine
pāto	part-time worker (refers to older women)
putaro	refers to lazy, ambitionless youth
renkyū	consecutive holidays

rerakusu dekinai	cannot relax
ryokan	(Japanese style) inn, hotel
ryōsai kenbo	good wife, wise mother ideology
ryūgaku	overseas study
seijitsu	sincerity, honesty
seishain	full-time permanent position
seishin	spirit, mind, soul
seishinteki ni tsuyoi	mentally/spiritually strong
seishinteki ni yowai	mentally/spiritually weak
seiyū	dubber, voice actor
seken	world, society, life – refers mainly to norms, values and expectations
sekinin	responsibility
sempai	senior, superior
sengyō shufu	full-time (professional) housewife
senmon gakkō	technical/vocational college
sensei	teacher
shachō boss	president, chairman, managing director,
shain	employee, staff
shakai hoken	social insurance
shakaijin	social person
shikata ga nai	cannot be helped, cannot help doing (sth)
shikkari seikatsu	literally; steady lifestyle
shizen	nature
shōganai	a shame, never mind, cannot be helped
soto	outside
sunao	obedient, docile, supple, flexible, tame
tabun daijōbu	maybe okay
takai	tall, expensive
tandai	junior college
tatamae	public behaviour
uchi	inside, in
ura	back, reverse

wagamama na	selfish, egoistic, wayward
wakon yōsai	Japanese spirit, Western learning
yaruki	drive, enthusiasm, motivation
yasashii	gentle, kind, mild
yokunai	not good
yūjun fudan na	indecisive