



**MR. WRONG:
COMPLAINTS
AGAINST
HUSBANDS**

BASICALLY, *JINSEI ANNAI* PROVIDES a place to seek relief from psychological pain, a medium through which people can protest against the situations which have brought on the pain. The column demonstrates that wives of all ages in Japan feel they have a lot to protest about. Nearly a fourth of all letters printed in the column contain, at least in part, complaints from wives about their marriages, and a majority of these pinpoint husbands as the source of their problem. An American reading through all these querulous letters from wives might easily conclude that Japanese women must surely be among earth's most miserable creatures.

That's an understandable reaction. However, like many aspects of another society that people try to understand in terms of their own experiences, the situation for Japanese women, in spite of all the evidence of male privilege, remains more complex and frequently very different from what one might assume. The more one learns about Japanese male-female relations, the more one realizes that the position of women in Japan is often remarkably strong and secure. Complaints by wives are better understood in terms

of the roles that a Japanese woman expects to fulfill. For example, a Japanese female expects to have things her own way around the home. In addition, complaining about one's husband does not necessarily have the same associations in Japan as it does in the United States.

Later in the chapter, we will elaborate on the role of the *wife* in Japan; now let's turn our attention to three rather typical letters together with the response generated for each by the *Jinsei Annai* staff. Each complaint is different, but all are clearly from wives who wish the nature of their marriages to be different. The first letter expresses the "He won't grow up" grievance, and, as we discuss below, has the additional sting of reflecting badly on the woman herself.

SICK AND TIRED OF SELF-CENTERED HUSBAND Husband Plays Around, Piles Up Debts, Even Quits His Job

I am a working wife in my mid-thirties. My job is physically demanding and every day is a hard day. But this is not my basic problem. What really upsets me is my husband. I'm sick and tired of his selfish attitude. The situation is so bad that I wish I could just die and get it over with. This man has no idea of the value of money. He spends a lot of time in expensive bars and constantly piles up debts of hundreds of thousands of yen. He plays mahjong¹ all the time, contributing to his debts. He even spends money from the household budget on himself.

His parents live close by, but whenever I visit them and ask for their advice, my mother-in-law just scolds me and says that I shouldn't concern myself with what men do outside the home. After I started working, my husband began to borrow a lot of money from his mother, telling her to get it back from me; yet none of this money was given to me as help in running the house.

About two years ago he quit the company where he had worked for a long time. He lent all of his severance pay to another person, had a traffic accident, and then started his own business without enough capital.² All of these things have increased our financial burdens. I am very worried about having enough money for the education of our two children.

Since his father doesn't even know that he quit his job, his parents still expect us to contribute to various family obligations such as presents for O-bon.³ I resent this. I think one reason he cannot seem to grow up is because of the way his mother treats him.

I desperately want to leave him, but I don't have any other family to go to. Recently I have been feeling fatigued all the time, and I just don't know where to turn. Sometimes I sincerely wish I were dead. What can I do?

—M., GUMMA PREFECTURE

If this were an American column, the reply would likely support divorce, or at least using the threat of leaving as a way of bargaining for a better situation. But this is Japan; although the response raises the option of divorce as a possibility, there is no enthusiasm for the idea. The ideal is for women to be patient, and above all, strong. Many people in Japan would still consider this problem to be the wife's burden; the wife's problem to solve. Incidentally, the discussion with the father-in-law, recommended below, would be no more likely to change the situation than it would in the United States.

Response: Saeko Saegusa, female critic

So, you have a selfish husband with a mother who indulges him. I felt great sympathy for you when I read that you are battling all of these problems by yourself. I can understand how a person can get so burdened by problems that they would think about dying.

On the other hand, you mentioned nothing about the prospect of getting a divorce. I suppose this means that deep down you feel that you really do not want to cast off the marriage completely. Maybe this commitment contributes to your husband's selfishness.

Rather than death, there must be some other way out of the situation. It seems that because of domination by your mother-in-law, you have not told your father-in-law about your husband's quitting his job and his other problems. However, I think it is essential that you discuss the entire matter with him and urge him to talk things over with his son. When a man is spoiled by his mother, it can often be helpful if the father steps in and uses his influence.

At any rate, you are still young and still have your job. If worst comes to worst, you are in a better position than most women to go out on your own. I want you to begin thinking in a more positive manner.

