

A Word to the Wives

The Middle-Aged Japanese Male: What's To Be Done?

Note to the English edition: The Japanese word “*dasai*” can mean tacky, uncool, dorky, lame, unsophisticated, provincial, in bad taste—basically, “to suck.”

New Hope for One of the Human Menagerie's Most Maligned Species

“Less than scintillating.”

“Depressingly predictable.”

“I certainly wouldn't want to marry one.”

From the sound of things, the Friars could be having their annual roast. But it's not some Hollywood celebrity crackling over the coals. Instead, it's half the population of Japan.

“Are Japanese men *dasai*?” That's the question we put to our panel of foreign women, five veterans of Japan with fluent Japanese language capabilities, a combined total of more than eighty-five years of residence and, most important, a professed goodwill toward the Japanese. Since all work with Japanese men, they asked to remain anonymous. In return, they agreed to pull no punches in their assessment.

Which, as you can see, was less than favorable. All criticism, of course, was based on a constructive premise: What can their better halves do to help?

The problem has nothing to do with physical features; small penises or short legs were not brought up once. In fact, it had little to do with the “*dasai*” we had in mind. Our panelists had their own ideas on the subject, and were not about to be steered in any other direction. They did ultimately surrender up their share of more “conventional” *dasai* conduct, but for them the real showdown was Japanese culture itself. Or, at least, how it manifested itself in its middle-aged representatives.

Let's begin with the easy stuff—the traits that are, by and large, correctable with relatively little effort.

Part I: The Bystander's Perspective

Looks Make—Or Break—the Man

Is your husband a walking dictionary of *dasai*? Do high school girls titter when he shuffles by with his tousled, unkempt hair? Rumpled polyester suit? Stained cuffs? Dirty fingernails? Worn, scuffed shoes? All of the above? We certainly hope you don't give them the chance.

This is nothing more than common sense, of course. After all, to an American, a business suit is the start of a business look, a look that means business, not just a middle-aged substitute for a school uniform. That said, other specific no-nos include long hair on short men, slouching posture and pot bellies.

Table Manners: *Dasai* Diners Don't Give a Fork

When Japanese men kick back after a long day at the office, especially with any amount of saké in them, and *especially* in a group, they tend to turn into loud, red-faced, necktied party animals. We assume you've impressed on your husband just how gauche this is in a Western restaurant. But just to be on the safe side, we'll say it anyway: Keep the noise down!

The same goes for how your man deals with dinner. The chef doesn't want to hear him enjoying his food from the kitchen. In

plain language, *don't* eat Western like Japanese. Slurping is okay for ramen or soba (noodles), but not for Western soup. Does he know to sip it quietly, with his soup spoon? And that "silence is golden" applies to all the other courses, too?

Another thing. Remind him that only a *dasai* diner actually eats holding a fork in his left hand. In-the-know men put down their knife, transfer the fork to their right hand and—this is important—bring it to their mouth with the prongs up.

And whatever you do, for God's sake don't let hubby: Eat with his face inches away from the table. Wipe his neck or underarms with those hot, wet hand towels before the meal. Or, clean his teeth with a toothpick at the table after it. *No, no* and *no*.

The *Dasai* Commuter

Trains seem to tap into hidden reservoirs of *dasai* in many Japanese men. In fact, once our discussion was over, we discovered that an unexpectedly large percentage of the *dasai* department our panel mentioned was railroad-related.

For instance, does your husband: Sleep on the train? Take off his clothes on long trips and ride in his long underwear? Read comics, especially the adult versions, or sexual articles in evening sports newspapers? Practice his golf swing with an umbrella, pitch imaginary baseballs or comb his hair in front of mirrors on platforms? Spit in stations or even after boarding the trains? Or, worst of all, get too friendly with girls in school uniforms? If so, *do* something!

Et Cetera

We're not trying to imply that only men like your husband are guilty of the following, but they carry a "*dasai*" label just the same. We certainly hope your husband doesn't, for instance: Unzip his trousers in public to tuck in his shirt, or undo them in a coffee shop or other public building. Comb long, wispy strands of hair from just over one ear all the way to the other—the infamous "bar code"—because he's getting a little thin on top. Wear a wig. Or, most common and *dasai* of all, urinate outdoors.

Part II: Casual Contact

Our next stratum of *dasai* deals with the dynamics of casual contact. A foreign woman meets a Japanese man, for instance, at a party or business meeting. They talk casually. He says he'd like to get together again. Is she thinking, "Yes," or "No?" And why?

Our panelists, anyway, were generally unenthusiastic about the prospects of a return engagement. One of the reasons that surfaced again and again was, "lack of variety." In fashion, in conversation and, yes, even in bed.

"Thirty years of, 'Where are you from?' 'Can you eat *natto*?' and, 'Oh, you can use chopsticks,'" mimicked Alicia, raising her eyes to the ceiling in exasperation. "It'll drive you nuts. How do they know to ask the same questions? Is it genetically encoded in their DNA?"

Apparently, that's not all Japanese men ask. "The Japanese will tell you over and over how reserved, how 'shy' they are," maintains Kim. "But you'd never know it from talking to the men. The second they meet you, they want to know all about your private life. 'Do you have a boyfriend?' 'Do you like Japanese men?' Don't they know how rude that is? Then, if you ask *them* personal questions, they start talking about, 'we Japanese.'"

