

Evolving Images of Parenthood:

Gender Roles and Caregiving in Contemporary Japanese Commercials

This thesis examines the portrayal of parenting and gender roles in contemporary Japanese video commercials in order to identify areas of continuity and change amid recent policy reforms promoting work-life balance and shared parental responsibility over childcare. Over the past decade, the Japanese government has expanded childcare leave provisions and introduced measures aimed at fostering a more supportive environment for working parents. Previous research has demonstrated that parenting magazines and television advertisements in the mid-2000s overwhelmingly portrayed mothers as primary caregivers and fathers as peripheral or incompetent figures. In light of the significant social and policy changes that have occurred since then, it is important to revisit these portrayals to determine whether they have meaningfully evolved. Drawing on a small-scale content analysis of two categories of video advertisements—child-centered products and household products—this study examines patterns in parenting roles and parent-child interaction. In contrast to earlier findings of highly gendered and stereotypical portrayals, the results indicate a noticeable shift in representation. Multiple commercials challenge traditional norms by depicting working mothers and more actively involved fathers, suggesting a societal shift toward more collaborative and balanced models of caregiving.