Karelia University of Applied Sciences
Bachelor of Culture and Arts

# Heteronormativity in Japanese Christmas Advertisements

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Abstract

Advertisements sell us products and services by portraying them as attractive as possible. For this purpose, human models are often employed, which transmits gendered imagery to our retinas. These advertisements commonly depict heterosexuality as a state of natural being, which can have an impact on an individual's perceived sense of self and sexuality. This thesis sets to find depictions of heteronormativity in Japanese Christmas advertisements.

Japan is a conservative country, where leadership positions are still predominantly filled by men. Christmas is a celebrated event, but it is perceived as foreign in nature, and as such, it is not a national holiday. Those who celebrate, spend Christmas with their lovers or friends. Christmas parties with fried chicken and strawberry Christmas cakes are popular. Using the texts of noteworthy researchers in the subject matter, Japanese Christmas advertisements are analyzed for their heteronormative depictions. Results suggest many products and brands are advertised with a naturalized heterosexual mindset.

bell hooks writes about the issues of patriarchal culture, where she describes men who want change. Patriarchal culture is harmful to everyone under its influence, especially men, whom it falsely promises ultimate power over the weak. Only few enjoy the benefits, and they too must conform to the rules of the patriarchy. With a long history of patriarchal leadership, Japan stands at a central position in the discussion.

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Tekijä
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Nimeke
Heteronormatiivisuus japanilaisissa joulumainoksissa

Tiivistelmä

Mainokset myyvät meille tuotteita ja palveluita esittämällä ne mahdollisimman houkuttelevina. Tähän tarkoitukseen käytetään toistuvasti ihmismalleja, jotka välittävät sukupuoliutuneita kuvia verkkokalvoillemme. Nämä mainokset esittävät heteroseksuaalisuutta usein luonnollisena olemisen tilana, joka voi vaikuttaa katsojan käsityksiin itsestään ja seksuaalisuudestaan. Tässä opinnäytetyössä tutkitaan heteronormatiivisuuden esityksiä japanilaisissa joulumainoksissa.

Japani on konservatiivinen maa, jossa vallan istuimet täytetään yhä miehillä. Joulua juhlitaan, vaikka se nähdäänkin ulkomaalaisena juhlana, jota ei tunnisteta kansallisena vapaapäivänä. He, jotka pystyvät, viettävät joulua ystävien tai rakkaidensa kesken. Joulukekkerit, joissa syödään mansikkajoulukakkua ja rasvassa paistettua kanaa, ovat suosittuja. Työssä käytetään aihepiirin kannalta keskeisten tutkijoiden tekstejä japanilaisten joulumainoksien analysointiin. Tulokset näyttävät monien tuotteiden sekä brändien mainostuksen pohjautuvan luonnollistettuun heteroseksuaaliseen ajatteluun.

bell hooks kirjoittaa patriarkaalisen kulttuurin ongelmista, ja miehet tahtovat jo muuttua. Patriarkaalinen kulttuuri on vahingollinen kaikille sen vaikutuksen alla oleville, etenkin miehille, joille se antaa valheellisia lupauksia ylimmästä vallasta heikommista. Harva nauttii sen tuomista eduista, ja hekin joutuvat mukautumaan patriarkaatin sääntöihin. Pitkän historian patriarkaalisessa johtamisessa omaavana maana Japani seisoo keskeisellä paikalla keskustelussa.

Kieli
englanti

Sivuja 77
Liitteet 1
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Asiasanat
joulu, mainokset, japani, sukupuoli, patriarkaatti

## Contents

# 1 Gendered advertising

The main purpose of advertising has been to sell products and services to potential customers, at least from the point of view of the advertiser. However, they are also offering us a set of body images (visual advertising), ideals, and values. It is up to the viewer to interpret their meanings and decide whether to accept or reject them. Advertising can thus influence the identity and behaviour of the individual. (Rossi 2003, 11.)

Advertisements with human characters always depict gendered advertising, and they often advertise heterosexuality as well. These advertisements tend to depict heterosexuality as a natural and desirable state, to which the viewer is expected to relate to by default. However, interpreting the gender array is never straightforward, even if an advertisement depicts a heterosexual couple. (Rossi 2003, 11.)

According to feminist philosopher Judith Butler (1990, 136), lauded as one of the initializers of modern gender discourse, gender does not have a point of origin, nor does a gendered way of being express anything about the core gender identity of a subject. The same applies for heterosexuality: it does not represent a true definitive way of natural sexuality, but only one form of sexuality that is reproduced, maintained, and normalized through massive cultural investments. (Rossi 2003, 12-13.)

This thesis sets to find out how heteronormativity is portrayed in Japanese society, and more specifically, how Japanese Christmas advertisements maintain heteronormative structures within the society by conducting a content analysis on a small set of advertisements. Additionally, the thesis hopes to shed some light on the differences of Christmas celebrations in the Japanese and Finnish cultures. Since the author has spent a year living in Japan as part of their exchange studies prior to the thesis writing process, they share their personal account of celebrating the New Year in a traditional setting in Japan. Japanese New Year traditions have some similarities to Western Christmas traditions and thus offer interesting insights and points of comparison (Appendix 1).

The aim is to compile existing information, and to provide more information about gendered advertising in Japan and the Western societies, so that different actors in Finland and Japan can further develop and/or update their approach to advertising. It should, however, provide useful data to other parties in different countries as well.

Finally, as a conservative country with a longstanding history of patriarchal culture, Japan continues to cultivate new generations of patriarchal men and women. bell hooks, a social critic and a feminist theorist, has written about the harmful symptoms that patriarchal culture produces and maintains. Men especially fall victim to its false claims of omnipotent power, which is ultimately only reserved for the select few (hooks 2020, 76-77). Japan stands at an interesting position in the conversation, and as a result, the country will be viewed through the lens of the patriarchal frame of reference.

# 2 Heteronormative gender roles in Western cultures

## 2.1 Brief history of heteronormative gender roles

### 2.1.1 Overview

Michel Foucault, a French historian and philosopher, has written about sexuality and how it has been constantly redefined in history. Foucault claims sexuality is a network of values that is cultivated by the perspectives of prevalent information and power, which also has influence on what is deemed pleasurable (Foucault 1998, 78; Nikunen 1996, 35). According to the repressive hypothesis, sexuality was repressed in Western societies from the 1600s to the mid-1900s, which is what Foucault criticizes in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*: sexuality was by no means repressed, even though it was regulated locally. (Foucault 1998, 41-43.)

Until the end of the 1700s, three main codes controlled sexuality: the canon law, the Christian law, and the civil law. They all focused on marriage and established acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. Various laws and recommendations monitored the sexuality of married couples, and thus, marriage was the most regulated entity. Other forms of sexuality were far more ambiguous, but homosexuality and bestiality, among others, were punished by the courts. Crimes against nature were especially egregious, and even nature itself was regulated. For example, hermaphrodites – intersex individuals – were seen as criminals because their very existence broke sex separation laws. Their offspring were treated similarly. (Foucault 1998, 33.)

With time, sexual life within the framework of marriage became a norm, and the focus was averted to groups that were thought to practice the other types of sexualities: children, criminals, mentally ill and homosexuals. Daydreams, obsessions, manias and outrages became a point of scrutiny. As far as the law was concerned, criminal acts were still being punished, yet despite that, understanding these people became a keen interest. (Foucault 1998, 34-35.) This led to the reclassifying of individuals: whereas in the canon and the civil law, sodomy was classified as one of forbidden acts, by the 1800s, homosexuality became a person with a past, someone who had a personality, childhood, and a way of life. Everything about this “new” person was connected to their gender and sexuality because these were the root of all their behaviour, always active in the background. “A secret that reveals itself over and over again”, as Foucault puts it. Through this reclassification, homosexuality became a type – a recognized new form of sexuality. (Foucault 1998, 37.)

Confession has been used as a common method in producing truthful gender discourse in Western societies. For a long time, it was used strictly in penance rituals, but after Protestantism, counter-reformation, the 1700s educational science, and the medical science of the 1800s, it has since lost its ritualistic and exclusionary rites. Methods of confession, and the compulsion connected to it, have spread far and wide, creating archives of sexual pleasure. For a time, these archives were being erased as more was built, and some information was never archived due to the practise of Christian absolution, but when medical science, psychiatry, and educational

science started reinforcing them, they became more permanent. Western societies have since kept an endless record of human pleasure. (Foucault 1998, 50-51.)

Historically, Western societies have practised what is called *scientia sexualis* – a confession-based method of understanding the truth about sexuality. In India, China, Japan, Rome, and the societies of Arab Muslims, however, another method was used: *ars erotica*. Instead of confessing the sexuality of oneself to a person of higher authority, *ars erotica* focuses on the pleasure itself – what is allowed, forbidden or necessary becomes irrelevant. Pleasure is attempted to be felt as pleasure, its intensity measured, and finally, what effects and permanence it has on the mind and body. Gathered knowledge is then reflected to the sexual act, aiming to develop it from the inside and reinforce its power. (Foucault 1998, 46-47.)

In the method of *ars erotica*, attained sexual knowledge becomes a secret that must be dealt with utmost delicacy. If the knowledge spreads too far, it will lose its virtue and effectiveness. Thus, a relationship with a master who knows the secret becomes essential. (Foucault 1998, 46.)

### 2.1.2 British women of honour

In the 1800s England, the prevalent sexual norm for women was to suppress their sexuality, which was especially sought after by the middle-class. Lynda Nead, who has researched the development of sexuality in Victorian era Britain through visual arts, says the ideal of femininity played a great role in maintaining house, moral, and social order, although there was no true consensus. Regardless, the prevalent discourse attempted to create confrontation between the honour and sexuality of a respectable woman. (Nikunen 1996, 35-36.) William Acton, a doctor responsible for sexual diseases in 1865, described a woman as follows:

> An ideal English wife and mother, gentle and considerate, is so pure hearted that she does not pay attention to sensual pleasures, nevertheless selflessly attached to the husband she loves that she gives up on her dreams for him. (Nikunen 1996, 36.)

Chastity was linked to marriage and family, and it was thought of as the cradle for moral responsibilities. About the only thing middle-class women were allowed to do outside the house was charity work, which combined with concrete relief work, gave other women an ideal to strive for as well. In medical science discourse it was often emphasized that devotion for the home and the maintenance of chastity was healthy. Hysteria was deemed a disease caused by the womb, which could be avoided by getting married and having children while still young. (Nikunen 1996, 36.)

Women were thought to refrain from sex not because it was natural, but because they were afraid of it. The ability to control their own pregnancies was seen as a threat, because it might release their desires. Feminists at the time opposed these views, since it allowed men to do as they wished, and because they were not being condemned for immorality as easily as women. In their battle against the double standards of men, feminists adopted the concept of an “honourable woman” – the idea of women being morally superior to men – which normalized the desirability of the chastity of women. (Nikunen 1996, 37.)

Men and women were seen as opposites of each other in the 1800s, and the differences were labelled. The masculinity of men and the femininity of women were highlighted, although women were expected to live for their man. The forming of the identity of a middle-class woman was affected by the segregation of public and private spaces; the public domain belonged to men, while the home belonged to women. This was apparent by how the position of women was depicted in cultural products, but also how they produced culture themselves. Their ability to take part in cultural productions was limited, and most women resigned to the role of teachers and hobbyists. While men were outside – painting pictures of streets and coffee shops – the few women who painted, depicted domestic life in their paintings. Flower arrangements were popular among women, while the women depicted in the works of men belonged to minority classes, such as prostitutes. (Nikunen 1996, 38.)

The model of a “honourable woman” was broadcasted through various educational and cultural imagery to all social classes. A sophisticated lady was weak and vulnerable, and needed constant protection. This image of a woman clashed with the physicality of those who belonged to the working class. These women were not seen as

healthy or strong, but dirty, and a source of disease. As free time and forms of entertainment increased, only men got to partake because of the genderdization of public and private spaces. If women were seen alone in public areas, they were understood to lack a private domain, a home, a family, or in other words, they lacked honour and could easily be considered prostitutes. In the case of prostitutes, honourability was maintained by differentiating from them, as they were thought to be dangerous to the honourability of a woman and commonly understood morals. In the name of honour, any signs of sexuality had to be masked or made invisible, as honourability was coded into the style and clothing of women. Therefore, women became sexual icons through restriction, having to hide their natural bodies. (Nikunen 1996, 39-40.)

### 2.1.3 Agrarian Finland and prostitution

Finland was a country of agrarian culture until the 1950s, when mass migration to cities from the countryside had begun. People migrated within Finland, but also abroad to countries like Sweden, and by 1970, over half of Finland's population lived within cities. (Haasio & Mattila 2022, 19.)

Sex and sexuality during agrarian Finland were seen in both positive and negative light. This was affected by different attitudes within different classes of society, and differing morals existed in parallel. In traditional countryside culture, positivity was often linked to general worshipping of fertility – not just in abundant harvest or livestock, but also in the continuity of humanity, where sex played an organic part. *Ukon vakka* and *Ukon malja* – a feast where both men and women, old and young, drunk copious amounts of beer and took part in sexual activities – were celebrated until the end of the 1600s. Negative views were influenced greatly by Christianity and government intervention, although sexuality was considered frightening in old agrarian culture as well. Under Christian beliefs sex was only allowed in marriage, and its influence eventually led to the banning of *Ukon vakka* feasts under the rule of King Gustav Vasa. (Haasio & Mattila 2022, 19-21.)

In traditional agrarian culture the sexuality of a woman was considered a dangerous phenomenon. A lot of *väki* (Eng. might) was connected to it, a sort of supernatural power in Finnish ancient belief. *Vitun väki* (Eng. the might of the cunt) was an other-worldly power that crosses between it and our world through the body of a woman and her genitals. A woman could attain the respect of a man with it, and it was both respected and feared. Through their sexuality, women were understood to wield immense power, and as such, the Finnish agrarian culture has been described as much more “vagina-centric” than other western European cultures. (Haasio & Mattila 2022, 21-22.)

Different kinds of sexual customs cultivated in cities. They received stimulus from other countries, and they represented government rule much more accurately compared to the older fashioned countryside. Government policy was to hold an “absolute sexual morality”, which required sexual continence from both men and women before marriage. However, according to “relative sexual morality”, which was another custom in cities, it was “natural” for men to have sex before and even outside marriage. Premarital sex and affaires while married were allowed for men under certain conditions, but not for women. This argument over double standards started in the 1800s and continued into the 1900s within cities, eventually spreading to the countryside as well by proxy of priests and educated people like teachers. (Haasio & Mattila 2022, 23.)

Prostitution was a decent source of income for poor women living in the cities in the first half of the 1800s. Due to a lack of bordels at the time, sex was first sold in alleys and pubs, and the prostitutes were likely supporting their families with the extra income. Their customers typically consisted of soldiers, journeymen, and miscellaneous youth. In the latter half of the 1800s, many people migrated to cities in Finland while searching for work, and among them were numerous young women, who were typically factory workers or female servants. These women could have potentially practised prostitution. (Haasio & Mattila 2022,168-169.)

Although prostitution was illegal based on then prevalent law, the greatest concern of the authorities was the health hazard it posed. Syphilis and gonorrhoea often spread through paid sex. In the city of Turku, syphilis patients amounted to around 2% of the

total population of the city in the early 1820s. The authorities closely observed sex work, not because it was considered immoral, but because they saw it as a threat to public health. This is suggested by the fact that in 1876, *Tarkastusvirasto* (Eng. inspection agency) was established. Its purpose was to periodically check on the health of sex selling women to look out for sex diseases. Additionally, *Tarkastusnaiset* – checked women – were authorised to practise prostitution, which created a new system of licensed prostitution. In peak years, every 100th woman of Helsinki residence was recorded as checked. The system was abolished in 1907, due to widespread opposing discourse and protest in prior decades leading up to its abolishment. (Haasio & Mattila 2022, 170-171.)

Based on research conducted by Antti Häkkinen, especially women were reporting on prostitutes to the authorities towards the end of the 1800s in Helsinki. Common complainers were neighbours and wives of men who used their services. The publicly visible sexuality of women was viewed as problematic, but it was considered more acceptable in working class residential areas than higher class. (Häkkinen 1995, 159-161.)