The second letter gets right to the heart of a basic difference between Japan and the United States. In the two societies, relationships

between husbands and wives are based on a different set of expectations. The first letter in this chapter describes conditions and reactions that we can all sympathize with; the one below is outside normal American reference points for relations between husbands and wives. We will try to explain why later in the chapter.

**IT HAS BEEN FOUR YEARS SINCE HER HUSBAND
TOOK A LOVER
His Transfer at Work May Be a Good Opportunity to Leave Him**

I am a wife in my early thirties with two children. Recently my husband was transferred to a new location. We were planning for him to go to the new location by himself for a short time, and then I and the children were to follow later. However, I am wondering if the relocation might be a good chance to leave him permanently.

We were married six years ago, but after only about one year of marriage my husband took a lover. We discussed the possibility of divorce about a year after this, but at that time I rejected the idea for several reasons: partly because of the children, partly because I did not want to give up my security, partly because I wanted to avoid the loss of face, and finally because I hated the idea of surrendering to the other woman. Since then I haven't raised the issue, but the relationship between my husband and his lover has continued.

Two years ago I had my second child, and I hoped this would compel my husband into caring about me again. Unfortunately it didn't happen. He accepts responsibility for the family, but he has no feeling left for me at all. Do you think it is possible for me to raise my children in this kind of artificial environment? I sometimes think it would be better to separate now and make a life together with the children. I am tired of sticking to this kind of play-acting existence, but I am having trouble building up the courage to end it.

—T., FUKUSHIMA PREFECTURE

The response elucidates a point of difference between Japan and the United States. One aspect of this difference is that a woman's role as successful wife and mother does not depend nearly as much in Japan on the nature of the relationship between the two spouses. In fact, as we'll

see later, family life is perceived as too important to be based on anything so volatile.

Response: Saeko Saegusa, female critic

Your penmanship and writing style suggest that you are an unusually intelligent person. You seem to be the kind of person who can look at things very truthfully, and indeed you have analyzed your situation carefully.

On the other hand, while well written, your letter leaves out some basic information: What motive, for example, did your husband have for turning to the other woman in the first place? Perhaps you know the reason for this but have intentionally omitted it.

Not knowing this crucial factor, it is difficult to offer advice; one thing I would advise is not to jump into any solution without very carefully weighing the results. While it may not be a healthy environment for children when parents do not get along well, the extreme recourse of divorce can be even more damaging.

Why don't you join your husband and try to start a new life there with him. The relationship between husband and wife is not a simple matter of "good" versus "bad." For something as important as your marriage I think it is worth another try.

In the introduction, we said that letters to *Jinsei Annai* were usually attempts to get practical advice. We included the following letter because, like a few others from unhappy wives, it runs contrary to that tendency, and is really more of an appeal for sympathy than an attempt to find a solution to a specific problem. This wife wants recognition for putting up with so much, and in this manner the column does indeed sometimes serve as a forum for airing grievances.

STUBBORN, SELFISH HUSBAND

Thoughts of the Future Bring Tears; Considered Divorce Many Times

I am a wife who is very upset about her husband. Each summer our township council organizes several volunteer clean-up campaigns for the local community. My husband never joins in for this work.

On the mornings of these campaigns I arrange work clothes and a hat for him, but he always says, "Only twice a month doesn't do any good anyway," and he stays home without offering the group any assistance. I suppose I could go in his place, but everyone knows I have a husband, and it would be too embarrassing. This is just one example. In everything he is selfish and stubborn, and in the more than thirty years since we got married, I have often been reduced to tears.

I have to admit that he built up his business from nothing, managing to buy land and build our house. However, one of the reasons he could devote so much energy to his business was that I was the one who single-handedly took care of the home. My husband spends a great deal of money on himself, but he has always been extremely stingy when it comes to me and the rest of the family. He is always saying, "Stop complaining, you're all getting free room and board." I have thought about divorce many times, but I have always given up the idea because of the children. Now I am too old to even think about it. Since being alone would bring even more misery, I might as well face the fact that I must continue to suffer as this man's wife. The realization of this kind of future brings tears to my eyes. How should I deal with a husband like this? Please advise me.

—Y., YAMANASHI PREFECTURE

This woman probably felt better after writing the letter, but she does not present a focused case against her husband. It generated the following meager expression of sympathy.

