

BILINGUAL

## Plant-eating guys just waiting to get chomped on

By KAORI SHOJI

It has finally happened: the inevitable relationship phenomenon. I was at a party the other day where every one of the couples present were paired off in the *kokusan onna* (国産オンナ, domestic woman)-*gaikokujin otoko* (外国人オトコ, foreign man) combination, a sight that would have caused my *ojiichan* (おじいちゃん, grandfather) — who's been dead for 15 years — to spit in the depths of his grave and unleash with venom his favorite two-kanji phrase "*kokujyokumonoda!* (国辱ものだ, it's a humiliating insult to the nation!)." And he probably won't be the only one, as *daki* (唾棄, spitting in sheer disgust) was how many men of his generation chose to express their indignation. In their heyday, they aimed this invective toward the *kokkaigijidō* (国会議事堂, National Diet Building).

To cap it off, there was not a single *nihondanji* (日本男児, full-fledged, red-blooded Japanese male) present, and all the mingling (which there was plenty of, believe me) between the singles went on between gorgeous, intelligent, super-capable Japanese women and equally wonderful foreign guys from places such as Michigan or Sheffield, England.

It wasn't always like this. I can remember a time when, at parties, foreign men were a minority among Japanese males, who made up in numbers what they lacked in charm, conversation and girl-getting aggression. Too often, the "J-men" were fighting a losing battle, but at least they were *there*, much to the comfort of folks like myself and girlfriend Akiko — two of a dying breed who tended to nurse nationalist sentiments when it came to men. "*Kokusan otoko wa dame dakedo hotto suru* (国産男はだめだけどほっとする, Domestic guys are hopeless, but they're relaxing)" was Akiko's maxim, and she held that at the end of a long day, the working woman opts for that *hotto* (ほっと, relaxing feeling) factor no matter how glamorous the alternative.

Alas, those days seem officially over, as one finds that (sob) few single Japanese men profess themselves willing to go out in the field anymore. "*Mendokusai* (面倒くさい, it's too much of an effort)," "*kane ga nai* (金がない, no money)" "*tsukareru* (疲れる, it's tiring)" head the list of reasons I collected from my brothers, cousins and other extended family members. Especially shocking was a derisive "*party ni ikuyōna onna niwa kyōmi ga nai* (パーティーに行くような女には興味がない, I'm not interested in a girl who would go to a party)." He also said, "*Gatsu gatsu shiteiruto omowaretakunai* (がつがつしていると思われたくない, I don't want them to think I'm desperate)" and added that it's far wiser and more effective to wait for the girl of his dreams to pounce on him out of the blue. "*Eeeee!?* (ええええ?! Reeally?!?)"

Actually, my nephew is the typical *sōshokukei danshi* (草食系男子, plant-eating, or herbivorous boy) seeking to be hunted down and devoured by a *nikushokukeijyoshi* (肉食系女子, meat-eating, carnivorous girl) whom he just happens to meet in a cute and cozy situation that preferably has nothing to do with parties. Never mind that his biceps are the size of grapefruits and he divides his life into two clear-cut boundaries — mastering the crawl for his school's swimming team and consuming everything in the fridge afterward. In his heart, he's just a little deer, blinking in the headlights of a big *keitōra* (軽トラ, pick-up truck).

Had my grandfather been around, he would have taken the boy to a dojo and ordered 2,000 kendo swings by midnight, not that it would do much good, as athletic prowess is clearly not the issue. Rather, the whole dating mindset has undergone a gender reversal — and these days, for Japanese women, it's as difficult to find an *otokorashii otoko* (男らしい男, a manly man) as it is to run into a *memeshii onna* (女々しい女, a whiny, girly girl). And let's not forget that while "otokorashii" has always been one of the highest praises, "memeshii" has always had insulting connotations, especially toward men.

The most desired traits of an *otokorashii otoko* are: "*ketsudanryoku ga aru* (決断力がある, decisiveness)," "*kōdōryoku ga aru* (行動力がある, quick to act)," "*guchi wo iwanai* (愚痴を言わない, never complains)" and "*mudaguchi wo tatakanai* (無駄口をたたかない, does not chatter)" — which these days are most likely to be found among the strapping, straight-backed young women marching the streets with a supreme self-confidence. Japanese men, on the other hand, generally seem to remain locked in the concerns and behavior patterns of the past.

It's perhaps no wonder, then, that the women are attending parties and having all sorts of *shigekitekina* (刺激的な, stimulating) experiences while the men go home and, according to my brother, sit in front of the TV with a cup noodle.

What's a die-hard-patriot kind of gal to do?

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