### 2.1.4 Non-binary gender theory

Entering the 1900s, more and more gender and sex related research was taking place, and since around the 1950s, we have begun cultivating a more modern approach to them. In the book *Gender trouble* (1990), Judith Butler takes the works of Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, Monique Wittig, among others, scrutinizes them, builds on their arguments, criticizes them, and proceeds to provide their own thesis on the subject.

Within the sphere of French feminism and poststructuralist theory, complicated power systems dictated the formation of sexual identity, or so it was thought. To Irigaray, there was only one sex, the masculine, which utilises the “Other” in the production of its meaning, the “Other” signifying a woman; to Foucault, whether the sex was masculine or feminine, it was the end product of a spread out, regulated economy; to Wittig, sex was under forcefully perpetrated heterosexuality, which is always

portrayed feminine due to the masculine having a universally accepted status, not needing additional labels. (Butler 1990, 19.) Butler states that a common trait with these drastically different depictions is the understanding that sex is seen as a substance within hegemonic language, or put in another way, a self-identifying being that “[...] through a performative twist of language and/or discourse [...] conceals the fact that “being” a sex or a gender is fundamentally impossible” (Butler 1990, 19-20).

Borrowing from and building upon the arguments of Mary Douglas in *Purity and Danger* (1966), Butler notes that Douglas provides a starting point to understanding how social taboos affect the formation and sustain the boundaries of the body: they place identifiers on the skin, acting as its boundary, further combining together with “anticipated transgressions”, making the body socially limited (Butler 1990, 131). After troubling the homophobic media coverage of AIDS, and how it correlates to the sexual activities of the homosexuals, Butler asserts that “the body is itself a consequence of taboos that render that body discreet by virtue of its stable boundaries” (Butler 1990, 132-133).

Thus, “words, acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance”, which is then allocated on the boundary of the body. Such acts are performative, producing an illusion of the interior gender core. Butler then suggests that drag can offer a stage for transgressive gender expression. It shakes up and turns the entire gender arrangement on its head and makes fun of both the expressive gender model and an assumed “original” gender identity by playing with the body and gender of the performer. Drag aims to imitate a hypothetical “original” gender that destabilizes “natural” identity and desire. (Butler 1990, 136-137, 139.)

For Butler, gender is not a noun, nor is it a collection of miscellaneous attributes. Gender is performative, and no gender identity can pre-exist because the identity itself is formed through those expressions. (Butler 1990, 23-25, 96-98, 139-141.) It is a social construct that hides its point of origin, a tacit multilateral will to perform, create, and maintain different genders as cultural illusions. It is repetitively produced, changing and evolving over time, which is why it should not be built stable. Butler encourages people to trouble their understanding of gender. (Butler 1990, 33-34, 140-141.)

Crucially, a distinction between performance and expression needs to be made: if bodily shows or acts are performative, those acts cannot be compared against a pre-existing identity, because one does not exist. Gender and sexuality can be as complicated and diverse as human beings are, as Butler cleverly puts it: “genders can be neither true nor false, neither real nor apparent, neither original nor derived. As credible bearers of those attributes, however, genders can also be rendered thoroughly and radically *incredible*.” (Butler 1990, 140-141.)

### 2.1.5 Gender displays and frame analysis

Erving Goffman, a well-known and respected sociologist, analyses how gender is portrayed in advertising and contemplates the ways human beings interpret social situations in his work *Gender Advertisements* (1979). He describes social situations as settings that “affirm social arrangements and announce ultimate doctrine”, claiming every minor detail about our behaviour reveals how we feel about ourselves, which add up to an arrangement, a scene of cultural values. These scenes, he claims, can be viewed as displays. (Goffman 1979, 1.)

In the animal world displays are used to showcase intent and the situation the animal is in, Goffman claims, allowing for an efficient response from those who bear witness to this display. In a similar fashion, the behaviour of a person and the way they look transmits a depiction of themselves to other people around them, creating a display that set the foundations for future interactions between the persons involved in the display and those who perceive it. However, Goffman also points out that humans use displays in a much more complicated manner than animals, adding that “displays in humans are a symptom, not a portrait”, meaning that expression is not instinctive, but learned and patterned through social interactions: (Goffman 1979 4-5; Gornick 1979, vii.)

> [...] [I]ndividuals do not merely learn how and when to express themselves, for in learning this they are learning to be objects that have a character, that express this character and for whom this characterological expressing is only natural. We are socialized to confirm our own hypotheses about our nature. (Goffman 1979, 7.)

As such, the concepts of both male and female boil down to the ability to create and read portrayals of masculinity and femininity, and the maintained willingness of an individual to do so. An individual has these abilities due to their existence as a human being, not because they are male or female, which Goffman further emphasizes by arguing that “one might just as well say there is no gender identity”, since there is “only a schedule for portraying gender”. (Goffman 1979, 8.)

This is the whole premise *Gender Advertisements* is structured around: advertisements do not necessarily represent how men or women behave, but rather how *we* think men and women are supposed to behave. These depictions, then, try to convince us that this is how they behave or should want to behave. Like a stage from a play, men and women are placed in the advertisements to co-operate in a play we call our social lives, to sell us an idea of what it is to be a man or a woman. Vivian Gornick, the writer of the introduction text in *Gender Advertisements*, writes that this framing accomplishes a goal of continued “essential order” set by the society, a status-quo which does not provoke, leaving the life experiences of those who participate unacknowledged. (Gornick 1979, vii.)

While viewing his chosen advertisements, Goffman recommends imagining the sexes reversed in the mind of oneself and then thinking about the image it results in. This is to bring awareness to existing stereotypes and to “generate [one’s] own gloss and obtain a cue to the possible merit of [his]”. (Goffman 1979, 25.) What he is suggesting here is that we should attempt framing scenarios in a way that differs from initial interpretations. Subjects of a display are, after all, often ranked based on their social status, which is reflected in advertisements: subjects of higher authority tend to be taller in height, or be positioned close to the center, for example. Framing and frame analysis are what Erving Goffman extensively theorised and used through-out his career, and although the modern landscape has changed from what it was, his work continues to be applied to social phenomena to this day. (Goffman 1979, 3; Persson 2019, vii-viii, 145-148.) This is because these concepts cut through societies and cultures and are prevalent in every aspect of our lives, hence their usefulness in all scientific research.

Goffman provides an excellent platform to analyse and frame advertisements, and his categories outlined in *Gender Advertisements* will be used later in the analyses of Japanese Christmas advertisements. Additionally, writings of Judith Butler about drag and the performativity of gender, along with the assertations of Michel Foucault on the different approaches to sexuality in Western and Asian cultures, are valuable resources that can be used for constructing perspectives to gender and sexuality that diverge from the norm. As a final note, it should be mentioned that despite advertisements not representing real life gender behaviour in any way, they are frequently viewed as if they do (Goffman 1979, 25). With this in mind, we can better frame advertisements as something that can have great influence on the way of being and behaviour of a person, especially those who are young. Perhaps it also says something about the power hierarchy of our societies.

## 2.2 Gender equality, ethnicity, and intersectionality

It is commonly thought that masculinity and manhood are the same thing – and the same can be said for femininity and womanhood – despite numerous examples of both women and men portraying masculinity and femininity interchangeably (Salenius 2023, 19). Masculinity and femininity are historically changing cultural contracts that do not have direct bodily foundations. According to Leena-Maija Rossi, complaints about masculine women and feminine men repeat in our day-to-day discourse. A woman adopting masculine traits can be seen as loss of femininity, while fear of women becoming potentially violent is also present. Because of this, some people seem to think that equality has “gone too far”, and that women becoming equal with men means “becoming man-like”. (Rossi 2003, 59-60, 228-229.)

In the past decades, media has portrayed and targeted homosexual and transgendered individuals as comical, creating stereotypes that would evidently label their sexual identity as nothing but laughing material for heterosexual audiences. The way media portrays people belonging to sexual minorities is important in building acceptance and diminishing discrimination. In recent years, it has been somewhat successful: exposure to sexual minorities through media, such as tv-shows or advertising, have helped cultivate more positive attitudes, though it should be mentioned that

it is more important *how* they are represented instead of *who*, as that would better portray their status as societal actors instead of emphasizing their minority position. (Fried & Opree 2023; Rossi 2003, 199.)

Work is still necessary. A multinational marketing research group, Ipsos, conducted a survey about gender equality in 2023. Results showed that 54 % of global respondents believe that when it comes to giving women equal rights to men, enough has been done in their country – an increase since 2019. Likewise, 54 % believed men are expected to do too much for equality, and 48 % believed that promoting the rights of women have gone so far that men are now being discriminated upon. 68 % of respondents believe inequality between men and women exists, but it would appear there are differing views on whether it is targeted towards men or women. (Ipsos 2023.)

In Finland, the Finnish job market is segregated into the jobs of women and men. According to Statistics Finland (2022) women usually work at national workplaces such as health and social services and education, while men work in private companies in fields like construction, transport, and storage, where salaries are typically higher. This raises questions about the realization of income equality in Finland.

Immigration increased in Finland massively in the 1990s, which led to a spike in multiculturalism. The discourse surrounding immigration has since circulated in Finnish media, but especially in the early years, immigrants themselves were represented only rarely, and when they were, it almost never happened on their terms. (Rossi 2003, 180-181.) This is still reality to some extent. As an example, the mass media reporting in relation to Russia directing asylum seekers to the eastern border of Finland seems to have caught Finnish people off guard, as reporters point their cameras towards incoming immigrants – mostly black people, whose faces are not shown – entering the country from a distance, and commenters in news articles demanding the immediate closure of the border (Sormunen & Orjala 2023; Hannus 2023; Korpela, Schönberg, Orjala, Mykkänen, STT 2023).

In the current decade, the mental image of a Finnish person is still considered to be a white family-oriented heterosexual individual, even though the society has diversified greatly compared to the past: it was still normal to make fun of Sami or homosexual people in the early 2000s. White people still receive and have more privileges than their non-white counterparts: black Finnish people are assumed to speak English and they can get attached with harmful and life-complicating stereotypes. However, social development has also taken place: joking about people who are already in a minority position is considered questionable, which has led to the adoption of the rule of “punching up” in comedy; only making fun of those with more power and privilege, not less. Like the skin colour of a person, their name, native language, ethnic background, religion, social class, even sex and gender, can become subjects of discrimination. (Frondelius 2023, 131-132.)

Intersectionality means the convergence and accumulation of different attributes of discrimination, and this has significant impact on the life experience of a person (Biana 2020). For example, a person can face prejudice simply due to their existence as a black person, but if they are additionally handicapped, poor, and queer, their standing in society is markedly worse. Intersectional feminism attempts to see and recognise these attributes and the complexity of discrimination. It gives a voice to those who are oppressed, and attempts to understand other perspectives of discrimination, not just those experienced by white women. (Frondelius 2023, 32.)

## 2.3 Contemporary issues in patriarchal culture

The patriarchy has persisted through many phases of history and surprisingly little has changed in its operation within our societies. Feminist theorist bell hooks writes in *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love* (In Finnish: *Mies tahtoo muuttua: miehet, maskuliinisuus, ja rakkaus* (2020)) that patriarchal culture hurts everyone who partake in it – even men, to whom it promises falsehoods of power and influence over the weak, but instead provides them with emotional distress and behaviour models that hurt themselves and others, ultimately leading to marginalisation and depression.

In the early years of radical feminism, a lot of anger and hatred was aimed against men due to their oppressive attitudes and behaviour towards women. Many felt justified in letting their rage loose: only few talked about the issues of men and how men could be loved in a patriarchal culture, or how that love could be expressed without fear of oppression and abuse. (hooks 2020, 12.)

Feminist thinkers like hooks, who wanted to involve men in the discussion, were labelled as identifying with them, ones who "could not be trusted" because they sympathised with men. However, as the movement progressed, it became apparent that nothing would change unless men were also partaking in the opposition of male dominance, though despite this, many women were still uninterested in expressing the need to write or talk about men. hooks believes this lack of interest to be a cause of how women are socialised in a patriarchal culture to remain silent about men and their problems. She argues that even the act of labelling all men as oppressors and all women as victims by the radical feminist movement bounced attention away from the reality of the situation of men and displayed a wider lack of awareness on their issues. (hooks 2020, 13.)

To hooks, the patriarchy is "the biggest life-threatening societal disease that attacks the body and spirit of a man", and yet most men do not use the term *patriarchy* in their daily lives: "They do not think about how it was formed, how it is maintained, and many likely do not even know how it is spelled or pronounced correctly." Men who have heard the term, usually connect it to the liberation of women and feminism, thus ignoring its relevance to them. (hooks 2020, 31.) As she writes:

> Nothing takes more credibility away from an old antifeminist projection about men being omnipotent than their fundamental unawareness of one of the most signifying sides of a political system that shapes and develops a man's identity and concept of self from birth to death (hooks 2020, 31).

The patriarchy is a socio-political system that emphasises men's "inherent" right to rule, viewing them above those that are considered weak, like women or other men, and are then allowed to maintain their dominance through various mechanisms of psychological abuse and violence (hooks 2020, 32). To indoctrinate young boys to the rules of the patriarchy, they are forced to feel pain and to repress their emotions.

Even if a boy is raised in an antipatriarchal household, they cannot be kept safe from the grasp of the patriarchy due to its wide reach within our societies. (hooks 2020, 35.) The patriarchy demands men to become emotionally crippled, and to remain that way indefinitely. It denies them full access to their free will, thus making it difficult for them to rebel against it, or to be disloyal to a patriarchal parent, be it man or woman. (hooks 2020, 39.)

Contemporary women-led households have led many to believe that children raised in such environments cannot become patriarchal because there is no man. To them, men are the sole teachers of patriarchal thinking. However, hooks claims many of these households are even more passionate about teaching such values. Due to a lack of real-life experience, women of these households are much more likely to idealise patriarchal men and to assume the role of one than those who live with patriarchal men every day. hooks suggests that we should underline the role that women play in the spreading and maintaining of a patriarchal culture, so that it can be better identified as a system that both men and women are supporting. Dismantling of such a culture is work that both men and women must do in co-operation. (hooks 2020, 36-37.)

hooks argues that although most American boys do not partake in violent crimes that lead to murder, the truth is that they are nonetheless raised to do so, either by their parents or the society at large, even if they manage to hide their inner murderer well and maintain an image of a well-meaning patriarch. A common narrative from dating teenage girls describes a seemingly “nice guy” who “gets into fits of rage”. Patriarchal thinking is encouraging young boys to adopt rage as an easy path to manhood, due to the patriarchy denying them any other feelings. (hooks 2020, 25, 52-53.)

The radical feminist critique of the patriarchy has been silenced within our societies. It has become a subculture discourse that only the educated elite can have access to, and even there, hooks argues that the term “patriarchy” has been rendered outdated. (hooks 2020, 40.) Until the damage caused by the patriarchy can be collectively confessed – and the system itself openly named and challenged – the issues of men cannot be dealt with. The patriarchal system has denied men access to full emotional well-being, even for those who most benefit from its existence (hooks

2020, 76-77). To deal with the crisis in men, the harmfulness of the system needs to be recognised and admitted. (hooks 2020, 41-42.)

While the harmful and violent behaviour of men is to be condemned, there needs to be a distinction between masculinity and patriarchal masculinity. Patriarchal masculinity assumes the sole difference of a man to be their right to rule and oppress women, or any other group they see weaker to them. hooks suggests feminist masculinity as a replacement, which would redefine manhood as a state of being rather than active performing. Some critics of masculinity have deemed it necessary to "end manliness" entirely, but such a stance only suggests there is something inherently wrong with masculinity or being a man. (hooks 2020, 112-113.) As hooks affirms:

> There is a life improving, life maintaining place for masculinity in a culture that is not based on dominance [...] and those of us who have bound ourselves to ending the patriarchy can touch the true hearts of men where they live, not by demanding they give up their masculinity, but by asking them to allow the meaning of masculinity to change (hooks 2020, 113).