Response: Michiko Fukazawa, female counselor

When a husband is not cooperative with those around him it is indeed troublesome and sad. I can certainly understand your feelings, and that you are upset by his stinginess.

From a third person's perspective, it does appear that you have unnecessarily elevated your husband's refusal to join community projects to the level of marital crisis. People have different views regarding these undertakings. Wouldn't it be better to go in place of your husband, in spite of the embarrassment, rather than allow the issue to cause so much strife in your life together?

I can see that your husband has shortcomings, but are these so serious as to raise the issue of divorce? In a life between two people some

faults simply have to be overlooked. No person on this earth will behave exactly as you would wish. I'm sure you have imperfections in his eyes as well. Hasn't he overlooked some of these?

Stop concentrating only on the man's inadequacies and emphasize his good points. He obviously is a good worker who has provided well for you and your family, at least in some ways. Learn to regard his selfishness and stubbornness as you do when you see these traits in your children.

As suggested above, non-Japanese should not construe too much from the fact that letters from disgruntled wives outnumbered any other kind. In Japan, married people are not under as much pressure as Americans to try to convince the world and themselves that they are "happy," and complaints which would almost certainly indicate a failing marriage in the United States do not necessarily mean very much. We can understand this better if we put Japanese husband-wife relations a bit more into context.

People who don't know much about the workings of the Japanese family generally have a completely wrong-headed idea of the relationship between men and women in that country. A few years ago, Ann Landers printed a letter in her column from a man identified as, "No Chauvinist—Just Honest," which lavishly praised the imagined qualities of Asian, and especially Japanese, wives, and attacked what the writer insisted to be the selfish attitude of contemporary American women. For several days, the entire column was devoted to reactions to the letter, and for more than a month the letter continued to generate responses. A handful of writers, including a few women, expressed varying degrees of agreement with No Chauvinist's position, but he was lambasted by most of those who wrote to the column, some insisting that men like No Chauvinist have personality deficiencies and just don't have what it takes to stand up to an adult partner. Over and over the word "subservient" was used by both sides, and by both sexes, to describe the way the writers imagined Japanese women relate to men.

The idea of the subservient Japanese woman comes from the only view foreigners generally have of them: shunted aside in a secondary role at work, and regularly absent any time important people communicate through media appearances. It all seems so undeniable. Japanese women,

conditioned for centuries by the ideals of Confucianism to be withdrawn and submissive, deferential toward parents as children and toward a husband later in life, do appear to be designed for service to others. This is a part of the ideal of womanhood in Japan, but it is an ideal meant for specific situations.

We are not suggesting that the perception of male dominance is all just a myth. In contemporary Japan, there remain ways in which Japan can legitimately be considered a male-dominated society. Sex discrimination in the work place is taken for granted. We personally believe this condition will last for many years and disagree with popular interpretations of Japan that see public sex discrimination rapidly disappearing. It is still common for a woman to work for a company for five years or more and receive only cost-of-living raises, while a man who began work in the same office will have more than doubled his salary during the same period. Women are seldom included in the “lifetime employment” system so often praised in the West these days; as blue-collar workers, women often assemble parts in numbing repetition for pay comparable to the American minimum wage.

As office workers, women are often considered little more than decoration. Some firms give instruction in proper bowing, provide lessons in tea serving, and at least one bank we know of even gives walking lessons to new female office workers so they will make a pleasant impression on male customers. More than likely, serving tea will be a common function for a female office worker for years after she joins a company or public agency, even though her education may parallel or even surpass some of the men she serves.

Even at home, in some ways, Japanese men have privileges which certainly seem to be rooted in male dominance. Women cater to men in a Japanese household in ways especially noticeable to people not raised in Japan. Certainly by the standards of many other countries men seem to take their wives for granted, spending time outside the home, for example, to an extent that few American men could expect to get away with.

Women in Japan do take care of men almost like servants, but if Japanese women were to suddenly find themselves playing the average American woman’s role, many of them would probably miss some of their old rights and advantages. If the realm of work outside the home is

still more of a man's world than in the West, life at home in most ways is more dominated by wives.

Wives used to be the servants of mothers-in-laws, and as we shall see in a later chapter, some vestiges of this older pattern still exist, causing problems in some families. However, the trend is for the nuclear family to live separately from in-laws, and a wife in a typical Japanese family makes almost every important decision within the home; she is obligated to carefully look after all who live there, yet every member of the family recognizes that when they enter this region they are in *her* territory.

