

Becoming Mr. Everyman:

Middlebrow Media and
White-Collar Masculinity
in Japan's Era of
High Economic Growth

Hannah Airriess

July 26, 2023 / 19:30- 21:00 (JST)

Hybrid (In-Person and on Zoom)

Venue: Room 301, 3F, Building 10,
Sophia University

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The salaryman, or male white-collar worker, was at the center of Japan's mass media landscape during the era of high economic growth (1952-1971). Middlebrow texts such as studio films, serialized novels, and weekly magazines, amongst other media, offered a mass cultural theorization of this figure as an archetypal national subjectivity of the era. This talk introduces the 1961 film *The Elegant Life of Mr. Everyman* (dir. Okamoto Kihachi) to examine the development of this white-collar mass culture and the shared visual, narrative, and discursive vocabulary animated across media forms. I read the film, which centers on the life of an unexceptional salaryman working at Suntory Liquors, alongside Suntory's real-life advertising and promotional materials from television and print media during the period of the film's release. This reading uncovers the constitutive roles of wartime experience and postwar consumer identity in crafting a white-collar masculinity that was essential to building a national image of high-growth era Japan.

Hannah Airriess is an assistant professor in the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures at Indiana University, Bloomington. She specializes in Japanese film and media, with a specific focus on studio cinema and its imaging of shifts in economic and national identities across 20th century Japan. She is currently working on a book manuscript concerning the figure of the salaryman, or male white-collar worker, staged across mass media in Japan's era of high economic growth (1954-1971). Using a transmedial approach that draws together popular cinema with archival material such as serialized fiction, advertising, popular social science texts and management literature, she argues the salaryman emerged as the dominant figure through which political and cultural transformations concerning labor, gender, and national identity were mediated in postwar Japan.

This talk is organized by David H. Slater (Professor of Anthropology, Sophia University)

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