

What Toyota has to say about wussy-boys



How could you doubt the manliness of Japanese men?

Yes, I know, poor kid– Kamenashi Kazuya is Secret Garden’s posterchild for all that is confused and confusing in Japan.

For the past several months my interest in gender issues in Japanese pop culture have had me following this topic of *Soushokukei Danshi Nikushokukei Jyou*, translated: Herbivore guys, carnivore girls.

“*Soushokukei danshi*” describes a “trend” of ‘herbivore men’, or a group of young men (typically classified as being metrosexual) who are rejecting the typical guidelines of masculinity, and embracing an alternative style. It’s a type of *Otomen* syndrome, as it were, for anyone who has read the manga/seen the drama. *Otomen* follows the story of a young man who, on the outside appears to be a manly-man, but who secretly loves sewing,

crochet, stuffed animals, strawberry parfaits and baking beautiful cakes. *Soushokukei danshi* have been described as being more “family oriented”, and being uninterested in women and dating.



Next in line are the carnivorous girls, beautiful, intelligent, ambitious young women displaying all of the characteristics it seems the men *should* be displaying: charisma, confidence, focus, and guts. These go-getters have been described by the *soushokukei danshi* as being “scary” (I’m shaking in my boots already...).

The typical dynamic spelled out by this phenomenon is a type of gender-role-reversal, where the herbivorous guys seem unable to get up the manly gumption to go after girls, but prefer to wait for the carnivorous beauty (as long as he’s not scared of her, that is) to hunt him down and snatch him up in one fell swoop (sounds okay to me...).

The problem apparently lies in the recent decline of the birthrate in Japan, which isn’t the only thing that’s been declining in recent years. Machoness seems to have also hit an all-time low, leaving this new generation of young guys who are officially pegged as having little or no interest in dating or sex. This seems to be the distress of anthropologists and hopeful young single women web-wide, as the aforementioned are concerned about the society itself stumbling, and the latter for more obvious reasons. This could be a legitimate claim, except that in an article by NPR a young *soushokukei danshi* admitted that he didn’t talk to girls, but it wasn’t because he wasn’t interested. If a girl approached him first, he would be thrilled– he just isn’t willing (or able) to make the first move.

Now, treading carefully around this topic which could potentially get heated quite quickly, I would like to address the fact that the world-wide-media loves nothing better than to peg the Japanese as eternal wrong-doers. I realize the Japanese are concerned about this new trend as well, but I also think it's positively ridiculous that everyone thinks the problem lies *just* in Japanese society. I for one know without a doubt that this trend of *soushokukei danshi* and *nikushokukei jyou* is running rampant in the American youth culture as well. Take for example the emo sub-culture where boys openly admit they like Disney movies, cry at the end of them, and wear girl's jeans. I have close friends who personify the pairing almost perfectly—literally, the woman swooped in and snatched him up in one fell swoop while he was eating strawberry Pocky. Are they Japanese? No, unfortunately (just kidding, guys).

Why everyone was blowing all of this seemingly way out of proportion wasn't making sense to me until I got deeper into that particular article on the subject. It was with grim relish that I found the most descriptive cause for alarm this new generation poses. An "expert" of the generation commented that "...the impact of the herbivores on the economy is very big. They're such big news now because sales are down, especially of status products like cars and alcohol." [1]

Someone in the comments made several points with which I agreed to the fullest. They said that for one, it was almost impossible to believe that 60% of all Japanese males between the ages of 18-30 weren't interested in women; and two, Japanese [and many other nationalities'] men have *always* been afraid of high-powered, strong, "scary" girls, so it's no surprise many of them shy away from "carnivorous" women.





"I just....feel like he should approach me first..."

Personally, I believe that Toyota and Suntori have more to say about this as an "issue" than any girls out there. When I asked around, at least ten girls said they **didn't want macho men**, and several guys responded with revulsion at the sheer mention of the concept.

If all these girls are as beautiful and confident and carnivorous as they claim to be, then why are they all whining about guys being more of an opposite polarity? It looks like an a-typical feminist "get your cake and eat it too" situation to me— no disrespect to the fems. Do women really want to be powerful and, let's face the facts, masculine, *and* have guys still playing that role too? How can guys be expected to play by traditional gender-roles that have already been altered?

It's like women (the only ones who seem to have a problem with this, well, aside from Toyota), and people in general, make this huge push for feminism and then refuse to accept that there will be consequences. Women will change their gender-roles so that they can "wear the trousers" as it were, and yet they expect there to be no change on the male side of things? Do women who have high-powered careers and confident attitudes really sit back and wait for these men to come after them? I think not— even if they idealize that situation, in reality it would create a paradox of personalities.

Essentially, by becoming the "carnivore" of the dynamic, it seems only cosmically natural that men would also begin changing in order to create harmony and balance in any given situation. Let's take GACKT as an example. GACKT often expresses his personal taste in women- as far as we know, he prefers a docile, soft-spoken girl who "walks three steps behind". This is a term referring to the fact that traditionally a bride would walk

several steps behind her husband. Nowadays, GACKT is using it to refer to the business of equality and roles in a relationship. He talks in *GACKTIONARY* about the “sun and moon” polarities of any given relationship. That there is always one person who is giving (sun) and one person who is receiving (moon). Between two people the roles may change depending on the circumstances and situations, but without them, there’s almost no balance. As GACKT put it, if you have two ‘sun’ roles, they would always be arguing and butting heads. In a good relationship, people should naturally assume a role (and always do, regardless of whether they are conscious of it or not). Since I agree with pretty much everything GACKT says on the matter, I would like to apply it to the discussion at hand by pointing out that in this generation of *soushokukei danshi* and *nikushokukei jyou*, the women are suddenly rising up to become the ‘sun’ role, while expecting the men to also remain in that role. However, in response to the women assuming the ‘sun’ or ‘giving’ role, these men are naturally assuming a ‘moon’ or more ‘receptive’ role.

You can’t choose in which aspects a person, or a gender as a whole, is either giving or receptive. You have to be sensitive and aware of how the roles change in any given situation, and be prepared to work with them. If men no longer have the machoness gene to talk to women first, and women continue refusing to accept any responsibility whatsoever, is it any wonder that the birth rate is declining?





Now, I'd just like to finish up by making it clear that I'm not taking sides, or saying that the women are wrong and the men are right. Nor is any disrespect to any party intended in any way. I've just seen a lot of *women* writing about this subject lately, and few of them seemed able to not make the men come out as some kind of enemy. And I apparently had a few things to say about that. Oh, and I am not endorsing Toyota or Suntori in any way– not until they send me product to test first.

1- NPR: "In Japan, 'Herbivore' Boys Subvert Ideas Of Manhood, by Louisa Lim

2-GACKTIONARY #16, by GACKT

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