In addition to violence, patriarchal masculinity requires men to prove their "true manliness" by idealising loneliness and lack of connections. Feminist masculinity, on the other hand, encourages them to be emotional and build connections, eventually forming a community. hooks claims that the assumption of love and authority being able to coexist is one of the biggest lies told by the patriarchy. Most men and women still believe in the lie, but in reality, love changes the power relationship. When men work on their identities outside the patriarchal array, they can form emotional awareness that is required to love themselves and others. When they adopt feminist thinking and recognise the benefits of growth and mutual development, their emotional well-being increases. (hooks 2020, 118-120.)

hooks calls for change: the idea of family needs to be revamped so that boys can learn to connect and be intimate with other people. Love should be the core value of family because it teaches us to love others and form communities. (hooks 2020, 161.) Many men are suffering and want to change. Naming the ways we become wounded is often easier than coming up with a healing habit and maintaining it, which explains why many women stick by men who continue on a destructive path. We still do not live in a world which would encourage us to stick by men who want to

change. Anyone and everyone can show love and support, create guides, landmarks, and new paths into the future. A culture of recovery is forming, but men need to embrace it, and those in their lives need not shun them, but offer support and encouragement. (hooks 2020, 172-173.)

## 2.4 Masculinity and femininity in advertising

Before the 1980s, male femininity was a taboo; men were supposed to be well groomed, dressed and not “too interested” in their appearance. Towards the end of the 1980s, attention to appearance became a focus for both genders, and the relationship to the fatherhood of men and their family changed drastically. However, male femininity has been both ridiculed and viewed as submissive, its representation in various media having often had comedic and condemning tones, whilst being connected to homosexuality. Furthermore, men who “let go of power”, or make themselves vulnerable to ridicule, are no men at all in a patriarchy – they are a disgrace for undermining its sole dominance. (hooks 2020, 27; Rossi 2003, 88-89, 177-179; Hänninen 1996, 107-108.)

Femininity has been traditionally linked to artificiality, mimicry, masking, decorativeness, passivity, reliability and weakness, whilst masculinity is supposed to portray activeness, physicality, competency, control and leadership, to name a few examples (hooks 2020, 32-34; Rossi 2003, 36, 178). While much has changed since the 1800s, the concept of beauty is still largely tied with female femininity and “naturalism”. Long slender legs are some of the most sexually coded body parts of women, along with long dark hair, curvy body, and of course, breasts. Women are expected to stay slim, but they are additionally expected to have large and solid breasts; cleavage is believed to be one of the most efficient sales tactics. (Rossi 2003, 36-39.) Although the bodies and images of women have commonly been thought of as naturally beautiful, this is historically a relatively new phenomenon. Beauty norms used to be connected to men in antiquity, as well as from 1500 to the early 1800s, where they represented both masculine and feminine characteristics. (Rossi 2003, 34.)

Clothes are also very heavily gendered, and we can often tell just by looking at them if they are masculine or feminine. In the past, a man wearing a skirt – an icon of a woman – would have been unacceptable, but even today, such an appearance for a man would be unusual, despite views becoming more acceptive of gender minorities and queer imagery (Fried & Opree 2023). Gendered clothing rites can be traced back to maternity wards, where girls and boys are dressed in pink and blue baby frocks respectively. (Hänninen 1996, 96-98.)

Heterosexuality as a concept is limiting perspectives on gender and sexuality, which is reproduced through advertisements. Portrayal of only two genders has led to what Judith Butler has coined as the “heterosexual matrix”, where heterosexuality is considered “natural” (Butler 1990, 5,151). Even children get represented as heterosexual, revealing how adults perceive gender relations and reflect these views through their bodies and being. Studies show that young girls are practising their evolving sexuality in the framework of hegemonic heterosexual discourse, and that advertisements and magazines targeted at teen-age girls push heteronormative values and presume viewers are heterosexual. Feminist researchers have criticized the stereotypical way the genders of young girls and women have been represented in advertisements. (Srivastava, Wilska & Sjöberg 2022.)

As Srivastava et al. (2022) state in their study of portraying girls in fast fashion advertisements, advertisements play an essential role in developing and constructing ideas of gendered being. Therefore, gender-stereotypical representation of the stereotypes within societies can be a limiting factor on the life of an individual. Portraying girls as caring might promote and maintain a stereotypical view of women being natural carers, which could lead some to follow a career path suggested by that sort of world view uncritically. Such visual constructs could also be swapped to that of construction work or coding, which would potentially alleviate gender over-representation in said professions. In the same vein, boys could also be depicted as holding a child, showing it is not a task only women can handle. The researchers conclude that marketing firms need to scrutinize the advertisements they create, especially if they are committed to gender equality.

# 3 Japanese history overview

## 3.1 Tokugawa Shogunate and the Meiji Restoration

Tokugawa Ieyasu was one of the strongest and last Shogun during the civil wars of Japan in the 1400s-1500s, and his house ended up conquering all other clans by 1600, giving him national hegemony extending even to the Imperial Court. As the rule of the emperor was overturned, the court became heavily regulated by the new Shogun government, reducing the duties of court officials to ceremonial at best, and making them rely on the good will of the Shogunate – the emperor himself was effectively a prisoner in his Kyoto palace. (Beasley 1990, 3.)

The real rulers resided in Edo, later known as Tokyo, where the Shogun central government known as *Bakufu* was established. This military government was mostly headed by Tokugawa henchmen known as *rōjū*. They were the most senior members of the administration, coming up with government policy and supervising the other lords of the country. Feudal lords known as *daimyō*, who headed the boundaries, were classified based on their relationship with the Tokugawa house, and they held the most power after the *rōjū*. (Beasley 1990, 4.)

Sex was a common topic in popular culture of early modern Japanese society (1600-1868). The world of that era was male dominated, and much of then produced cultural products came from the hands and minds of male actors. Thus, it would be problematic to claim that any such products reflected the voices of women back then. Men discussed female sexual desires to serve their own needs, from recreational and procreational points of view, and as authors of the many sex materials released back then, established ways to behave in bed. (Walthall 2009, 1-2, 15-16.)

Nevertheless, an interesting comparative difference can be observed between the West and Japan. While Western societies generally instructed women to suppress their sexual desires, a more diverse understanding was reached in Japan; masturbation was considered good for the body and mind, although much of the discourse

surrounded on the use of dildos and fingers, which is evident from the illustrated sex books from the 1600s, often depicting masturbation. The depicted women appealed to the male audience, but they also showed appropriate spaces for masturbation, displayed the views of the society on the practice, and revealed its phallogocentric nature. In the end, masturbation for a woman was just a way to relieve the lust of oneself, when lacking access to the member of a man, though the practice and the tools needed in it were described in sex materials in great detail, suggesting that the need for a woman to satisfy herself was taken seriously. (Walthall 2009, 3-5.)

After centuries of civil war and the successful restoring and maintaining of the law by the Tokugawa Shogunate, military service from the samurai was no longer needed. Their position was to transform to that of a civil official, to conduct local administrative duties or act as a messenger. Many such positions existed, and thousands of them were filled by samurai of specific rank. Over 400 000 samurai families existed in the early 1600s, rising to around 500 000 samurai in Edo alone by the 1700s. (Beasley 1990, 6-7.) They continued to serve the ruling class until the end of the Meiji era, their preferences shaping cultural norms throughout, which is evident from the fact that samurai values are still looked up to in contemporary Japanese culture (Beasley 1990, 20).

In the 1620s and the 1630s the Bakufu rulers decided to cut ties to the outside world, in part because they were afraid dissidents would seek out foreign military assistance, but also because they saw the spread of Christianity as a threat, a corruption that had to be eradicated. After suppressing it, additional measures were taken to ensure it would not resurface. Soon after, foreign trade halted as well, allowing only Chinese and Dutch vessels to do business at a trading post in Deshima. This policy of the “closed country” was to end in 1854, when American Commodore Matthew C. Perry showed up in Edo Bay with a naval fleet of eight ships. This forced the Bakufu to open negotiations with the representatives of Washington, which led to the opening of Shimoda and Hakodate ports, as well as allowing American ships to obtain stores from Japanese officials. (Beasley 1990, 22, 28-29.)

Few years after opening the ports, attacks on foreigners and the Japanese people employed by them increased (Beasley 1990, 39). Attacks on foreign trade ships further escalated the situation, leading to intervention by affected countries, demanding indemnities and increased trade (Beasley 1990, 44). The Bakufu and the domains had very few means to stand against them, so they had to accept unideal conditions, though they tried to resist, resulting in British, Dutch, French and American ships attacking Shimonoseki Strait in 1864. Further concessions were made when the Bakufu failed to pay the second instalment of the Shimonoseki indemnity, which only caused more dissatisfaction with the Bakufu. (Beasley 1990, 42, 47-49.)

Public opinion started swaying towards the reinstation of the rule of the emperor. When Tokugawa Yoshinobu succeeded his predecessor Iemochi in January 1867, anti-Bakufu movement was already so widespread that it forced him to resign towards the end of the same year, though still hoping to maintain a life of privilege and to own lands belonging to the Tokugawa clan along with its sizable army (Beasley 1990, 49, 52).

The domains of Satsuma and Choshu, together with Hiroshima, Owari, Echizen, and Tosa, seized the imperial palace in Kyoto in January of 1868, summoning the imperial council shortly afterwards and stripping Yoshinobu of his power, reverting it back to the emperor. The following weeks the army loyal to the emperor moved towards the east, most *daimyō* submitting to their cause along the way. Yoshinobu, now classified as a rebel by the court, issued an order that forbade resistance, which led to the occupation of Edo by early April. Remaining Tokugawa supporters fled to Hokkaido, where they continued fighting until 1869. (Beasley 1990, 52-53.)

### 3.2 Meiji era and the growing empire

The new government led by the emperor was concerned with the threat Western powers posed. The anti-foreigner movement seen under the late Bakufu was not sustainable, and any provocation could mean trouble for Japan. Thus, the treaties signed during Bakufu rule were to be honoured under the new authority as well. (Beasley 1990, 55-56.)

As a preliminary measure, to lay the foundations for a central machinery for decision-making, the emperor was transferred to the castle of the ex-Shogun in Edo, and soon after the city was renamed to Tokyo – “eastern capital” in Japanese. However, for the decisions to be effective – and because foreign threat was always looming in the background – it became obvious that the domains needed to be abolished, and the government centralised. After much convincing, the domains of Choshu, Satsuma, Tosa, and Hizen left their lands and people in the hands of the emperor in March of 1869, and towards the end of August in 1871, the emperor called all feudal lords in Tokyo to his palace and announced that all domains were to be abolished and replaced with prefectures. (Beasley 1990, 69-61.) When the boundaries were re-drawn in 1872, there were 72 prefectures, which later reduced to 43 (Beasley 1990, 65-66).

The Meiji period saw many changes in policy, new institutions were founded, and Japan was modernised substantially (Beasley 1990, 57). As an example, private ownership of land was legalised, its value reassessed in currency and taxed at a lower rate than before (Beasley 1990, 61). The military of Japan was also strengthened. As the country became more involved in issues of mainland Asia in the 1880s, a war time strength of 200 000 soldiers was achieved after a revision to the conscription law in 1883. By 1894, there were enough modern weapons and artillery for all troops, all of which were manufactured in Japan. A third of the national budget was being spent on military right before the first foreign war Japan partook in. (Beasley 1990, 64-65.)

### 3.3 Rise and fall of the empire

Both China and Japan held interests in the Korean peninsula, and this caused tension between the countries in the 1890s. Korea was viewed as a potential line of defence by the Japanese military because the Russians started building a railway in the north. (Beasley 1990, 144-145.) War broke out in 1894 between China and Japan, in which Japan emerged victorious to the surprise of the entire world. Peace negotiations were held in early 1895, where Chinese influence in Korea was eliminated, and the island of Taiwan transitioned under Japanese occupation. In addition, Japan

received similar economic privileges in China compared to the Western powers. (Beasley 1990, 146.)

Japan continued to strengthen its military after the victory over China, and while the Chinese were ruled out as a threat, Russia remained a competitor in the area (Beasley 1990, 148). After anti-foreign outbreaks led by a group called Boxers took place in the northern regions of China, Russia used the attacks to justify seizing most of Manchuria. This move was considered a threat to Japan, eventually leading to the Russo-Japanese war that was fought between 1904-1905. (Beasley 1990, 149-150.) The Japanese Empire was once again victorious, though not without suffering large casualties. Russia recognised Japanese interests in Korea, and handed over its lease of Liaotung in China and the part of the railway it was building, later renamed to “South Manchuria Railway”. (Beasley 1990, 150-151.)

These two wars gave Japan international recognition, and as a result, the country replaced China as the strongest force in Asia. In 1910 Japan annexed and occupied Korea as a response to civil uproar, which broke out after the Korean emperor failed to conjure international support for Korean independence in Hague in 1907 – leading to his abdication (Beasley 1990, 153-154). Thereafter, the influence and presence of Japan increased in China and the country was afforded membership in the League of Nations in 1918 (Beasley 1990, 155-158).

During this time of imperial expansion, Japanese military established what were known as *comfort stations* on their occupied territories, where girls and women were systematically abducted and/or sold to in order to act as sex slaves, more commonly known as *comfort girls-women* for the military personnel. The majority of these girls and women were Korean, and they have come out to tell their stories decades later in various publications in the modern era, demanding for an official apology and monetary reparations. It is estimated that there are up to 200 000 affected women still alive today. Japan has been reluctant to make an official apology, even bending the truth and censoring history from teaching materials, and as such, the Japanese-Korean relationship has deteriorated. (The Research Team of the War & Women’s Human Rights Center 2020, Ward & Lay 2016.)

In September 1931, Japanese officers of the Kwantung Army manufactured an explosion along the South Manchuria railway, which incited the Japanese invasion of Manchuria the next day. Action was taken despite the wishes of the cabinet in Tokyo, and also without the authority of the high military officers, but once it became known to them, senior military staff insisted that troops in the field must be supported. A puppet state of “Manchukuo” was established in 1932, the last emperor of China, Pu Yi, brought in from retirement as its leader. When the League of Nations started investigating an appeal from China and concluded that Japan was at fault, Japan withdrew from the League of Nations entirely. (Beasley 1990, 172-175.)

After 1930, militarism became dominant in Japanese decision making and ultranationalism started gaining ground (Beasley 1990, 177). The Kwantung Army wanted to make advances to the south of Manchukuo, so to that end, an incident at the Marco Polo bridge outside Beijing in 1937 turned into a military campaign. Much like with the Manchuria incident, Tokyo was in no position to cease it from escalating. Chinese coastline was blockaded by the navy, cities heavily bombed, and many important cities and economic centres fell under Japanese control. This marked the beginning of World War II in Asia. (Beasley 1990, 194-196.)

As the goals of the government became increasingly ambitious – and because World War II in Europe was making military resources scarce – Japan began seizing more land in Southeast Asia. In December 1941, an American base was attacked in Pearl Harbor, along with simultaneous attacks on Wake, Midway, the Philippines, and Hong Kong. Singapore was conquered in February of 1942, the Netherlands Indies surrendered in March, and Burma was overrun by the end of April. Japanese forces took thousands of prisoners of Western and Asian origin, many of whom suffered harsh conditions under their captors, including torture and executions. (Beasley 1990, 200-201, 203-204.)

The occupations resulted in a severe lack of military personnel. Many troops were tied to protect Manchukuo against a potential Russian invasion, and more were designated to garrison duties. After the Americans retaliated and took out most shipping vessels, it became increasingly difficult to replace the losses. (Beasley 1990, 208.) By 1944, Japan had too few aircrafts to protect the homeland. The situation became

dire, and towards the end of the year, Japan had to rely on *kamikaze* suicide bombers for offensive attacks, which did little to stop the American advance. Almost all large Japanese cities, save for Kyoto, suffered large scale firebombings, the largest of which took place in Tokyo on March 9th, 1945. An estimate of 120 000 civilians lost their lives. In August, two atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, resulting in hundreds of thousands more deaths. Shortly after, Russia declared war against Japan, yet even this was not enough for the war minister and two Chief of Staff, who still opposed surrender, forcing the emperor to step in. It was many days later, after much turbulence, on August 15th, when the decision to surrender was made public. Many leaders, including war minister Anami Korechika, committed suicide afterwards. On September 2nd, the Empire of Japan officially surrendered to the Allied Forces in Tokyo Bay. (Beasley 1990, 209-212.)

