



Paul A. Christensen, Japan, Alcoholism, and Masculinity: Suffering Sobriety in Tokyo

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a true spiritual homeland' (200). This and other similar passages will only reinforce the perception that her call for a defence of Japanese language is entangled with ethnic nationalism.

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Japan, Alcoholism, and Masculinity: Suffering Sobriety in Tokyo

PAUL A. CHRISTENSEN

Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014

xvi, 147 pp + appendix, notes, references, index

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Most foreign visitors to Japan have noted the widespread societal tolerance of public drunkenness as they gingerly step over inebriated salarymen and pools of vomit as they try to catch the last train in the evening. If you end up working or studying in Japan, you will inevitably be asked to numerous *nomikai* drinking parties and might even end up one of those knocked-out drunks yourself. It is hard not to drink in Japan. Alcohol is ubiquitous. Up to very recently, one could buy not only beer but also *sake* and *shōchū* out of vending machines without an ID; and even now, a teenager buying alcoholic beverages at a convenience store will rarely be asked questions.

For men, drinking is not only a social lubricant but also a means through which they can express their masculinity. Conversely, becoming alcoholic and joining a sobriety program can have a devastating impact on men's sense of themselves as social beings and as men. What does it mean to be a man who cannot drink? Anthropologist Paul Christensen's monograph explores these aspects of alcoholism and masculinity in Japan by focusing on the two largest alcohol cessation group programs: Alcoholics Anonymous and Danshukai.

Alcoholics Anonymous is the Japanese branch of the organization of the same name that was started by two Americans, Bill Wilson and Bob Smith, in Ohio in 1935. AA has since grown to become an international organization with over 100,000 groups worldwide. The central text for AA members is the 'Big Book' (its formal title is *Alcoholics Anonymous*), which details the 12 steps to sobriety. Christensen traces the history of AA in Japan from its beginnings in a meeting in March of 1975 at the Kamata Catholic Church to the current point where it has approximately 5000–7000 members in Japan (65). As described by Christensen, AA has more or less been directly imported into Japan with very little attempt at localization – which, he argues, underlies some of its difficulties in gaining broader acceptance.

Danshukai is the second and slightly larger (at 10,000 members) organization for alcohol cessation – although the number of members is a bit ambiguous, as Danshukai allows family members (spouses and children of alcoholics) to attend while AA is strictly for alcoholics only. The founders of what would later be called Danshukai were inspired by AA principles and beliefs when they started meeting in

the early 1950s, thus making Danshukai older than AA in Japan by about two decades. The main differences relative to AA are the aforementioned membership categories (Danshukai allows for non-alcoholic family members), level of membership dues, government support, and greater attempt at localization through the avoidance of the language of 'steps' and of 'a higher power' that are central to AA's philosophy. Christensen notes that Danshukai is composed primarily of alcoholic men (and their non-alcoholic wives) while AA in Japan has a slightly more equitable gender balance. Danshukai tends to attract more working-class men and women who cleave to traditional gender stereotypes, while AA tends towards a more cosmopolitan-oriented audience.

In broaching the history of sobriety and alcoholism in Japan, Christensen starts with the *Kojiki* but then quickly jumps to the 1950s. With the end of the Occupation came easy access to alcohol and also the resurgence of groups concerned about alcohol consumption, such as the Japan Temperance Union, which can trace itself back to organizations formed in the early Meiji period (37). From the beginning, these organizations were focused on the question of male sobriety. As Christensen notes:

A pervasive metaphor of masculinity is the *daikokubashira*, the 'great central pillar that supports a house', understood in the contemporary [sic] as primarily financial contribution. Such a view works to exacerbate the marginalized masculinity of alcoholics as it paradoxically makes explicit their inability to provide such support. Japanese men are typically insulated from a problematic view of their alcohol consumption as long as the roof protecting one's family, both metaphoric and physical, is supported. (15)

From there, Christensen moves to the core ethnographic portion of his monograph. He engaged in participant observation (he hastens to add that he himself is not alcoholic) of several group meetings of both Danshukai and AA in the Tokyo area, including interviews with members outside of group meetings. The stories of the various alcoholic men that Christensen encountered and the devastation that they caused themselves and their families are particularly evocative and moving. When the *daikokubashira* central pillar crumbles, it takes the entire house down with it. Both organizations exist to help members pick up the pieces and move forward with their lives, albeit with much pain and struggle.