Much more consistently than in Europe or the United States, the wife in a typical Japanese family single-handedly controls the family's purse strings. Older children jokingly refer to their mother as *ōkura daijin*, "the minister of finance," because they understand that the family budget is completely in her hands, and when they need money it would be pointless to raise the issue with anyone else. Except for more wealthy executive types, Japanese men receive an allowance from their wives for personal expenses—referred to by the same word (*okozukai*) as allowances given to children. The amount is determined mainly by the state of the family economy. Since women pay all domestic bills, it is the rare husband indeed who knows very much of the budgetary details of family life. In other words, women control how much money the average man has to spend, and thereby control what he can afford to do.

It isn't so much that men dominate women in Japan, but rather that men and women are more separated into *outside* and *inside* arenas of adult control. At work, the ideal is for men to play the role of adults in authority, but inside the home, men, along with children, become dependents of women, who turn out in most cases to wear the mantle of real adult responsibility.

An interesting irony surrounding the role of women in Japan lies in the fact that men expect women to be extremely feminine and completely nonthreatening in public. Female office workers take on almost infantile personalities in the work place. Most women artificially raise their voice to an extremely high pitch when talking to men at work; they understand that men prefer women to project a childlike image, interpreted in Japan as cute and pleasant. In any group where men and women have to interact together in public, most women make a conspicuous point of deferring to men when opinions are stated and decisions made.

As mothers and wives, on the other hand, women are expected to be paragons of strength and good judgment, and in that context men far more completely and readily defer to women than in the United States and other Western societies. Women bear the burden of running all the really important affairs of the family, almost as if their husbands had stored all their responsibilities in their lockers at work. If a Japanese man puts on too much weight, for instance, rather than placing any blame on him, some will end up criticizing his wife for overfeeding him. After all, it is her job to “take care of things” at home, and this includes the personal welfare and appearance of her husband.

It is the wife who normally has the job of squirreling away a large portion of income for deposits into savings accounts for emergencies and retirement; the average Japanese husband is surprisingly ignorant of the amount of money the family has in the bank. Women are so completely in charge of the management of their children’s education—an extremely strategic aspect of Japanese life—that they are often held directly accountable if any learning problems develop.

Television dramas and wives’ discussion of family matters express an undercurrent of feeling among Japanese women that, along with the other duties of being a wife, women must bear the additional burden of “raising” their husbands. True, this idea is prevalent to some extent in the United States as well, but in Japan it goes a little farther and seems to be more pervasive. Young men, after being pampered by their mothers as children, are not expected to emerge from adolescence fully grown up and able to take care of social responsibilities. Young males, considered to be inherently immature in their personal lives, are expected to be compelled toward maturity over time by the triple forces of school, employer, and wife. During the daytime, men are completely in charge of running the important affairs of Japan. These caretakers of the businesses and services of one of the most dynamic economies of our time, once they leave their jobs, tend to be seen by adult women as grown up boys at play.

In fact, most men in Japan are granted considerable play time with other men (and even other women under limited circumstances), while wives—the real adults at home—have too many sober responsibilities around the house to engage in any such frivolity. Inside, the wife is the de

facto boss; on the outside the husband has an unusual degree of freedom. Both have a greater measure of independence from each other than would be expected in the United States. A respondent to one letter sent to *Jinsei Annai* expresses this idea clearly, scolding a young wife for having somehow missed what to Japanese is this most obvious of truisms. The writer, the mother of a small boy, complained that her husband sneaks around borrowing money for foolish purposes and often stays home from work. She has considered divorce, but Tei Fujiwara, a female writer, will have none of it, replying in part,

Response: Tei Fujiwara, female writer

Why don't you have the courage to try to help your husband grow up. Rather than complaining all the time, why don't you spend more energy molding your husband into the kind of man you want. You already are the mother of one child; just imagine that you have one more spoiled son. Handle your husband with more cleverness, and change him into the right sort of person the same way you raise your other child [our emphasis]. Things don't appear to be all that bad; it is likely that your husband's stock can rise in value. . . .

Of course, there are limits to male freedom, and occasionally failure to take family matters seriously, especially involving self-indulgence in the use of money, is itself the focus of complaints to *Jinsei Annai*. During our study we found six letters that focused on the issue of husbands failing to meet their financial responsibilities to the family. The letter below is typical, except that it is from a wife who had actually separated from her husband, still rather rare in Japan—even here it was only a trial separation.