Immediately after the surrender of Japan, before the arrival of the occupation, the Japanese authorities – all of whom were male – became fearful of the Allied occupation, so they did all they could to face the occupation forces on their terms. To that end, Japanese police and the bureaucracy began producing defeat propaganda. Numerous rumours spread in the country about the upcoming occupation. The Tokyo Metropolitan Police warned about civil unrest in their reports, suggesting some may attempt revenge, while mentioning that women could face sexual violence at the hands of the occupiers, offering the formation of comfort stations as mitigation to this threat. State officials, bureaucrats, and the police were all sending this message of gendered violence, targeted at women. However, such fears were misguided in retrospect, at least on a large scale. The fear and anxiety of the ruling class were based in the military defeat, which caused them to lose their manhood in the patriarchal context. This irrational fear of an imagined enemy, who was not physically present yet, initiated the use of prostitution as a necessity to prevent violent assaults and rape. (Kramm 2017, 587-588, 590-592.)

The Recreation and Amusement Association (RAA) was a semi-political association which organised recreational services and brothels for the occupation, and the director, Miyazawa Hamajiro, outlined in his inaugural speech on August 28th, 1945, what needed to be done to “defend” the Japanese race: (Kramm 2017, 604-603.)

> At this time, we are imposed… with the difficult task to comfort the occupation forces as part of the urgent national facilities for postwar management… [T]hrough the human sacrifice of several thousand 'Okichis of the Shōwa period' we build a floodwall against the raging waves, helping to defend and nurture the purity of our race, thereby becoming an invisible base for the postwar social order. (Kramm 2017, 603.)

Okichi was the name of the geisha, who supposedly served the first U.S. general consul Townsend Harris during Bakufu rule in the 1850s, who later committed suicide. Her sexual services are believed to have had a positive impact on the peaceful negotiations with the United States. In this speech, Miyazawa reconstructs the idea that the individual must make sacrifices for their nation, and in this instance specifically, paints women as pure and vulnerable, who need to be protected against foreign contamination through the sacrifice of other women – a contradiction, though the audience still gave him roaring applause. (Kramm 2017, 603.)

As such, "the female floodwall" was enacted, a systemic separation of the Japanese population and the occupiers in order to protect the "national body", or *kokutai* in Japanese. Government agents, local police, and various fascistic as well as ultranationalist groups were tasked with setting up the facilities and to recruit women, which the government approved of. Low class women from the countryside were employed at these comfort facilities, sometimes using extortion tactics and violence. These women were commonly promised a dormitory, along with household supplies and food by the RAA, due to generous funding by the Ministry of Finance. Much of the offered materials were scarce due to the waste laid by American bombings, and they were in demand. However, young women could gain access to these resources in exchange for taking part in a nationalist, patriarchal, heteronormative project, where lower class women were once again tasked with protecting Japanese sexuality and acting as an outlet for male desire, all while absolving the patriarchal elite of their failures in the war. (Kramm 2017, 587, 610-614.)

### 3.4 Post-war occupation and economic miracle

The American occupation was keen to end Japanese militarism and ultranationalism, so they demilitarized and disarmed the country. The war machine was dismantled, all remaining soldiers and civilians abroad recalled, and claims to all the lands Japan had conquered since 1868 invalidated. War criminals were tried, including 28 political leaders, seven of whom were executed by hanging. Key posts in government, the press and the radio, education, and business were purged, affecting over 200 000 individuals. (Beasley 1990, 214-216.)

The emperor was also a special problem, due to the Japanese people holding his position in high sentimental value. The Americans knew that trying him in court or abdication would cause outrage, so they wanted to preserve his status, allowing them to occupy Japan with the least amount of commitment by the occupation forces. (Beasley 1990, 216-217.) The role of the emperor within the society would be changed from that of a divine being, to a “symbol of the state and of the unity of the people” (Beasley 1990, 220).

The constitution of Japan from 1889 was retired and a new one was drafted. It was enforced starting May 3rd, 1947, and included many changes to the original, such as the status of the emperor and the revocation of the rights of Japan to wage war (Beasley 219-220.). The occupation also introduced new laws which would further democratise the country and allow crucial opportunities for industrial growth (Beasley 1990, 221-223). After the Korean war broke out in 1950, peace negotiations with the powers and Japan began in 1951, which led to the restoration of the sovereignty of Japan in San Francisco, 1952 (Beasley 1990, 224). A defence agreement was also signed with the Americans, providing them bases in Japan in exchange for economic support. The Korean war also acted as a stimulus to the Japanese economy. (Beasley 1990, 226.) Japan would later support American objectives in Vietnam, and in doing so, gain back administrative control of Okinawa (Llewelyn 2009).

In 1956, the Japanese government passed the Prostitution Prevention Law, which did not impact the operation of the sex industry in Japan significantly. The reason for this was the exclusion of the geisha system, which was considered a respectable

form of prostitution, which shielded the rest of the industry from legal intervention. Playboy had previously established a similar standard in the United States, which allowed the continued production and distribution of pornography, also known as the *Playboy standard*. (Norma 2008.)

The widespread acceptance of the geisha system likely encouraged many fathers to sell their daughters to geisha houses. After the Second World War, the geisha system was supposedly reformed: the geisha houses were legally classified as “boarding houses”, and the women in the system were “independent contractors”. Compulsory education meant that girls under the age of 16 could no longer enter the system, which allowed social agencies to monitor the trafficking of the girls. (Norma 2008.)

The geisha system did not occupy a large portion of the Japanese sex industry – an overall estimate of 14 % – but it did significantly influence Japanese culture. The abuse of women, prostitution, and the issue of trafficking provoked prominent women to speak up, which eventually forced lawmakers to apply restrictions on the sex industry. The director of the women and minors bureau of the Department of Labor, Yamakawa Kikue, criticised the geisha system in the following passing on Yomiuri newspaper in June 1953: (Norma 2008.)

> [T]here’s no other country in the world where women have a public role that involves acting as a hostess for men’s gatherings to make them more pleasant. And there’s no country that would hold up such women as its national ‘culture’. Pretending that they’re [the geisha] artists is just the height of sophistry. (Norma 2008.)

After the law was passed, the sex industry abandoned its older bordel prostitution model for a more socially accepted one: hostess services, the formation of which was inspired by the geisha system. The sex industry thus continued its operations well into the boom decades, but under the new “geisha-ised” environment, bringing in girls and women from Korea, China, and other South Asian countries as well. Caroline Norma (2008) argues that even “glamorous” forms of prostitution need to be included in abolitionist strategies, because the sex industry will always look for better

ways to do its business. Such acts like stripping, for example, have been left uncriticised by Western abolitionists.

World War II left Japan in a bad state, with many of its civilian and industrial infrastructure destroyed and millions left unemployed. The country also faced famine. With the help from still existing technology and American imports of munitions, however, the country recovered quickly and entered a stage of unseen economic growth in the history of the country, which was sustained even after the occupation came to an end. (Beasley 1990, 244-245.) Much of this was possible due to the undertakings of the Japanese government (Beasley 1990, 246-247).

In the 1960s, Japan became heavily influenced by American culture, which caused young Japanese people to adopt aspects of American lifestyles. Such Western cultural icons as The Beatles, Bob Dylan and The Beach Boys became role models and idols for many, strengthening the idea that Western lifestyle translated to prosperity, as opposed to the old Japanese way of living. The mass media, which was controlled by the United States, acted as a tool to democratize and demilitarise Japan, while transmitting these concepts to the Japanese public. The introduction of Western clothes by the U.S. occupation caused many to stop wearing Japanese style clothing on a daily basis. Women were granted the right to vote, and they could foster industrial careers, abandoning the “good wife, wise mother” social role they had been forced into previously. Japan experienced, as Bhakti Satrio Nugroho puts it, a “cultural erosion”, which replaced aspects of Japanese culture with American culture. (Nugroho 2020.)

The rapid economic growth continued until 1973, when the Arab countries decided to raise oil prices. This greatly increased import costs, forcing the government to cut down oil usage. Another increase in oil prices came in mid-1979 to early 1980, but this did not have as large of an impact due to measures taken by the government. Furthermore, the economic development of Japan was taking a new direction in the form of technological innovations, which allowed for steady growth despite the rise of oil prices until the early 1990s. (Beasley 1990, 249-250.) In the 1990s, however, the bubble economy burst, forcing the country into recession, with long-term impacts affecting the society even today (RIETI 2020, 203-204).

During the post-war period Japan enjoyed immense growth, making it the second largest economy in the world for a time. The American occupation “Westernised” the country to the point that many young adults glorified American cultural hegemony, while abandoning older Japanese culture (Nugroho 2020). The economic growth impacted the society greatly, and living standards improved drastically. Urbanisation spread, and people migrated to cities from the countryside. The government invested heavily into infrastructure, leading to the robust transportation systems that are in place today. Japan became a big player in many industries during this time, including entertainment (video games, music, anime and manga), and the auto industry, paving the way for modern technological advancements. Trade unions, previously weak, became influential, though membership eventually fell off drastically (Nippon 2023). Modern day Japan is a clash of both modern and traditional values, a parliamentary democracy, though still conservative and patriarchal in many ways. (Beasley 1990, 253, 260, 274-276.)

# 4 Heteronormativity in Japan

## 4.1 Women in interwar Western style confectionary advertising

When Japan was modernised and rapid industrial development began after the Meiji Restoration, leadership in various positions was male dominated. However, women still had an integral role in many industries, such as the Western confectionary industry, which had rooted itself a position in the Japanese market in the early 1900s. Lillian Tsay, author of *Feminising the ‘Modern’ Sweetness: Gender and Western-Style Confectionery in Interwar Japan* (2022), investigates how women were depicted in advertisements of the era and finds that women were both the producers of the product, as well as the consumers of it. They could be divided into three significant social groups, although many existed back then: the “female worker”, the “modern girl”, and the “good wife, wise mother”. (Tsay 2022, 859-861, 865, 878.)

Female factory workers (*jokō*) provided the growing empire with cheap labour, and many of them wished that working hard would eventually bring better living conditions. However, the harsh factory discipline they worked under provided them with poor wages, while a cleaner, nurse-like image was portrayed of these exploited women to the public: innocent, obedient girls in white uniforms wrapping candy by hand with “skilful nimble fingers”. Average daily wage for the manual labour they provided was about 50 sen – half of one yen – while a box of candies they produced cost ten sen. A Journalist in 1915 depicted the workflow of women who operated the machines and wrapped the candies, but by 1919, the raw materials and heavy machinery were seemingly handled only by men. This technology-based gendered segregation systematically produced and reinforced social identities and gender roles within factories. Morinaga & Company Ltd (Morinaga Seika) also hired only relatively young women: the maximum accepted age was 20. (Tsay 2022, 862-863.)

Many facets of life were patriarchal in nature at the time, evident by the fact how women were treated at the factories: fathers exercised their hegemony over their daughters by choosing their jobs for them, the women at the confectionary factories had to follow strict guidelines largely issued by men, employers controlled their sexuality by imposing after-work activities, all while newspapers constructed a hygienic image of a self-disciplined female worker. Exceptions also existed: the wife of the factory owner, who was a matriarchal figure and had more power and privilege than those working there, effectively aided with the exploitation of female workers. (Tsay 2022, 863-865.)

The “modern girl” was associated with a rising consumer society in metropolitan areas of the world like Tokyo and New York during the interwar period. In Japan, the *modāngāru* represented a specific kind of modernity: Western clothes belonged to their closets, they enjoyed Western products, and seeked liberation from the traditional patriarchal restrictions. The “good wife, wise mother” was seen as patriarchal, which the modern girl often opposed. However, she also limited the empowerment of women by remaining passive when it came to the rights of women, and she was a consumer above all else. The modern girl departed from the innocence of a *Shōjo*, little girl, but she was still not to be considered a “woman”, though she broke traditional beauty standards. Their healthy bodies and femininity were used by

confectionery companies to promote health and pleasure, and their visage was often seen playing modern sports like tennis. (Tsay 2022, 861, 865-867.)

The sexuality of the modern girl was also utilised: the modern girl of Morinaga, Shōkyokusai Tenkatsu, became iconic through her magical shows, and through association with the products of Morinaga, the products themselves came to represent the same things as she did: charm, modernity, progress, etc. Her eroticised body and magic performances were popular among her audiences, which Morinaga capitalized into by circulating their products – Shōkyokusai herself would even turn pigeons into candy. She toured the colonies of Japan in Taiwan and Korea in 1915, which were advertised in the local newspapers. Lillian Tsay notes that a crucial difference between these advertisements is that in the Taiwanese advertisement they have her wearing antique Western clothes with a cape, mimicking the dance of Salome, and although she is wearing western clothes in the Korean version as well, her hairstyle is noticeably Japanese: (Tsay 2022, 867.)

> Just like the caramels she advertised for, Shōkyokusai's image was interchangeable between 'the West' and 'Japan'. In these images, she represented a cultural hegemony that stood above the colonies as a symbol of progress and modernity. (Tsay 2022, 867.)

Finally, there was the "good wife, wise mother" (*Shufu*), who lived in the domestic sphere, loyal to her family. Since the Meiji era, the nation was perceived as "family", with the emperor as its father figure. The role of mothers and wives in the system was to consolidate an imperial-patriarchal social order, where these women were expected to assume specific moral codes. The idea was that if women were educated to socialise their next generation offspring under these conditions, Japan could "escape Western imperialism and strengthen nationalism". (Tsay 2022, 872.) However, Tsay points out these women often went even further:

> [T]hey often educated themselves by reading housewife's magazines about the latest commercial trends ranging from food to fashion. Domesticated as these women were, while they might not be as extravagant consumers as the modern girls, they were active consumers. (Tsay 2022, 872.)

Sugar was – erroneously – considered to have benefits to the health of oneself during this time, so managing the health of the children with confectionery became the duty of the mother. Western-style confectionary like chocolate was used by mothers and housewives to educate their children, thus allowing them to simultaneously fulfil domestic tasks and show support to the patriarchal national policy. (Tsay 2022, 872.)

The housewife was often recognisable by the fact that she was accompanied by her children, and she wore Japanese clothes. Her kimono painted a picture of a mature woman, whose sexuality was strictly restricted within the confines of home. She was much older than *jokō* or *modāngāru* and no longer portrayed any form of innocence. Rather, her figure was very Japanese, befitting the state ideal of femininity. (Tsay 2022, 873-874.)

Confectionary companies advertised the housewife as a loving mother who teaches her children important lessons – the confectionary itself acted as a tool for education. Her children wore either Japanese or Western-style clothing depending on the setting. Although the mother was visually depicting “Japanese-ness”, her rationale often portrayed Western modernity. The advertising image she represented convinced that the confectionary was not only sweet and pleasurable, but that it also provided nutrition for the new generation. (Tsay 2022, 873-875.)

## 4.2 Grooming to attract, crossdressing and femvertising: Gender norms of modern day Japan

It can be argued that in modern day Japan, men continue to determine what is male or female. Traditionally, the society has defined gender through distinct roles divided into men and women, as the historical examples of the geisha and samurai would suggest. However, other – more ambiguous – roles and displays have also existed, as is the case with *Genji Monogatari* (*The Tale of Genji*), and its portrayal of “beautiful boys”, or *kabuki* performances, a type of play where all actors are male, who also perform the roles of women. (Salenius 2023, 10-11, 13-14.)

The popularity of Japanese popular culture like anime, manga, music, and video-games have created fandoms reaching far beyond the borders of Japan. Since the 1980s, for instance, Visual *kei* style music has challenged the idea of binary gender, as mostly male performers cross-dress or employ androgynous personas. Fan cultures born from the likes of Visual *kei* bands have formed a “fan service” phenomenon, where performers are pressured to do sexual acts to please their – overwhelmingly female – audience. (Salenius 2023, 16-17.)

Under the post-war family order, it is expected to enter a heterosexual marriage with the opposing sex and to have children. In this manner, one can become a “full member of society”. In fact, marriage is still a privilege only enjoyed by heterosexual couples (Tso 2022, 562; Salenius 2023, 15). The salarymen, Japanese white-collar workers, who traditionally represented a national ideal form of masculinity despite only being a minority class in society, have increasingly fallen out of fashion in a constantly changing society. This is in part due to the changing imagery of an attractive man, and in part due to difficulties related to job hunting. However, such lifestyle aspirations still persist and remain a point of reference to both men and women. (Salenius 2023, 18-19; Tso 2022, 547, 551.)

