Abstract

Construction of a Desirable Father Image in Modern Japan: The Creation and Acceptance of a "Father" Discourse in Japanese Media

The purpose of this study is to understand the processes behind the construction and normalization of the discourse on a desirable father image in modern society. I examine the processes of production, representation, and normalization of the socially desirable image of a father, how it became incorporated into the identities of many people, and its underlying factors.

Chapter 1 describes the social, economic, and cultural background relating to this study. The rising social pressure to have children, the transformation of the media environment and parenting community, and social attention toward the family as a subject can be attributed to the social issue of sub-replacement fertility. With these factors in mind, and using the concept of the "Circuit of Culture," I examine the formation of the "new father," one that is deemed desirable in modern society, through the analysis of social media and print media.

In Chapter 4, which follows the review of previous studies (Chapter 2), the research perspective, and the method chosen for analysis (Chapter 3), I analyze the historical changes in the desirable father image in print media. Until the 1980s, the media's attention was centered on interviews with celebrities, in which they talked about the "father" as an abstract or idealistic concept, as well as on gossip based on their secretly photographed family events, but since the end of the 1990s, there have been more opportunities for celebrities to talk about their real-time experiences. A public relations campaign conducted by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare in 1999 to promote parental involvement, with the slogan "A man who is not involved in childcare cannot be called a father," had a significant impact. Many men began to talk publicly about parenting after the Ikumen Project was launched in 2010. As the previous studies indicate, the opinion

that "fathers should be involved in parenting in order to save the family from a crisis" started to emerge in the 1970s, but following the 1999 campaign the socially desirable image of a father began to be discussed amid the search for a solution to the social issue of a declining birthrate.

In Chapter 5, I analyze the new magazines for fathers that have been published since 2005. Such magazines filled men's private sphere with information about enjoying housework and childcare—viewed as a mothers' job until then—and with information on how to enjoy a holiday with the family, as well as holiday fashion ideas. Some of the new magazines intended for fathers positioned Western fathers as role models in the beginning, but as awareness spread and increased, Japan's unique editorial policies took over, and they began to favor practical content. The depicted and normalized father image showed qualities of a person who "saves the family from a crisis," "considers familial ties sacred and important," "can combine work and family," and "enjoys the chores associated with parenting." A large part of this overlaps with the father image favored in Hollywood movies.

In Chapter 6, I focus on the popularity of the subject of "the family" on social media and analyze celebrity blogs. Many of the father images favored in these blogs possess qualities that match those mentioned above. Furthermore, until the 1990s, news stories about celebrities' families consisted of gossip and rumor, but with the spread of social media, celebrities began personally announcing pregnancies and childbirths to society in a format resembling a business letter. The attention given to the subject of "the family" enabled these announcements to be regarded as news.

In the final chapter, I summarize the processes behind the creation of a socially desirable father image based on political purposes, as well as its popularization after the involvement of the media, consumption by the people, internalization by some fathers as their identity, and adoption as a social norm. I also establish the divergence between the ideal and real lives of Japanese fathers and the possibility of reforming the "public" and "private" spheres.