SHOULD SHE CONSIDER DIVORCE?

Husband Lacks Responsibility and the Will to Work

I am a housewife in my early thirties. Five years ago I chose to marry a man three years younger than I. Two years later, the same year our child was born, we moved in with his parents. We kept our own quarters and ate separately. At about that time my husband lost his job. Previously, he had changed jobs frequently, but after he lost this particular job, he just seemed to lose the desire to work.

Even after six months had gone by, he still did not resume working. I got tired of this situation, so I returned to the home of my parents. A few months later I went back to him, but nothing had changed. Finally I decided on divorce, and separated from him legally. He begged me not to divorce him, but his mother told me to do whatever I thought best. Finally I had the idea that if he and our child got to be very close he would change his ways. I moved back in with him even though my own parents were completely against it.

However, after three months, which brings us to the present, there is still no change. He continues to play the horses with his mother's money, seldom stays around the house, and pays very little attention to our child. His mother always says that he is not a well man and it will take a long time for him to "get better," whatever that means. She suggests that I go to work instead of him. I don't like the idea; if I go out and get a job, I'm afraid it might make him even more irresponsible. When I hear about the difficulties single mothers have I'm afraid to strike out on my own. On the other hand, the way things are I have no way of knowing if my husband will go out and get a job in a year, or even in ten years.

Actually, whether he works or not, he has never been a responsible person. I have serious doubts about his common sense and trustworthiness. What should I do? Please give me your advice.

—M., IBARAKI PREFECTURE

The respondent in this case takes the complaint very seriously. She understands that this woman is at a crossroad in her life and that in the Japan of today she does not necessarily have to tolerate her situation. The writer is young enough to start over if things are unremitting, but Japanese, even the most liberal-minded concerning divorce, are very much aware of the risks a divorced woman takes.

Response: Saeko Saegusa, female critic

"Actually, whether he works or not, he has never been a responsible person. I have serious doubts about his common sense and trustworthiness." These are your words.

That is a very strong indictment of a husband by a wife. I believe it is reasonable to denounce a husband who depends on his mother and who works unpredictably from one year to the next. Your distress does not

seem to be the kind that will go away easily; therefore, I think it would not be out of the question to consider ending your marriage.

For your child it is most important to consider the quality of parental care, and not just whether both parents are present. Frankly, I do not think that the present situation is beneficial for your child.

On the other hand, I'm concerned about your life in the future. Bringing up a child on your own is a big step to take.

You should do this without depending on your own parents, and you must make serious preparations toward finding a job.

If you resolve to solve your basic problem, you will find the will to carry you through.

People living in advanced industrialized societies rarely reflect on the fact that only during the past eighty or ninety years people in these societies have developed the expectation of intimacy between husbands and wives to a degree never seen in the world before. Americans manifest this expectation of intimacy at least as much as anywhere else. While married—even though the likelihood of staying married until one partner dies is less than in just about any other nation—ideally American husbands and wives are lovers, best pals, coparents, financial partners, confidants, and in most other ways the closest of companions. Americans have come to believe that marriage is a source of happiness, not only for convenience or the attainment of a higher-order adult role, but because the two partners have *each other*. Americans don't just marry for love; they're supposed to stay in love, to somehow retain at least part of the affection and mutual appreciation which brought them together in the first place. Divorce is accepted as a painful yet available solution when the dream of a happiness together deteriorates.

In spite of being subject to the same influences associated with modernization that produced the companionship marriage in other modern societies, Japan has not responded in the same way, and still does not emphasize companionship within marriage to nearly as great a degree. A comparison of the roles of wives of important public figures manifests this difference. The wife of an American president is a significant person in her own right. Barbara Bush, for instance, now has a public following nearly as great as her husband. The office of prime minister in Japan is almost as imposing as the presidency is to Americans; one would have to

be virtually isolated from just about every media not to hear the Prime Minister's name mentioned or to see his face every day. Yet, surprisingly, on the average, less than 5 percent of university students in Japan are aware of the name of the Prime Minister's wife, and only a slightly larger percentage could identify her photograph when not taken standing beside her husband. The American woman's place might have been "in the home," in past generations, but American married life long ago developed such a deep intimacy that the two partners share identity even in their purely public roles. From the beginning of the republic everyone knew who a president's wife was; the two stood side-by-side on many important occasions; they faced many of their social activities together as a couple, as Americans expect to do.