Women have had a significant role in cultivating and maintaining images of ideal male bodies. Cristopher Tso, who has researched individual grooming practices of men in the context of heteronormative behaviour, found that single men groom their bodies to attract women – with the intent for potential sexual activities – while married men lose interest in grooming after getting married, but do so at the imperative of their wife anyway, meaning these men objectify themselves under the gaze of a potential female partner (Tso 2022, 553, 557).

In the context of marriage, having fulfilled the expectations of the society as heteronormative men, the “nagging” of the wife is seen as caring – a sign of a healthy heteronormative marriage. One individual, a thirty-two year-old CEO described his shaving habits after marriage as follows: (Tso 2022, 560.)

> [W]ell, I guess she [his wife] prefers it that way and, well, so she shaves them. I can't do it myself and nor does the hair dresser, so she does it … [The reason for having them shaved] was completely my wife. She kept going on, like, 'I'll shave them, I'll shave them' and so I was like 'fine, fine, go ahead (dōzo, dōzo). (Tso 2022, 559.)

Other accounts of heteronormativity also exist, as is shown by Miyazaki Ayumi in her research on university male-to-female crossdressing (*josō*) competitions: three out of five interviewed participants claimed to have external motivations for crossdressing and the other two had internal motivations. External motivations, as Miyazaki explains, have nothing to do with the need of a person to express their gender or sexual identity, which is contrary to someone with internal motivations. All of the interviewed crossdressers had varied impressions and reasons as to why they and someone else would dress as a woman: someone might do it to display feminine beauty, another might seek self-discovery, while a third does it to accrue social capital. (Miyazaki 2023, 128-129.)

Miyazaki argues, however, that the motivations for doing *josō*, or in some cases, *becoming a woman*, are too complicated for an analysis of assumed *hybrid masculinities*, "defined as masculine men borrowing elements of femininities to construct masculine identities for advancing their own heteronormative agenda", due to the wide range of responses she received. (Miyazaki 2023, 146)

Femininities and masculinities deeply conjoined in the interviewees' understanding of *josō*, although there was at least one *josō* practitioner who did it to culturally appropriate feminine traits for the purpose of creating his ideal woman (Miyazaki 2023, 131, 146). For him, *josō* is strictly about men who dress like women and has no connection to sexuality or gender. He also belittles female university students, claiming that they do not have a sense for fashion, insinuating that through *josō* he can become more beautiful than them. In his response, he switches pronouns from *boku* – a formal masculine pronoun – to *ore*, which has a strongly masculine – even *aggressive* – tone when talking about himself, further extending to the disparaging second-person pronoun *aitsura*, when talking about these women: (Miyazaki 2023, 133-134.)

> Women in this society start to disguise [bakeru] themselves, say, when they move from high school to university, right? Well, that's often the case. At that moment, well, how should I put it, I myself had lived without thinking about my appearance, but without my realizing it, they [aitsura] begin to notice the existence (of appearance). And well, for example, well, they use eyelid glue, or what is it, say, go shopping at a place like PARCO in Shinjuku, but they have no aesthetics and no idea, but they think they have become fashionable. And then, well, based on that, they one-up me [ore] and think they are superior to me [ore]. I [boku] can't accept that. Well, without make-up, they are just potatoes lying on the ground. That's something, really something that makes me feel strange. (Miyazaki 2023, 133.)

The Japanese education system is very patriarchal with distinct gender roles, which is apparent by the fact that young men and women are often segregated into high schools for boys and girls – many of which exist in Japan – where they have very little contact with the opposite sex until enrolment into university. Miyazaki contemplates that this, along with the widespread patriarchal imagery of Japanese women, could have correlation as to why young men might try producing representations of their ideal women through *josō*. (Miyazaki 2023, 132.)

Another curious example of heteronormativity can be seen with the Japanese advertisement industry, which continues producing images of binary gender. Itatsu Yuko researched the advertisement campaigns of the multinational sports company Nike and found that after releasing an advertisement video for female empowerment called "They can't stop us" in November 2020, which led to criticism and backlash, Nike employed a different strategy in their subsequent output. (Itatsu 2023, 99-100, 114-115.) The backlash was covered in international press as well (Reuters 2020).

Itatsu considers that Nike Japan seemed to learn they need to "Japanify" their messages of diversity and inclusion if they wish for them to be accepted by the Japanese society (Itatsu 2023, 107). Unfortunately, Nike overcompensated, and their ad campaigns regressed to the point of maintaining stereotypical gender roles, as evident by the Nike *Juku* series of videos, where the cram school theme is used to encourage young teenagers in secondary school to work out. In the first video, four female students dance and exercise while dressed in sailor school uniforms, which is a typical representation of gendered stereotypes in Japanese society (Nike Japan 2022a). In the second one, a man, portrayed as another student, is teaching all the exercise

moves to a fellow female student, who submissively takes the role of a learner. (Itatsu 2023, 114; Nike Japan 2022b.)

The ad video “They can’t stop us” showcased that while the messaging of Nike was on point from a global audience perspective, it was far too advanced for the Japanese local audience. It could be said that advertisement companies need to modify their messaging to fit the Japanese frame to reach wide audiences and prevent backlash, but this is ultimately up for debate, as Itatsu Yuko points out: (Itatsu 2023, 115.)

> Perhaps [the backlash] was Nike’s strategy, perhaps it was their miscalculation, or perhaps they were playing the long game. It did indeed rally people who believe in the progressive agenda, so perhaps it can be said that it completely hit the mark for some. (Itatsu 2023, 115.)

Advertisement companies need to consider the message they wish to communicate to their customers, and what methods they utilise. Companies interested in communicating diversity and equality, however, need to be extra careful, so as to prevent conformation to heteronormativity and the maintaining of gendered stereotypes. In the modern online media space, companies can reach their audiences faster than ever before, and the same is true for customer feedback. Perhaps this frame of juxtaposition can act as a forum for further discussions about social change in Japan.

# 5 Christmas in Japan and Finland

## 5.1 Origins of modern Santa Claus

Santa Claus has been an integral part of Christmas celebrations in Western countries, and the event itself is personified into him, which is evident from the numerous images that permeate public spaces every Christmas. This chapter takes a look at Christmas from the point of view of Santa Claus, how he came to be, and how Christmas is celebrated in Finland and Japan.

The origins of Christmas and Santa Claus can be traced back to the legend of Saint Nicholas, who is also known as *Nicholas the Wonderworker*, due to his numerous charitable deeds. He was born around 1700 years ago in a town called Patara in Asia Minor. His family was wealthy, but his parents died of plague, so he inherited a vast fortune and was raised by his bishop uncle in Myra. He himself would later become a bishop as well. (Perunka 2020, 11-12.)

Perhaps the most well-known legend about Saint Nicholas is a story about three sisters whose poor father did not have enough fortune to pay their dowries, so they were destined to prostitution. After hearing about this, Saint Nicholas secretly climbed to the roof of their house and dropped three balls of gold down their chimney, enough to cover the expenses of each. Many variations of the story exist, but Saint Nicholas is nonetheless depicted holding three balls of gold in his hand in some religious icons as reference to the story. (Perunka 2020, 12-13.) To this day, Saint Nicholas is a protector saint of children and sailors (Perunka 2020, 14).

While other European powers fought for what they believed to be the correct religion in the 1600s, the Dutch eagerly expanded their business network and eventually found themselves sailing along the eastern shore of the American continent. Along with the settlers came *Sinterklaas*, or Dutch Saint Nicholas. After his death, the legend of Saint Nicholas had slowly become well-known all over Europe. *Sinterklaas* brought fruits and gifts from South European countries, and he was well received within the community of settlers. Over time he came to be known as *Santa Claus*, with his religious ties slowly evaporating. (Perunka 2020, 25-26, 31-32.)

The first modern Santa Claus was drawn in 1881 by the American artist Thomas Nast (Perunka 2020, 49; Wikimedia Commons 2024). In 1931, Coca Cola established a marketing campaign with the aim to make their brown drink more attractive outside hot summer days, and for this purpose they hired Haddon “Sunny” Sundblom to draw them a Coca-Cola Santa, which was a huge image uplift compared to earlier iterations of him. This form laid the foundations for most depictions of Santa Claus in the modern era. (Perunka 2020, 52-53.)

## 5.2 Finnish Christmas: From archaic goats to a tourist attraction

The Finnish Santa Claus used to look and act like a wild billy goat in the 1800s: he wore a birch bark mask with goat horns, along with a fur turned inside-out. Initially, his role was not to give presents, but to uplift the mood and build atmosphere. Some accounts describe fear among children when *joulupukki* (lit. *Christmas goat*) entered the room, as this personal anecdote would suggest: (Perunka 2020, 59-61.)

> […] Then tea serving began, which took an entire eternity. After it was finally over, the door leading to the porch was opened and *joulupukki* jumped in. It was horrible to look at. One of the servants had taken a white beard, gilded horns, and wore my father's fur turned inside out. The *pukki* leaped across the room, jumped in the air and scared me so that I seeked shelter from behind the dress of my mother, where I barely dared to peek from. My entire body was shaking, when I was forced to pick apples from the [Christmas] *tree* and offer them to the *pukki* because I was afraid the hairy creature would bite my hand. (Perunka 2020, 60.)

*Joulupukki* received more human features over time, and by the 1900s, gift giving became a part of his routine. Although his anonymity was well guarded, he often truly showed up and had conversations with children like a real person. The archaic *Christmas goat* left the modern *joulupukki* with the term *goat* in his job title, although he no longer portrays any animalistic traits. (Perunka 2020, 61-62.) Modern Santa Claus later came to Europe from the United States in the aftermath of World War II, along with Coca-Cola and general prosperity, although he was not well received at first (Perunka 2020, 113-114).

Finnish people know that Santa Claus lives in Lappi, Korvatunturi, which is said to have its roots in the radio show *Lastentunti* (lit. *Children's hour*) produced by Yleisradio and hosted by Markus Rautio, aka. Uncle Markus. Rautio announced the true home of Santa Claus as early as 1927. He was one of the establishers of Yleisradio and had a key role in teaching Finnish people common Christmas traditions. (Perunka 2020, 64-65.)

In the 1980s it was realised in Finland that tourism could provide Lappi immense wealth, and discussions about the establishment of *joulumaa* (*Christmas land*) were initiated. Santa ventured into mass tourism, which was helped by the increased

volume of air traffic, and through PR-work by the Finnish airline Finnair, the idea of Santa Claus living in Finland became international. (Pakkanen 2011, 36-37; Perunka 2020, 94-96, 253-254.)

Various Christmas traditions exist in Finland, one of the most well-known and looked after being the Christmas table; casseroles, ham, rice porridge, salted raw salmon and *Karjalanpiirakka* (rye crust pasties, usually with rice porridge filling) are consumed nationwide, along with potential accompaniments. The actual Christmas dinner takes place right before evening, as earlier hours of the day are spent on other Christmas activities. (Aalto 1999, 290-293.)

Christmas is usually celebrated with family on Christmas Eve, on the 24th of December, instead of actual Christmas day, the 25th, which is spent resting and enjoying received presents (Aalto 1999, 278). Christmas ham cooks for multiple hours, so many cook it overnight, and in doing so, the smell of cooked ham permeates Finnish homes in the morning of Christmas Eve. However, Finnish Rice Porridge tends to be eaten for breakfast, leaving the ham for the Christmas table. An almond is often dropped into the porridge to bring good luck to whoever finds it from their bowl. Christmas bakeries like gingerbread cookies of various shapes and Christmas tarts filled with plum jam are also popular. (Aalto 1999, 279-281.)

Those who wish to have a Christmas tree bring it inside the home by Christmas Eve and decorate it. Gifts are placed under the tree in mysterious fashion, and act as decorations until evening when they are finally opened. (Aalto 1999, 183, 185.) Finns also go to the cemetery and place candles and wreathes on graves of their passed away relatives. Finally, they go to Christmas sauna before taking a seat at the Christmas table. (Aalto 1999, 288-290.)

### 5.3 Japanese Christmas: Kentucky Fried Chicken and Christmas Cake

Japan has borrowed from various cultures and countries through-out its history, the continued use of Chinese *han* characters known as *kanji* in Japanese written materials being the most prevalent example of this. However, this borrowing has not

occurred uncritically: Japanese people make sure the borrowed elements fit their culture. Christianity is still a minority religion due to its incompatibility with old Japanese culture and traditions, partly due to its refusal to recognise the nature spirits known as *kami* or buddhas as part of its god catalogue, partly due to the history of prohibitive laws and views in the country. (Vesterinen 1987, 194-195.)

Christianity was first introduced in 1549 when Francis Xavier along with two other Jesuit brothers came to Japan to spread Christian values and religion. When they started conducting sermons, many people tuned in. Initial impressions seemed to be positive, but Xavier ultimately failed to meet any significant leaders nor the emperor, and his excursion ultimately did not produce many results. However, even after he left Japan a few years later, the missionary work continued. According to Jesuit records, 150 000 Japanese people had converted by 1582. (Vesterinen 1987, 195.) Due to its roots in Christianity, it is likely that Christmas was also introduced around the same time.

When Toyotomi Hideyoshi rose to power, he turned against Christianity after seeing how much influence it had garnered in Kyushu. He ordered the missionaries to leave the country, but only some listened. In 1597 he crucified 26 Christians and ordered all foreigners to leave the country, though his sudden death the next year ended Christian persecution momentarily. When Tokugawa Shogunate rose to power, the Bakufu prohibited Christianity in 1613. This was followed by the destruction of churches and the persecution of Christians in the following years. (Vesterinen 1987, 195-196.)

The country was subsequently closed from the outside world and the foreigners were abolished. Japanese Christians were pressured to let go of their faith, and under severe pressure, some did, but Christianity was never fully eradicated. Those who never converted back, went into hiding, practising their faith in secret. In 1865, the Roman Catholic church returned to Nagasaki, and they found that there were approximately 60 000 Christians who had retained their faith for over 200 years in the nearby villages. The isolation had changed their doctrine, and they had come to call themselves *kirishitan*. (Vesterinen 1987, 196-197.)

Although the Meiji government allowed Christians to continue their missionary work, persecution did not stop for many years (Vesterinen 1987, 197). From 1899 to 1945, the official view was that religious freedom would be permitted, but only if it bolstered the imperial state and was not considered a right of the individual. The aim was to bring Japanese religions closer under government control and then rile up Japanese people in support of their war efforts. Christian leaders in Japan were enthusiastic to support the vision of the Japanese government about a new order in East Asia and distanced themselves from Western Christianity. Emphasis was put on “Japanese Christianity”, as Christianity was *Japanified*. (Ion 2003, 83, 88.)

Modern Christmas emerged after World War II, alongside Western cultural influence of mostly American origins. It has never had a strong tie to religion, unlike many Western countries, and Japanese people do not usually connect the event to Christianity in any way. Many Christmas icons like lights, music, Santa Claus, gifts, reindeer and Christmas trees, among others, are prevalent at department stores and restaurants. The event is commercial first and foremost, and multi-national companies and brands like Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) and McDonald’s have helped shape its commercial image. (Kimura & Belk 2005.)

The typical foods associated with Christmas are expensive Christmas cakes and KFC. At a time of prospering consumer culture, KFC launched the “Kentucky for Christmas” campaign in 1974, which caught the attention of Japanese people and became hugely successful. Christmas continues to be the most profitable time of year for the company. (Springer 2022.) It is also considered a romantic event for unmarried couples, and many young people tend to go on dates (Daniels 2009, 182-183).

Various Christmas elements are borrowed from other countries and mixed together, producing a mashup that is different from many Western cultures and exotic at the same time. However, Christmas is still considered foreign, and it is often geographically separated to ensure the event maintains its foreign and exotic feel: Christmas decorations are plentiful in department stores, but they are nowhere to be found in traditional homes and restaurants with tatami mats, or at shrines or temples. When midnight arrives on the 25th of December, all Christmas decorations are removed

and replaced in anticipation of the New Year. (Kimura & Belk 2005.) The New Year is considered a more important event to Japanese people, comparable to how Christmas is celebrated in countries like Finland (Appendix 1).

# 6 Japanese Christmas advertisement analyses

For the next following chapters, we will look at and analyze Christmas advertisements that aired in Japan in the last five years. The main objective is to find out how these advertisements depict heteronormativity, what gender specific stereotypes are produced and reproduced, and the ways they potentially break such norms.