Part III: Sex and the Middle-Aged Japanese Male

OK, now let's get serious.

Strictly speaking, sex is beyond the scope this article originally set out to explore. One, we were looking for more "lighthearted" material. Two, we set our basic criterion on wanting to get to know a man better or not. And that ground has

already been covered in a sexual relationship, at least after the first time. Unfortunately, this is where our panelists hit their stride.

By discussion's end, Japanese men's sexual mores had been carved up like a Thanksgiving turkey. (We might mention that, in America, a man who cannot satisfy a woman sexually is *dasai*.) As before, penis size was not a factor. Satisfaction, on the other hand, certainly was.

Our panelists felt there were three primary obstacles separating Japanese men and hit status between international sheets. First came their view of sex as little more than a means to their own gratification.

Jennifer summed it up as follows. "Most Japanese men are finished before the woman even gets warmed up. Haven't they heard? Macho is out. Enlightened sex is kind and gentle and for creating a bond between two people. They don't think twice about what the woman might or might not be getting out of all this. In this country, considerate, caring, sensitive lovers are an endangered species."

"I like to experiment, and I haven't found any Japanese men who are into that," lamented Roseanne. "There's no communication, no give and take. Even if they're proficient technically, I get the feeling they're performing, like they got their moves from a book. Sometimes I almost wonder if they really enjoy it."

It's even a matter of semantics, as Barbara pointed out. "It's incredible. There's no Japanese word with a trace of romance, like 'making love' in English. Instead, they have words like 'docking' for sex and 'technician' for someone who's good at docking. Then they wonder why the world calls them 'robots.'"

The second problem area was not so distant from the first: Japanese men treat sex like a bodily function.

This observation occasioned enthusiastic nods. "To them, it's little more than an urge to be relieved, like hunger or going to the bathroom," seconded Alicia. "Sex as an expression of love or a way of getting closer to someone? Forget it. They clamp their eyes shut—off in their own little erotic world—and whump, whump, whump . . . like hamsters in a cage."

The third impediment to sexual enjoyment was the Japanese cleanliness compulsion. "Why do men insist on taking a shower *before* sex? Or even worse, folding their clothes?!" Sylvia wanted to know. "I mean, neat and clean is fine, but are all their little rituals more important than spontaneity or enjoyment? Why can't they let themselves go and just *do* it?"

Other panelists had apparently run into similar situations. "As soon as it's over, it's quick, grab a tissue. Then up and go wash," said Jennifer, shrugging her shoulders. "I like to lie around afterwards. But no, got to get all those nasty bodily fluids off them ASAP, as if they'd leave permanent stains. What's really unfortunate is, most Japanese women don't know any better, so there's no pressure on the men to change."

Part IV: Conclusions

So there you go: the dos and don'ts of *dasai*. Recognize your husband anywhere along the way? As before, we hope not. But just in case, here are some pointers you might want to pass along . . .

First, a word of encouragement. Even if you suspect your man might not be International Man of the Year, it's not the end of the world. (Well, worry a little if he pops up repeatedly in Part I.) After all, while our panelists made many compelling points, they wanted Japanese men to be more like *them*—an extremely "convenient" approach to living in a country other than one's own.

Now let's turn our original question around for a moment. What kind of Japanese men *do* score points? According to our "experts," a man who can treat a woman as his equal without feeling threatened. Who doesn't "freeze" at the thought of making

mistakes or what people will think of them. Who's tender and sympathetic. And who can look at woman in the eye when talking to her—deal with her as a person rather than as an object.

OK, now to the nitty-gritty. First, a tip to help your husband escape being stereotyped as “just one of the herd.” If he has expensive tastes, clue him in: there are other very competent manufacturers in the world besides Mercedes-Benz, Rolex and Louis Vitton. The Japanese preoccupation with name brands has only strengthened charges like, “a country of lemmings.” A more judicious choice would be items that suggest that thought, not blind obedience, went into their purchase. He might have to do his homework, but the fact remains: To foreign women, being well informed, knowing something they don't, makes a man more interesting. (Your husband might not be into this kind of snob appeal, but the principle still applies: show them you're different without showing off.)

Here's a winning conversational strategy: Ask questions based only on what he's learned from the other person up to that point. This shows he's not only listening to what his discussion partner is saying, but also showing interest in her as a person. Which, by the way, is something foreign women are very big on. Later, when he gets to know her better, *then* give him the green light on asking where she's from, how she got to Japan and so on—except natto and chopsticks, unless *she* brings it up.

And finally, we might not be able to make your husband the last of the red-hot lovers, but we can suggest a great meeting ground between his cleanliness compulsion and your fair share of TLC. After making love, have him wipe your moist areas clean with a hot wet towel. Better still, why not have him massage the inside of your thighs—towel and all—while he's at it. He feels great. You feel great. It's a natural.

If you anticipate resistance in the beginning, do the honors yourself the first time. We guarantee he'll like it. Then, the next time, suggest that he reciprocate. Or you could highlight the preceding paragraph and leave the magazine open on the coffee table. (Men always like something better if they think it's *their* idea.)

Now, one last word of caution. Once the transformation is kicking in, you certainly can't let him go on those overseas business trips alone. Tell him this is only the Beginner's Course, and to find out more he'll have to take you along. That way, there's something in it for you, too.

Good luck! In fact, why don't you walk him through his first lesson when he gets home tonight? And don't stop until you've made him the hottest item in the housing complex.