Many young Japanese, especially among the ranks of the not yet married, would probably deny it, but what they really want out of marriage is what could be described as a comfortable life: comfort implying predictability, being accepted by others, a life surrounded by people and things Japanese associate with adult respectability—not so different really from what many Americans want. A slight difference, however, is that beyond this kind of comfort Japanese do not expect such a close companionship of another person—someone to melt the self into—the feelings Americans fantasize about as part of a lifelong romance.

The denial mentioned above derives from an attraction to the ideal of romantic love as something young Japanese admire in the abstract. Young Japanese like to see themselves—even though it may not particularly correspond with reality—as modern and liberated, and behaving as young people in the world today are expected to behave.

They admire the idea of romance, but it does not dominate their thoughts about courtship as it does in the United States. For Japanese, "being married" is the brass ring of life, and romance is not a necessity. Therefore, almost no Japanese of either sex prefers single life after passing marriageable age.⁴ People past this age are hardly ever single by choice. Women may be single because they have studied or worked toward career success before finding a husband; consequently not many Japanese men desire them as wives.

After about the age of forty, being a bachelor is not at all associated with images of reckless fun as it can be elsewhere. There is nothing even

close to a glorified singles lifestyle phenomenon in Japan. Dating is firmly established, not like the recreational dating of some young single Americans. Very few Japanese would be inclined to regard dating as anything but a preliminary step leading up to marriage.

Japanese and Americans behave differently, but they both receive benefits and disadvantages for their respective courtship and marriage systems. Americans have more intimacy and companionship after marriage; Japanese have more independence from each other and they can count on more stability in family life. Interestingly, both societies often seem to yearn for what the other has; but both systems have evolved in distinct cultural environments, and the stress specific to each system would be intolerable if suddenly imposed on the other society.

Because Americans are socialized to view married life as a continuation of romantic attraction, they accept that life between husband and wife is very fragile. Love, for all its luster, is infamous for its unpredictability. Few Japanese really expect marriage to be very exciting in and of itself. They do expect it to be a source of stability in their lives; Japanese seldom worry about being left by their spouse for another man or woman. During our year of observation, only five letters broached the subject of sexual infidelity, and one of these concerned an ex-husband. A husband's adultery does not necessarily suggest the treacherous implications it does to American wives. Since the role of romantic partner is not the crux of marriage, the sting of rejection is not felt as severely by Japanese women. In the letter below, the tentative affair carried on by the writer's husband is interpreted by the writer not so much as treachery as it is a clumsiness in failing to meet the duties of a husband and father. To American eyes this wife would seem unbelievably calm. In part, this is the result of a rather old-fashioned elegance in writing style, and also, as we have said, because she probably does not feel that her worth as a woman has been directly threatened.

**WIFE WONDERS IF SHE SHOULD PERMIT HUSBAND TO
HAVE A LOVER**

She Is Distressed, but Thinks He Still Loves Her

I am a woman in my early thirties, married five years with one child. I married for love and my husband and I have had a very intimate

relationship with each other. We have been so close that people have often teased us about it. However, approximately two years ago, about the time I became pregnant, my husband's attitude began to change. When I confronted him, he confessed that he had strong feelings for his female colleague.

I know the woman, a person who has had difficulty in her marriage, and I am convinced that this is the reason her relationship with my husband has developed so rapidly. Once when he came home with the odor of perfume on his clothes, I questioned him about it. He admitted being with her but insisted that the relationship had not reached the physical level. He did say that he was not ready to stop seeing her, and he asked me to wait for him to arrive at a conclusion.

I believe that in his heart he does not want to destroy our family, but he does not seem willing to give her up either. Maybe this is the reason he says he has not reached a physical level with her yet. I wonder, especially when I think of the feelings of the other woman, whether I should let him continue acting so selfishly. Finally, one day I told him I would wait for him to choose one way or the other, but he could not continue on without making a choice. He seems to be agonizing over the decision, and when I see his despair, I wonder whether or not it would be fair for me to leave him.

Since I know that he loves me, perhaps I should permit him to have a lover. I sympathize with the other woman, but I can't help resenting her. All three of us are suffering; I hope I can retain my sanity through all of this.