The following criteria were used to pick the advertisements: first, only advertisements with people in them were considered, due to their absence massively reducing depth from the analysis. Second, only advertisements released between 2019-2024 were chosen. Third, to ease the life of the author, the adverts needed to be in digital format and easily accessible. Finally, there needed to be some relation to Christmas, which is an ambiguous criterion, but one that is required to stay within the theme of the topic. At times of uncertainty, the discretion of the author was utilized. Together with the criteria above, adverts were chosen based on their level of intrigue.

Although Erving Goffman was a well-respected sociologist, his approaches and thinking were challenged at times (Deegan 2014). Regardless, the work of Goffman in *Gender Advertisements* underlined problems of the social world of its time and remains a valuable resource for advertisement analysis to this day. His categories of gender representation allow for an interesting vantage point into gendered advertising, and they were used as a point of reference while conducting these analyses. Of particular interest were the following:

> **Relative size:** Social weight, power, and authority is depicted through the size of the subjects, especially height. The superiority of the male subject and status over female subjects is represented through enlargement of the girth and height of the male subject – occasionally to unrealistic levels. Sometimes used to symbolize a single thematic issue. (Goffman 1979, 28-29.)

**Feminine touch:** Women are most likely to be depicted as using their hands or fingers to caress the outlines of objects, or to be "just barely touching" the object. Other body parts can also be used, and the object of touching can even be the body of oneself. (Goffman 1979, 29, 31.)

**Function ranking:** When a man and a woman collaborate, the man is more likely to take the executive role. Even children are depicted in this manner, although their serious attitude clashes with their activity, which is not viewed seriously (by adults). Pictures where adults receive body-addressed help from another adult commonly represents male subjects as the receivers and female subjects as the givers. (Goffman 1979, 32, 34-35.)

**The ritualization of subordination:** A typical representation of subordination is the act of lowering the physical posture of oneself in some way. Likewise, standing erect while holding your head high is a stereotypical signature of superiority and unashamedness. (Goffman 1979, 40.)

**Licensed withdrawal:** Women are more commonly depicted withdrawing from social situations psychologically, leaving them disoriented and supposedly dependent of the protective goodwill of others, whether they are present or not. Women are often shown drifting away from the physical scene mentally, despite being in proximity with a male subject. Having a phone call or focusing on their own hands also withdraws the attention of the subject from the scene. (Goffman 1979, 57, 65, 68.)

The following analyses were conducted using the qualitative content analysis method. The adverts were first systematically dissected for their existing elements in the display, which were then unwrapped through an objective lens. Next, the texts of Judith Butler about the performativity of gender and drag were considered and utilized while providing the interpretations of the author. The pictures were framed and viewed as displays of behavior and being, as Goffman had done previously. Relevant outside information was brought in when necessary and available, to get a better understanding of the context surrounding these adverts. Finally, the sex of the models was flipped and contemplated in the heterosexual binary frame to see how it would change the display.

# 7 Fujifilm instax cheki: heteronormative gender roles of young men and women

The first advert shows us various instances of two models, male and female, who are holding a camera in different poses (Banner Library 2025a). In the middle, the female model is placed frontmost, facing towards her right, while the male model stands taller behind her, facing towards his left. Both models hold a camera, but only the man is shown holding a physical picture in his left hand, which he crosses behind the right hand holding a camera. The smaller physical picture he is holding depicts them both, suggesting it was taken with one of these cameras.

Around the centered models, smaller versions of the same models can be found, presumably taking pictures with their cameras. Both the man and the woman show up a total of three times, not counting the physical pictures included in the advertisement. Both also hold a different model of camera to one other. The man is depicted standing straight consistently, apart from the right-most instance, where he seems to crouch a little, while the woman is seen kicking her other leg backwards while caressing a tiny camera in one instance and bending over in another. Both are depicted smiling, but the woman uses more lively body language.

The man and the woman are dressed in casual clothing, though the bathrobe style get-up belonging to the man is the most casual. The woman wears a sleeveless red sweater-like vest, with a thinner sleeved red sweater underneath. She also wears a striped miniskirt, but her legs are covered with black coloured pants. The man also wears black pants, although two out of three instances of him cover them. Under the bathrobe, a white shirt can be seen, although just barely. The woman wears earrings and has lipstick applied, while her hair looks shiny and smooth. The man does not seem to have significant make-up applied – if at all. His hair looks fluffy and soft, suggesting it has been treated slightly at most. All instances of the man and woman look as described consistently through-out the advertisement.

Finally, on the overlay we can see the "*instax cheki*" logo, next to which the various camera models are displayed. Below this, the text "*For the Christmas present, cheki.*" can be read in Japanese, along with the asterisks stating the print photos are only a depiction and that the user must wait around 90 seconds after printing for the picture to manifest. The Fujifilm logo is affixed to the top left corner of the frame. All of the camera models exhibited in this picture are decorated with a red ribbon, making them look like unwrapped Christmas presents.

Immediately striking from this advertisement is the feminisation of the female model and the masculinisation of the male model. The woman is wearing clothing and make-up which thoroughly render her into a feminine woman, and her behaviour in this advertisement further reinforce this interpretation. Although the man is wearing an unusually casual outfit – or perhaps especially because of it, since it might be more acceptable for a Japanese man than woman – his posture, the way he holds the camera, and colour of his clothes leave no room for any other interpretation than that he is likewise a masculine man.

Furthermore, the colour and shape of the cameras they are holding reflect their respective genders in the binary context, and as such, make this display heteronormative. If we additionally look at the categories of Erving Goffman, we start to notice the subordination of the female model, simply by looking at the posture of the male model: he holds his head up high and handles the camera more comfortably, he takes his tool seriously. He is also depicted taller than the woman, and his less expressive face signifies that he is focused. In the centered collage he is additionally shown to hold not only the camera, but a physical portrait of him and the woman together, depicting him as the more active person by suggesting he took the picture. His towering figure also gives off a protective impression.

The woman, on the other hand, is shown playing around with her camera and having fun. She does not seem very serious, and the camera seemingly becomes a toy in her hands. This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that she kicks her leg back in one instance – a stereotypical depiction of young women having fun – and bends over in another, protruding her butt slightly. The way she holds the tiny camera gives room for the Feminine touch category, and because her size is smaller in all

instances when compared against the man, the Relative size category becomes relevant as well. Finally, since the man and woman can be interpreted to be collaborating together for the pictures – even though both are operating their own cameras – the Function ranking category seems to be represented as well, especially since the man seems to be in the more active role.

The creators of this advertisement seem to not have wanted there to be any depiction of romance or closer intimacy with these characters. Neither actor never directly gazes at the other, nor is there any form of closeness depicted. Both are focused on what is in front of their cameras, so they do not have time to be eyeing each other. As such, one can only assume that these young adult characters are part of a larger friend group (seen in one of the physical portraits), which is further corroborated by their casual attire. Nevertheless, their relationship is not shown to be particularly close.

If the binary genders were reversed in this advertisement, we would end up with a much more interesting advertisement, since both actors are representing their normalised gender roles. It would be an unusual sight to have the male model behave like a stereotypical carefree young woman and the female model as a focused photographer who knows her way around a camera, although then the arrangement would likely receive a comedic undertone, which has often been the case, when feminine men and masculine women are depicted in media, and even then, the advertisement would still necessitate that the masculine actor is in the active role.

The advertised product(s) get signified with the same characteristics as the models who hold them: the black and square cameras are for serious guys who wish to take their photography seriously, while the bright coloured, small, and round cameras are for carefree gals who just want to play around and have fun. This must have been a deliberate choice by the advertisers to market these cameras to their gendered target groups. If this advertisement aired in Finland for example, it would be interesting to see if anyone criticised it for representing far too stereotypical imagery, as has been the case for some media content in the past (Puukka 2025).

# 8 7-Eleven x King & Prince: gendered segregation of the youth in advertising

Here we can see a group of five young people gathered together around a table filled with food (Banner Library 2025b). The leftmost person holds a bottle of 7-Eleven branded beverage in his right hand and a small box in his left. A white cord can be seen extending from the box, but no other information can be attracted, since it is covered well in his palm. Likewise, the contents of the bottle are unknown. He is shown to be laughing at something, as his mouth is wide open, and his eyes squinted. The four other people around him are looking at him, smiling and laughing.

Three of the five men are sitting on what looks like a sofa, the other two are behind the sofa: one sitting on the backrest and the other leaning against the backrest with his arms. The rightmost model sitting on the sofa is resting his hand on the shoulder of the model to his right, which looks to be the only physical contact point among these actors, at least based on what is visible in this picture. The foods on the table contain typical Christmas food like fried chicken and Christmas cake. In addition, there is pizza, raw meat, and small amounts of vegetables. There are also cones on the table, presumably as decorations.

The outfits of the models follow a casual code, with a theme of warmth and bright colours, fitting a Christmas setting. It seems these men are having a party, which would explain the abundance of food and the confetti floating in the air. The clean and soft attire gives the entire collage a softer look, and the hair and faces of the models are treated. The environment looks very luxurious, from the little that is shown in the picture, befitting a famous celebrity, or in this case, an idol group.

This advertisement was made in collaboration with 7-Eleven, a popular international convenience store brand in Japan, and King & Prince, a Japanese boy band established in 2018 (7-Eleven 2024, Oricon Music 2018a). There were six members in the band when it first debuted, but there are only five members in this arrangement, because Iwahashi Genki went on hiatus in November 2018 to focus on his panic

disorder (Oricon Music 2018b). He later formally left the group in March of 2021 (音楽ナタリー2021). The current King & Prince consists of just two members, Nagase Ren and Takahashi Kaito, after Kishi Yuta, Jinguji Yuta and Hirano Sho left the group in 2023 (Modelpress 2022). The same year, former president and founder of Johnny & Associates, the talent agency behind the success of King & Prince, came under heavy criticism due to allegations of sexual abuse by former idols (The Asahi Simbun 2023). Johnny Kitagawa, the person these allegations were lodged against, died in 2019. This advertisement was released in September 2020.

The advertisement looks to be a stereotypical representation of how young guys should spend time together. As mentioned previously by Miyazaki Ayumi, before entering university, the school system can segregate based on the sex of the individual if they are enrolled to one of the many schools for boys or girls (Miyazaki 2023, 132). This can lead to the development of unreal patriarchal imagery of Japanese women among young men, as she states, and within the context of this advertisement, we can see how these young male idols are reflecting the existing standard of segregated pastime activities. Given their young age, they could easily be taken as young university students who have not had much contact with the opposite sex yet. Since no women are pictured here, it suggests that the company behind these adverts did not consider them fitting. Idols are, after all, expected to remain single in Asia (Kwan 2018, 1).

If we were to assume that these beautiful young men are targeting the female fans of the King & Prince idol group, we can look at this advertisement from another perspective. In such case, the advertisers would have knowingly constructed this image with the perspectives of the female audience in mind, effectively producing the fan service effect. This puts the action, as well as inaction of the subjects in a different light.

For example, the one model who rests his arm on the shoulder of the other can be interpreted as an act of manly friendship, since physical contact among men within the context of heteronormative advertising is commonly found in situations that have been rendered manly, either through activity or the surrounding environment and

atmosphere (Rossi 2003, 177,179). It can also be interpreted as a subtle show of deeper interest by this person in the other model, since no one else is shown touching each other, at least intentionally. The direction he is looking would initially suggest he is looking at the leftmost model as everyone else is doing so, but under this new perspective, he might as well be secretly eyeing the model immediately to his right. This would suggest the existence of a queer cue, which the fans of the idol group could easily be able to identify. Delving deeper into the fan culture of King & Prince would reveal further context.

At a time when one of their members was dealing with panic disorder, the remaining members of King & Prince seem happy, as if nothing was wrong. It is very likely they received instructions to behave this way, since Christmas is meant to be an event of warmth and happiness. Nevertheless, knowing that the official departure of Iwahashi Genki is looming ahead, it could be that they are masking troubles occurring behind the scenes, which is not uncommon to take place in Japan, as Japanese people often use various methods to lighten up the mood in response to difficult situations, especially when it comes to saving face (Matsumoto 1988, 423-425).

Although the members who left the band in 2023 said they did so due to differing life goals, the huge controversy surrounding Johnny & Associates gives further context for an alternate reason. The talent agency seemed to think that offering a public apology after the death of Johnny would suffice for the victims and their families, but since the issue became so widespread, they were forced to offer reparations and remove all mentions of Johnny, including the name of the agency (The Asahi Shimbun 2023; Goldbart 2024; Modelpress 2023). A BBC documentary was also released on the matter in 2024 (BBC 2024). Whether members of King & Prince were victims of abuse or not, staying in an idol group that has been publicly tarnished by the talent agency behind their success would be a tall ask, although two of the members did.

As for 7-Eleven, they are positioning themselves close to the idol group, so close that the model with most authority – signified by the gaze of all the other members – is holding a bottle with their brand on it. They want to be associated with the popular boy band and their fans, and the happy and warm atmosphere that the Christmas season brings. The table full of food signifies abundance, and that is the visual

message they wish to convey to their customers: they will find these and much more from 7-Eleven to fill their own party tables. Since King & Prince chose to promote them, the 7-Eleven brand became more recognisable not only among their fans, but other Japanese people as well. Pop culture icons such as these idols tend to be well known among people.

Looking at the text in the top left corner, we can read the sentence “Happy Home Christmas” followed by “7-Eleven x King & Prince” below it in small print. English is not well understood within Japanese society, and it is perhaps most apparent from the various advertisements where the text is written incorrectly, or when there is no discernible message or context. In this instance, the words happy, home, and Christmas are likely the attributes they wish to project to the viewer, but chained together the way they are, it sounds confusing to a native English speaker. Despite Japanese people having accepted the use of English in advertisements, they see it mostly as part of a marketing strategy aimed at the local customer (Holmquist & Cudmore 2013, 89-90).

Of the categories of Erving Goffman, Relative size and Ritualization of subordination seem to be the most apparent. We can see that although the man wearing a red shirt on the far left is sitting on the sofa, his size is larger due to his close proximity to the camera. He is established as the center of attention in this picture, corroborated by the fact that everyone is looking at him attentively. The man sitting on the backrest in the back is taller, but he is bending forward slightly, as if he is honouring the central figure in the front. The same is true for the man leaning on the backrest in the back: he is taller, but his screen space is a lot smaller due to his lowered posture. The other two models sitting on the couch are further away from the camera, which already places them in a lower status, which could be why they do not need to lower their posture significantly. We can also consider Feminine touch, except in this instance we would have to utilise a queer frame of reference.

Overall, this display reflects the wider scale segregated pastime activities of the youth. Flipping the sex would break norms. Seeing a group of women wearing male coded clothing would be a radical representation. It is also uncommon to see women leaning or sitting on the backrest, as that is considered to be male behaviour.

Further, lifting a bottle with one hand would be considered atypical behaviour for a woman, as that would signify strength – a trait commonly retained to men in heteronormative settings. However, with female models we would likely see them positioned and represented differently by the advertisers.

# 9 Lumine Christmas campaign 2020: unchallenging the status quo

We are greeted by a close-up shot of a person who looks directly towards the camera (Banner Library 2025c). Her squinted eyes are accompanied with a large open mouth, though the teeth are closed. The grand smile on her face reveals her upper gumline, which is usually hidden behind the lips of a closed mouth. Her dark hair is messy, and apart from the applied lipstick, she does not seem to have much make up on; her natural facial features are visible in detail.

The background is solid red, which matches the colour of her sweater and lipstick. A pair of what look like pearl necklaces can be spotted around her neck, and she does have earrings, but they are less visible behind her hair. Under her sweater, a collared shirt with red and white stripes is perceivable. The text reads “Let’s praise ourselves” in Japanese at the top, along with “Merry good job! Lumine Christmas 2020” in English at the bottom. There is a pair of warm winter gloves to the right side of the picture, which appear to be clapping.