Christensen talks to a few medical doctors but otherwise does not spend too much time on the history of how alcoholism itself has come to be understood – either in its former incarnation as *arukōru chūdoku* or as *arukōru izonshō* (dependency). The Japanese term *chūdoku* has a slippery dual meaning as both 'poison' and 'addiction' and Japanese medicine has largely treated alcohol addiction as a psychiatric disorder. Even now, a good number of beds in psychiatric wards in Japan are filled with alcoholics. The author notes this and also observes that a good number of the members of both AA and Danshukai are referred to the programs by doctors at nearby hospitals, but otherwise the book does not dwell on how alcoholism has been framed by the medical profession in Japan or treated within hospitals. There is, however, mention of alternative alcohol treatment programs in Japan based on Naikan and other Buddhist philosophies, which the author details to some degree (118–121), tying this back to the question of the importance of spirituality (and of a singular 'higher power').

The strength of this text is that it is tightly focused on masculinity and men within the context of alcoholism and sobriety in Japan and it rarely strays out of the ethnographic moment to dwell on history or social theory. Those interested in the question of women (especially as the co-dependent enablers of alcoholic husbands) should read Amy Borovoy's *The Too-Good Wife*. Those interested in the construction of masculinity through shared drinking at hostess clubs should read Anne Allison's now classic *Nightwork* (1994). Read together, these three books give great insight into the complexities of alcohol consumption and abuse in contemporary Japan.

Texts Mentioned

Allison, Anne, *Nightwork: Sexuality, Pleasure, and Corporate Masculinity in a Tokyo Hostess Club*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Borovoy, Amy, *The Too-Good Wife: Alcohol, Codependence, and the Politics of Nurturance in Postwar Japan*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.

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Making Tea, Making Japan: Cultural Nationalism in Japan

KRISTIN SURAK

Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013

xix, 187 pp. + notes, bibliography, index; illustrations

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Kristin Surak's book *Making Tea, Making Japan* is well written and thoroughly researched. The first 90 pages constitute a detailed description of *chanoyu*, the formal preparation of *matcha*, powdered tea. Surak spent several years studying *chanoyu* in Japan within the Urasenke lineage and, presumably, a further seven years in the United States since she mentions a total of ten years' experience with the practice. Her main thesis is that practicing *chanoyu* is a form of 'nation-work' which she defines as the 'social labor of objectifying the nation ... making this abstract concept identifiable and tangible' (3).

In writing the latter half of the book, Surak succumbs to the unfortunate tendency of some academics to conflate criticism with critical thinking. Having done a nice job of reviewing the literature on nationalism in the introduction and placing *chanoyu* within the cultural matrix of a developing Japanese sense of national identity in Chapter 2 ('Creating Tea, the National Transformation of a Cultural Practice'), Surak launches into a one-sided diatribe on what she perceives as the tendency of the tea lineages (*iemoto*) 'to petrify [their] aesthetic choices into a codified body of knowledge that could be appropriated and sold' (98). Referring to the transformation of tea after the death of Sen Rikyū (d. 1591), she gives no documentation for her assertion that the Sen families, the three most prominent *iemoto* in tea, suffered from a lack of access to the Tokugawa shogunate, or that the majority of the shogunal elders routinely practiced the Sekishū-style of tea which she identifies as 'daimyo tea' (pertaining to the feudal lords), 'free of any institutional corsetry' (98). In fact, during the Tokugawa era, while daimyo tea