This picture is part of a large advertising campaign by Lumine (stylized as LUMINE), a group of train station style multi-storied shopping centres in Tokyo, which primarily contain clothing stores. This picture, along with five others, circulated Lumine shopping centres in various formats, along with digital versions posted to websites and social media. It was chosen for this analysis due to its seemingly wide-spread circulation over the other versions. It was even displayed on a banner outside Shinjuku train station. (Party 2020.) The year 2020 was the first full year of the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused people all around the world to socially distance themselves

from others to prevent spreading the disease. Against this backdrop, the campaign is praising Japanese people for surviving through the tough times, which the clapping winter gloves further emphasize.

The messy hair of the model, combined with the comically large grin gives a very comedic tone to the advertisement. It looks as if she had gone through hell and back through-out the year (or woke up with bed hair in the morning), yet despite all the hardships, she manages to stand unfazed and even throw an over-the-top smile. This is not a typical representation of Japanese women, who are often depicted more delicate than this. For example, the stereotypical Japanese woman tends to cover her mouth while opening it wide, and although her teeth are closed, we can find another example of a woman with her mouth wide open without covering it from one of the other pictures used in this campaign (Party 2020). However, due to these depictions being more common in Japanese slap stick comedy TV-shows, perhaps the creators of this campaign wanted to give it that kind of similar feeling.

One of the companies who worked on the marketing campaign for Lumine, Party, have a website showcasing the entire campaign in English. They do not directly mention the COVID-19 pandemic anywhere, likely due to its negative connotations, instead referring to “unexpected and drastic changes in the lives of all people”. This is despite having produced, in their words, a film where 24 women tell how they “optimistically spent their days full of changes in flying colors” and interviewing 50 women about their quarantine experiences for this campaign. They claim the campaign was created so that people can give each other the gift of “good job”. (Party 2020.)

Based on the imagery displayed on the Party website, the target group of this campaign would appear to be young women as they are most represented, and because clothing is more commonly in the interests of women in the heteronormative scheme (Party 2020). The other posters suggest that diversity was considered when choosing the models, although primary focus and visibility seems to be given to models who were rendered “Japanese” by the marketing firms. As for why the picture with the big smile was chosen to be the central image, we can only speculate. It could be that the advertisers wanted to echo this overly positive image to Japanese people,

hoping it would catch their eye and produce positive reactions, or maybe they thought this one was the most appropriate for mass spreading, suggesting that the others were somehow lacking.

It is also curious, that during a time of an on-going pandemic, no one is displayed wearing a mask. Japanese people are, after all, diligent mask users, before, during, and after the pandemic (Murakami 2023, 2-3; 8). It is likely that during the pandemic, mask wearing became symbolic of COVID-19, which might explain why this campaign did not include them. The construction of a positive, customer praising Christmas campaign requires the erasure of negativity, even at a time when mask wearing was and continued to be the norm for many. This suggests the advertisers wanted to offer people something positive to look at and congratulate them for putting up with harsh social restrictions.

Returning back to the main poster of this analysis, we can tell our model is feminine due to the bright lipstick and jewellery she is wearing. Her representation is slightly atypical, but she nonetheless conforms to the heteronormative idea of what a woman is supposed to look like. Her clothing appears feminine with the bright red colour scheme. Finally, further emphasizing this point, if we were to swap the sex of the model, we would end up with a male model with many feminine traits, which would give us grounds to look at this picture from drag and queer perspectives – a feminine male model at the center stage would be a rare sight.

The choice of shooting in close-up style makes the picture very intimate and brings the facial features of the model to our face; her white teeth framed by red lips are unavoidable, as they are almost dead center of the image. There is nothing that would suggest a queer or drag outlook, since there is very little information here. Likewise, the categories of Erving Goffman offer us no grounds for further gender normative categorisation.

Lumine is using the Christmas season to bring a sense of happiness and relief with this “praise the customer” campaign, which admittedly may have been a breath of fresh air for many. The clothes in the posters may be an attempt at selling potential

customers the idea that Lumine should be their one stop shop for all of their fashion needs, and they are putting a lot of effort into this public image campaign to attract them. At the same time, they wish to send a message of support for those who were struggling and show that they care about the well-being of their customers. The only real symbols relating to Christmas are the clapping winter gloves, Christmas colours like red and green, and the use of words like “merry” and “Christmas”. Interestingly, both words get always separated by the “good job” phrase, which one can only assume to be caused by the fact that the society sees the use of English more as a marketing tool. “Merry good job” is an incorrect use of the language, but amusing for the English speaking foreigner, who consequently were not allowed entry into the country at the time (Vogt & Quin 2022, 247-250).

In the end, the marketing picture in focus here is inconsequential in terms of how much it breaks societal norms. It looks goofy, but almost every other aspect supports the status quo of how women should look within the society. Looking at it together with the other posters makes it stand out with its bright red colour scheme. The inclusion of models from different ethnic groups does make the set look more diverse, but considering the campaign primarily focused on imagery deemed “Japanese”, it undermines the message of progressive diversity.

## 10 Asahi draft beer: equality behind a Santa mask

Four floating heads and hands holding a beer can introduce us to the fourth advertisement, produced by Asahi, a Japanese beer brewing company (Banner Library 2025d). The heads wear Santa hats, together with white beards, which only cover the neck and chin. All have what looks to be foam from the beer cans above their upper lips, which makes it seem like they are wearing fake moustaches. The two heads at the bottom look like they are toasting their cans.

The background is red, with the center having a brighter shade than the borders of the image. Sparkles and shimmer are spread everywhere behind the heads, which are at the front stage. At the very front we have text in Japanese; “Cheers to Christmas with foam” at the top, and “Merry Christmas! With a can of draft beer.” At the bottom, along with the Asahi logo and “super dry draft beer” in smaller font in the lower right corner. Finally, there is a note at the very bottom telling people to not drink under the age of 20 or drunk drive.

As the beards and Christmas hats cover parts of the face and the top of their heads, the sex and gender of these models becomes difficult to assess. There are traits that can be interpreted as feminine or masculine from the faces of the actors, but these are very subtle. Such traits include things like hair length and the size and shape of their facial features. The beard is fake, as the strings attached to the back of their ears are visible, which the foam moustache complements. This creates the mental image of a costume-based Christmas party among adults.

Both the hat and beard are markers of masculinity, because they are the trademark icons of Santa Claus, who more often than not is portrayed as an old happy man who brings presents to children all around the world. It would be questionable, then, that such a man would proceed to promote draft beer, even going as far as to enjoying one himself. Instead, the advertisers have opted to using actors presumably over their 20s and made them goof around with beer in their Santa get-up, which the foam resembling a moustache depicts. The display thus parodies Santa Claus.

The foam over the lips of the actors attempts to place Asahi draft beer as part of the iconic public visage of Santa Claus, which produces a humorous tone. Santa Claus typically does not wear a moustache, but a full blown bushy beard, which together with the sudden appearance of the moustache might explain the surprised expressions on the faces of the actors. A moustache more closely resembles Colonel Sanders, who is often dressed as Santa Claus around Christmas time in Japan, so there is a good chance that the advertisers were instead attempting to recreate him (Springer 2022).

What is interesting here is that all of the actors are represented as equals. No one is placed to the very center, nor is one given higher authority over the other, although the beer cans are ominously gathered around the central region. Further, nobody is focusing on the situation at hand, as they are all disoriented, likely due to the ongoing hilarity of the beer foam moustache. This gives room for the category of Licenced withdrawal, due to the psychological disconnect from the social situation. However, unless all models are female, this representation subverts the typical gender role hierarchy set by Goffman. Each model is allowed the same space in the frame, and they are all expressing themselves in a similar fashion. The ambiguity of the sex of each model makes it irrelevant how many men or women there are, since they are all rendered masculine through the Santa Claus outfit. This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that no other body parts are visible, other than the hands. There are no visible decorations or ornaments either.

Unlike the “Merry Good Job” campaign by Lumine, this advertisement leaves the analysis of sex and gender of the models up to the viewer. There are no specific feminine or masculine elements that would suggest any given actor is male or female, as they are subtle and up to the interpretation of the viewer. Furthermore, they are all masked behind Santa Claus costumes, which would force any viewer to look past a wall of masculinity. In my personal opinion, only the models on the right side can be classified as male or female, the rest are too ambiguous to know for certain. Swapping the sex of the models on the right does not significantly change the current arrangement, as they would simply swap places. Even if we swapped the sex of only one of the models, we would still have to interpret them through the Santa Claus mask, which is not straightforward.

Asahi wishes young adults of drinking age would consider their draft beer for their Christmas parties. As there are no interpretable sex or gender based target groups, they are targeting everyone of drinking age who might join a party around Christmas. The fact that the foam moustache creates a likeness to Christmas Colonel Sanders would suggest that Asahi is aware of Japanese Christmas traditions, and the popularity of KFC around the time period. Even if they were not and this was an accident, viewers might notice the similarity. This could encourage people to buy Asahi beer with their KFC around Christmas.

Whether intentional or not, this advertisement does not maintain stereotypical gender roles intended for men and women. In fact, it is not straightforward who is a man or a woman in the first place. Each model is represented in equal standing to each other, and there are no exaggerated male or female signifiers, such as large physical stature or subservience to someone in a position of authority. Everyone is masked behind a Santa outfit, which renders all models masculine to an extent. Combined with potential Colonel Sanders likeness, Asahi positions their draft beer as the default beverage for Christmas parties. The influence of KFC within Japanese society during Christmas is so strong that other brands seem to lean against them to market their own products. This lays an interesting foundation to analyse the final advertisement.

## 11 FamilyMart fried chicken: second best chicken on a heteronormative plate

The final advertisement portrays three characters in a Christmas themed setting (FamilyMart 2021). Starting from the left, we have Santa Claus in his familiar outfit holding a piece of fried chicken in his right hand, while doing a peace sign with his left. In the center, we have an adult man doing the same, except he is holding a different fried chicken product. The same continues with the woman on the right, who likewise is holding a different fried chicken product. The man in the middle wears a red sweater and has a very confident smile on his face. The woman on the other hand wears a Santa hat, together with a Christmas themed dress. Her smile is bright and much softer than the man in the middle. Similarly, the Santa Claus on the left shares a softer and kinder expression on his face.

The background of the image is covered by a shining red curtain with glimmering lights everywhere. The text in Japanese at the top reads “Famima (short for FamilyMart) is Japan’s second most famous fried chicken shop!”. On a green stamp below, it reads “Number one is that other famous fried chicken restaurant!”. To the left of the picture, a box with Christmas decorations hanging from its top side can be

found, with the text “Famima’s Christmas is too tasty”. Above the box there is a plate of fried chicken along with what appears to be seasoning.

According to the FamilyMart website covering this Christmas campaign, the two models featured in this picture are Tamaki Hiroshi and Yagi Rikako, who are both established celebrity actors (Oricon 2024, IMDb 2025). 2021 marked the 40th anniversary since the establishment of FamilyMart, so to celebrate, FamilyMart retailed fried chicken with 18 different spices, which according to them, is the highest amount in FamilyMart history. (FamilyMart 2021.)

FamilyMart also conducted a survey asking 5000 people aged between 15-69 what store/restaurant comes to mind when it comes to fried chicken. They additionally asked what store/restaurant they are reminded of when thinking about tasty fried chicken. Apparently 40.1 % and 24 % of Japanese people responded with FamilyMart to the first and second question respectively, putting the convenience store chain in second place in both instances. They further claim that they take the number one spot in the convenience store category. These results should be taken with certain reservations, as the survey was conducted by the marketing firm Intage at the request of FamilyMart, and because the full survey results are not publicly available. (FamilyMart 2021.)

Against this backdrop, we can see that FamilyMart is taking everything out of the survey results they have reported on the campaign website. They know they cannot compete against the number one chicken restaurant (presumably KFC), so they commit to their second place to market themselves as the second-best choice. They have intentionally left the number one store/restaurant unnamed, to limit its visibility in their marketing campaign, only referring to them as “the fast-food restaurant that specializes in fried chicken” (FamilyMart 2021). FamilyMart is positioning themselves superior to all other convenience store brands, at least when it comes to fried chicken. Thus, the peace sign that all the models in the advertisement are displaying gets attached with a secondary meaning: the two fingers solidify their second position in the outcome of the survey. The chicken they hold in the other hand is almost parallel to the peace sign, which signifies their relation to one another.

Out of all the models, the man in the center looks more confident than the rest and is therefore taking authority in this setting. We can also see that he is slightly taller, which we can interpret as a continuation of the Relative size category. Otherwise, we can see that a balance between all models is attempted, as they are positioned side by side. However, Santa Claus and Yaga Rikako both wear a Santa hat, whereas Tamaki Hiroshi does not. We can interpret this as an act of masculinity preservation, as making him wear a Santa hat would soften his serious and confident outlook, which is in stark contrast to that of the Santa Claus figure. Men are typically not expected to wear costumes either, so this might also be the case. Further, by looking at the second picture on the campaign website of FamilyMart, we can see the Christmas themed dress of Yaga Rikako in full display. This renders her display thoroughly feminine, despite wearing a Santa hat. Her soft smile, long dark hair, and slender figure continues bolstering the heteronormative narrative of how women should behave and look. (FamilyMart 2021.)

The Santa Claus in this advertisement likely serves an auxiliary role, as he is casted off to the left side of the picture. He is also pushed all the way back, as Yaga Rikako and Tamaki Hiroshi take higher layered positions, which is most apparent from his peace sign being the most obstructed. It is possible that he is only there to strengthen the image of Christmas in the minds of the viewers, and to balance the confidence of Tamaki Hiroshi with more softness. He is also committing to his role of an old man in the heteronormative setting, who no longer needs to prove his masculinity as he has become frail.

Switching the sex of the actors turns the picture quite interesting. Instead of Santa Claus, we would have an older woman (the wife of Santa Claus?) who would manifest the entire event of Christmas into her character, a stern and confident woman in male-coded clothing in the middle, and a vibrant, soft-smiling young man in a Christmas dress. The positions of the models within this new display are also interesting, as despite a woman now being positioned in the center, masculinity would still be considered to reside with the most authority and visibility, whilst the softer feminine man is casted off to the side, though still existing in the front-most layer. The replacement for Santa Claus would still retain her auxiliary role, but we would look at this

Christmas arrangement from a feminine lens. A good question to ask is if the new personification of Christmas would still wear a Santa outfit or something else.

FamilyMart is sending a soft, Christmas spirited message to their customers. If you cannot go to KFC, or if one is not nearby, FamilyMart chicken is a solid secondary option. Men and women, young and old, are equally targeted, but they are still applying the heteronormative narrative to their representations of them. Displaying men and women in such a narrow way can be harmful and could make people not fitting into those displays feel left out. For a country like Japan, however, heteronormative displays seem to be par for the course in advertising.

Regardless of the bias found in the survey requested by FamilyMart, we can assess that FamilyMart is indeed a well-established convenience store chain in Japan, and they have a well-recognised brand of fried chicken that people buy during Christmas. However, even if we take their claims as the truth, there are likely areas where their chicken is less popular than the competition due to reasons pertaining to personal taste and the local area. Considering that they received only 24 % favourable responses to the second question in the survey, there is a lot of room for other brands to close in to the result of FamilyMart. We can only speculate how accurately this survey represents the thoughts of Japanese people pertaining to fried chicken, since FamilyMart has only shared a fraction of the results.

# 12 Findings

Based on the analyses conducted, we can interpret that heteronormativity in Japanese Christmas advertisements is common, as four out of five advertisements depicted such representations one way or the other. Only the draft beer advertisement by Asahi stands out, because the floating heads in Santa hats and beards mask all models behind a mask of masculinity. Each of the four advertisements with heteronormative depictions utilises a different method, however: the first establishes a standard for men and women who are on friendly terms; the second reproduces the

gender segregated image of partying young men; the third provides a bit of diversity in the other campaign posters, but conforms to heteronormativity by establishing a “Japanese” priority model, where the most feminine woman receives most visibility; and the fifth display uses heteronormative gender roles to construct a stereotypical setting for the authoritative man and the soft smiling young woman, similar to the first advertisement.

Humor was a common element used to portray the characters in these advertisements, likely to invoke positive impressions among viewers and potential customers through a hyperbolic representation. The Lumine and FamilyMart Christmas campaigns are the prime examples of this: the former connecting the surviving of CoViD-19 pandemic to the messy hair and overly positive expression on the face of the female model, the latter using the devastation of being unable to take first place (which would likely be a tall ask in the first place) in the survey to bolster their second positioning.

Switching the sex provided interesting results, when the display was undoubtedly heteronormative. Suddenly the man and woman were found in positions they would otherwise not be in. However, one thing often remained the same, and that is the position of the masculine and the feminine. Despite the male actor switching to a female one, the new display would still maintain that the masculine actor (a female model in this case) should be the one to have the most authority and visibility. I believe this proves the heteronormative nature of these advertisements, as originally the masculine actor was male.

The only instance where a queer cue could potentially be interpreted was in the 7-Eleven x King & Prince advertisement, where one of the boy band members held his arm on the shoulder of the other. It is up to the viewer to decide what meanings this subtle act contains, and therefore it is too difficult to make any firm conclusions. Additional context could be attainable from further investigation into the fan culture of King & Prince.

A theme that rose up among these adverts is the focus on Christmas parties, which are particularly popular among young people during Christmas. 7-Eleven, Asahi and FamilyMart all have a stake in the Christmas party table, and they want to be present. Additionally, Asahi and FamilyMart suggested a reliance to KFC in their advertisements, which is the leading fried chicken fast food restaurant. Fried chicken is popular during Christmas time in Japan, and convenience stores want a piece of that pie. They cannot directly compete against the multinational brand, but they can try to position themselves as number two, as FamilyMart established in their advertising campaign.

Another theme is the use of famous celebrities like idol groups, models or actors. Japanese people could recognise them and choose one brand or store over the competition, if the model they like/trust is seen advocating for one. The convenience stores usually accompany advertising campaigns with supplementary items themed around the collaborating group, which the customer can either buy or win through a game or raffle.

Heteronormativity was also used as a method of targeting advertising to one or both sexes in the binary gender context. 7-Eleven x King & Prince, for example, targeted young groups of men, and while an argument could also be made for fans of King & Prince, the display of five men is directly borrowing from the stereotypical way young Japanese people spend time in their reference groups, and this advertisement echoes that narrative. This is to say that King & Prince could maintain the notion that men should continue spending time with other men, and depending on how large the female audience of King & Prince was at the time, could further convince men who are willing to objectify themselves in front of the female gaze that they are attractive to women that way.

These results do not in any way directly correlate to the Japanese society, as the sample size of five is far too small for that purpose. Likewise, these findings do not reflect the Japanese society at large. What they do suggest, however, is that there is a clear pattern of heteronormative representation in the Japanese Christmas advertisements that were analysed. To find out how widespread this behaviour is, it would require a wider range of samples, preferably outside the Christmas setting as well. In

other words, further research is needed to see how common such a way of representation is, and to understand the quirks and alternate portrayals of the models used in advertising.

# 13 Conclusions

Gender and sexuality are complicated concepts that will never be static. The binary heterosexual frame limits our understanding of them and serves only to maintain the heteronormative power structures within our societies. In reality, heterosexuality is only one form of sexuality, and all societies, in some ways, bolster and maintain its dominance at the expense of others. With the case of Japan, marriage being only available to heterosexual couples means that the only recognised way to be in a relationship as far as the state is concerned is the heterosexual one. Additionally, there are often benefits to getting married, so the government seems to hope Japanese people enter heterosexual relationships and have babies (Tebiki 2022). Their wish is tied to the low birthrates Japan has been experiencing, and despite marriage not being a prerequisite for having children, many in Japan still seem to think it is (Yamaguchi 2024).

Christmas as a religious event has slowly lost its religious ties over the centuries, and relatively recently, it has become a commercial event in many countries. In Japan, Christmas has had some ties to its Christian roots, but after the end of World War II, these ties have significantly evaporated, which ties into the modern economic development that got kickstarted by American influence and support. The image of Christmas is likely superficial in the minds of many Japanese people, which would explain the stark difference in Christmas traditions and the way they celebrate it, but such claims would require confirmation with further research. What we can say, however, is that Christmas parties with strawberry cakes and fried chicken are unlikely to go away.

Alternate ways to express gender exist in Japan, but they appear to be designated to specific spaces like competitions or cosplay events. Being a conservative country, Japan still struggles with the idea that women can be leaders and men can care for children at home. It is then perhaps par for the course that specific gender roles exist depending on what sex you were assigned at birth, even if the individual disagrees. In a community centered society like Japan, individuals may be required to make sacrifices in order to not rock the boat and appease the public.

With the advert analyses that have been produced, I hope to have been able to provide an account of heteronormativity that could help companies and individuals to look out for potentially harmful representations of men and women. Nothing dictates that men should be powerful and in leadership positions, nor should women conform to subservience or accept their weakness, but they are nonetheless commonly depicted in such a way, even if it seems subtle at first glance. Although swapping the sex of the models often provided interesting results, my interpretations of the display should not be taken as the one and only answer, as they would vary by person. My interpretation of a woman portraying masculinity could become an empowered feminine woman who shatters the norms in the interpretation of another person. As such, I would first and foremost suggest looking at and creating an individual in the mind of oneself, before adding the flavouring of gender, because by assuming a gender by default, we are applying a gender based bias, which Judith Butler themself deemed does not pre-exist.

To address the issues of patriarchal culture in Japan, it would require more widespread awareness of the concept itself before any change could theoretically take place. This is difficult to achieve, because Japanese people tend to reject any form of negativity, and historically, have regularly rejected ideas they deem unfit for their culture and society. Unbiased, truthful teaching about the imperial history of Japan to the younger generations would help, but as long as Japanese learning institutions are led by men by an overwhelming majority, who censor out key details such as the issue of comfort girls/women from textbooks, it would seem unlikely that such a drastic change could take place. However, there are signs of change, and it would seem Japanese people – women especially – are willing to fight for their rights in the right circumstances (BBC 2021).

When change becomes more and more inevitable, those who resist it will start resisting it even stronger than before. The fact that discrimination against minority groups has become increasingly more acceptable in Western societies correlates with the increased demand for the recognition of their rights. With the case of gender equality, both men and women seem to have drastically differing views on who is in an unequal position within the society and the polarity in political views between them has become a true issue in democratic societies where the majority vote counts. Many men who used to follow the liberal agenda seem to have abandoned it in favour of a more conservative approach, which has been touted by the likes of Andrew Tate and Donald Trump.

However, Andrew Tate and Donald Trump represent a time that has already passed. Their views on domestic abuse or abortion for example are relics that the majority of people should reject. That did not stop them from selling young inexperienced men the idea of a patriarchal culture where men have all the power and authority, and those who take their doctrine to heart will find out the hard way that the world does not work that way anymore.

The neoliberal governments have failed to improve living conditions for those in lower hierarchal positions within our societies. At the same time, wealthy people have continued becoming wealthier than ever before. This unequal distribution of wealth, I believe, along with the deepened rift in identity questions among men and women has increased polarity and caused the status of the privileged white Western man to be threatened. In retaliation, these men seek out circles where their cries for help are met with populistic promises of a return to a time where the man is the leader once again. (Nuuttila 2024.)

It is important for everyone to start naming the issues of the patriarchal culture, and to systematically reject it. As bell hooks highlights in *The Will To Change* (2020), it is harmful to not only women, but everyone involved, including men. The select few who receive the mythical power they were promised are left broken, expected to live an emotionless life in perpetuity, having to defend their position in the power hierarchy. The sooner men realise the grift they are being sold, the sooner they can start working on healing and building a better, fulfilling life.

I highly recommend everyone to read this book by bell hooks, and her other works as well. It describes the struggles the feminist movement experienced in the late 1900s and goes into great detail how the patriarchy impacts our daily lives, using her own personal life experiences as a point of reference. Shaun, a YouTube video essayist and Twitch streamer, made a video about her book and Andrew Tate. In it, he asked his Twitter followers what they thought was positive masculinity in their opinion and received numerous responses of what they perceived to be good men. He then talks about his father, who he deems to be an example of positive masculinity. Despite him being a very masculine man, his father never imposed his lifestyle or way of being on to other people. Shaun describes him as a man who is “content with his existence” to the point that he can “leave room for other ways of being”. To Shaun, positive masculinity does not “claim its descriptors”. By that he means it recognises concepts such as strength and power to not be the inherent rights of men, but practicable by other groups of people as well. (Shaun 2023.)

The concept of who and what is considered male or female and masculine or feminine is everchanging. I believe we are ready to free ourselves from the shackles of the patriarchy, which demands men extinguish their self-worth and subject themselves to immense mental abuse – to which women often fall victim to – but we need to be able to name the system and call it out. Men also need to allow the concept of manhood to change and accept that masculinity is more than an inherent aspect of being a man. This does not mean that there is something wrong with masculine men. Men have a place in all of our lives, but they should recognise and accept other ways of being as well. Denying their existence is pointless and only serves to continue the physical and mental abuse experienced by both the accuser and the accused. A variety of gendered expression has existed for as long as humans have, and they will continue to, whether they are recognised by others or not. By being kinder to our fellow species and recognising their basic needs, we can build new relationships, communities and networks, which can lead to new ideas, opportunities, and better life for us all.

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# An account of celebrating New Year in Japan

As part of my exchange studies at Josai International University in 2022-2023, I spent an academic year living in Japan and had the opportunity to experience a traditional New Year at the family home of a Japanese student in Fukushima prefecture. Considering the context matter, providing this personal anecdote of New Year traditions offers an interesting angle to look at Western Christmas traditions.

I travelled to a train station in Tokyo on the 30th of December 2022, where the student and their parent would pick me up. We then drove to the house belonging to the grandparents of the student, stopping at the convenience store on the way to buy drinks and water for the New Year. When we arrived, I made sure to arrange my shoes neatly at the *genkan*, otherwise known as the entrance of the house in Japanese, as that is the tradition, especially when visiting strangers. I then handed over my gift to the grandparents, using an old expression roughly translating to “This is a boring gift, but please accept it”. Gift-giving is also a conventional Japanese act, and it is expected in situations like this, though perhaps those who are viewed as foreigners are cut some slack.

As soon as we arrived, the grandmother placed *kagami-mochi* on the small Shinto shrine they had at home known as *kamidana*. *Kagami-mochi* consists of two rice cakes, one big and one small, stacked on top of each other, and a small orange coloured fruit akin to mandarin called *daidai*, which is placed on top. It is meant to act as an offering to attract the *Toshigami*, a Shinto spirit of the New Year. On January 11th, the hardened kagami-mochi is shattered and eaten.

I was then seated at the dining table, where I would spend most of my time throughout the New Year, as the event is commonly dedicated to resting. We ate sandwiches with different types of filling, the grandmother encouraging me to eat more than I could. This is often considered good hospitality in Japan, and she told me later that I could refuse if I needed to.

A large television was mounted on the wall above one end of the table, where everyone could watch it easily and comfortably. During the New Year, a popular gameshow is commonly watched: Japanese celebrities play specific roles and answer questions by opening doors to a room with the letter of their answer, where they all sit in until the host opens the door, revealing the correct answer. The annual university relay marathon known as *ekiden*, where students from 20 universities compete against each other in Tokyo, airs on the second and third of January, and is also commonly watched.

Throughout my stay, I collected a list of words that I will now share below, with short descriptions:

**門松, Kadomatsu**: A type of decoration placed at the entrance of homes, businesses and temples. Many variations exist, with the combination of pine branches and three large bamboos being the most common. Attracts the Toshigami.

**しめ飾り, Shimekazari**: A small decoration placed at the entrance of houses and businesses. Wards off evil and attracts the Toshigami. Shares a similarity to the Western Christmas wreath.

**福袋, Fukubukuro**: A lucky bag sold at stores before and during the New Year. Its contents are random, and merchants usually offer them at a deep discount.

**お雑煮, Ozōni**: A Japanese soup containing rice cakes. Associated with the New Year and Osechi foods. Preparations differ depending on the region and household.

**福笑い, Fukuwarai**: A game played during the New Year, which is aimed at children. Players attempt to place facial features, such as the nose, eyes, mouth and eyebrows on a face printed on a piece of paper while blindfolded.

**お年玉, Otoshidama**: A custom where adult relatives give money to children on the day of the New Year. Handed out in small, decorated envelopes, sometimes made of origami.

**破魔矢, Hamaya**: A type of arrow sold at temples and shrines with a blunt tip. Acts as a talisman to ward off evil during the New Year. Often paired with a bow called *hamayumi*.

**初詣, Hatsumōde**: A tradition of visiting a shrine or a temple for the first time during the New Year. It is meant to bring a fresh start to the new year. Lucky charms and amulets are sold at temples and shrines, and visitors make wishes for the new year.

**年越しそば, Toshikoshi soba**: A bowl of noodles usually eaten on the eve of the New Year. It is customary to let go of the hardships of the year by eating

toshikoshi soba, because soba noodles cut easily. The long noodles also represent long life, and the buckwheat they are made out of can survive harsh climates during its growth, which is why soba is associated with strength and resilience.

**おせち料理, Osechiryōri**: Traditional Japanese New Year foods with numerous symbolic and cultural values. Eaten from a box similar to *bentō*.

**イカ人参, Ikaninjin**: Traditional New Year food eaten in Fukushima, consisting of thinly sliced carrot and squid. Boiled in soy sauce and sake. Different regions have their own special New Year foods.

The next day, on the eve of the New Year, the relatives of the Japanese student came over to spend the New Year with us. We talked about various topics and played *karuta*, a Japanese card game originally brought to Japan by Portuguese traders in the 1500s, which is where the name originates from. We took turns to flip cards and see if we could get a matching pair. The one with most pairs won, and I believe I managed to do it once. It was almost exactly like a competitive memory game, but I assume we changed the rules a little to make it easier. At some point we went shopping for food, and we stopped at a department store on the way. There, I saw *fukubukuro*, which I first assumed contained random clothes, as *fuku* can also mean clothes in Japanese. I only realised my misunderstanding on the way back, so I could not unfortunately experience opening one myself. At least I saw many *kadomatsu* and *shimekazari*.

Then we ate *toshikoshi soba* and watched the game show from the television. We intended to visit the temple as soon as the year changed, but due to the relatives enjoying too much alcohol, we decided to go the next day, early in the morning.

On the day of the New Year, we performed *hatsumōde* by visiting the Buddhist temple closest to the home of the grandparents. By the entrance we saw beautiful *kadomatsu*, and inside they had a booth where they sold good luck charms, New Year fortunes, and *hamaya*. They also had a pot in the middle of the path leading to the temple, where people could leave incense sticks and bathe their heads in smoke, which is said to remove pain and make people more intelligent.

Before leaving, the family bought me a charm and a fortune. I no longer remember the contents of the fortune, which were kindly translated to me by the student, but it

was “small luck” fortune. Unfortunately, from what I can remember, it sounded like my upcoming year would be an uphill battle.

Back home, preparations for the New Year dinner began. The grandmother prepared *Ozōni*, while the rest of the relatives prepared steak, *Osechiryōri*, *Ikaninjin*, etc. The *Ozōni* in that household only contained vegetables, along with the mochi rice cakes and *nori*, also known as edible seaweed. After eating, *Otoshidama* was given to the younger people of the family, and somehow that also included me, even though I was there only as a guest. It was not a small amount of money either, so I was very surprised. The rest of the day was spent playing traditional Japanese games like *fukuwarai*, where I failed miserably. We also watched the television and rested – some of us even took a nap.

The next day, on January second, we watched the university marathon from the television while eating breakfast, before going to the *onsen*, or Japanese hot springs for a relaxing bath. It was a large complex, containing a restaurant and a game center as well, so we spent most of the day there. The cousin of the student foolishly attempted to challenge me into a sauna competition without telling me, which ended up backfiring for him, as he spent the rest of the day with a horrible headache. Before returning, we admired the beach and the ocean next to the *onsen*, which was located on the edge of the east coast of Japan. The Pacific Ocean was a great sight for the eyes.

On January third, I returned back to my home in Togane city, but before doing so, we ate the final breakfast. I received very positive feedback for my behaviour, which in the words of the grandmother, was almost Japanese, and she offered me some very precious parting gifts. I thanked them deeply for their hospitality, and on the way back, I got a little emotional in the car. I never could have anticipated that my time at the home of the student’s grandparents could become such a rewarding experience, both culturally and in terms of my personal development. I will always remember this lovely family who momentarily accepted me as part of their family without hesitation, despite never having met me before.