What should I do? Please advise me.

—M., TOKYO

The reply was uncommonly vague, and it is difficult to see how the advice could have been helpful. It also differed greatly from conventional attitudes. The majority of the replies were quite sensible within the context of Japanese cultural values; this one from Michiko Fukazawa, a female counselor, suggests that not only is the affair none of the writer's business, but should be off limits even for discussion. Today, however, the majority of educated Japanese women consider a husband's sexual affairs, while not necessarily grounds for separation or divorce, to be very much the legitimate concern of a wife.

Response: Michiko Fukazawa, female counselor

In the course of a lifetime there are bound to be mountains and valleys, and the same can be said for marriages. Husbands and wives may be close, but they are still separate individuals. It is impossible to force another person to live exactly as you would wish. Your husband had his own reasons for getting into this situation, and this problem is his. You cannot solve this dilemma for him.

Any effort on your part to try to resolve this situation, for example to "leave him," or to "permit him to have a lover," cannot work. It is a big mistake to believe that you can will a solution involving other people's feelings and attitudes. You should exclude the other woman from your thoughts about your relationship with your husband. Confronting him over the smell of perfume brings the other woman into the situation as a factor between you two. Keep her out of it.

Your real problem lies entirely in the relationship between you and this man who has brought a terrible burden upon himself. Let us hope that the whole matter can become a proving ground for his love for you.

We mentioned above that this is not a typical letter. The traditional vices such as drinking, womanizing, and gambling are not very prominent in complaints by wives writing to *Jinsei Annai*. Alcohol abuse as the main subject of letters is rare, although it seemed to be a contributing factor in a few letters describing domestic violence. One letter complained of the behavior of an unemployed husband who "drinks every night"; another complained of violent behavior, but it was not clear if alcohol was involved.

Anyone who has lived in Japan for a time might guess that gambling would be a problem in many families with limited budgets. Legal betting occurs all over Japan, not only for horse racing, but for bicycle racing and speedboat racing. A few decades ago, the Chinese game of *mahjong* became a form of recreational gambling for many men. *Mahjong* parlors are not as popular as they once were, but they are still widespread over the urban landscape. Practically every block in local shopping areas has at least one *pachinko-ya*, a garishly decorated pinball parlor with incessant, loud, march music blaring from within.

Pachinko, too, represents a form of gambling, and while the amounts of money used to play for an hour or so are relatively small,

pachinko addicts can easily spend upwards of a thousand dollars a year.

Judging from *Jinsei Annai*, Japanese wives seem to take their husband's gambling with resigned acceptance. Only three letters featured complaints against husbands who gambled too much: two from wives of men accused of spending excessive amounts of time playing *mahjong*, and another about a man whose gambling habits were not clearly described. Three or four additional letters complaining of "foolish use of money" could very well have involved gambling, but did not explicitly say so.

Sexual compatibility was the problem in four letters, three decrying unreasonable sexual demands made on wives, and one from a woman in her middle forties who lamented the loss of sexual appetite in her husband. The Japanese rely heavily on condoms to prevent pregnancy. The shortcomings of this method were revealed in one letter in the following way.

AFTER THIRD ABORTION, CAN'T STAND IT ANYMORE Husband Carelessly Insists on Making Love

I am a thirty-year-old housewife with two children. Two months ago I became pregnant. We live in a small rented house; since we are already a family of four, we simply cannot manage another child, I recently had my third abortion.

My husband is a sincere man, but he doesn't help with the children at all. With one more child my burden will increase so much that I won't be able to stand it. In spite of this, my husband wants to have sex all the time without being careful about getting me pregnant. Each time I had an abortion he promised to cut down on having sex, but as soon as I am fully recovered he wants to start up again. I beg him to use condoms. He rarely has them and he just goes ahead and forces sex on me anyway.

I can't stand suffering so much physically and spending so much money on abortions.

My husband seems to enjoy the sex, but I can't because I am always worried about getting pregnant again. Because we already have children, I don't see any reason for having sex all the time. Can't men learn to be more self-controlled? Please give me your opinion.

—T., YAMAGATA PREFECTURE

The response from Keiko Ochiai, a female writer, basically follows a standard progressive line which typifies intellectual commentary about marriage these days. The argument that marriage partners should respect each other—directed mainly at husbands—is frequently repeated in women's magazines, and is probably affecting overall levels of expectation for young women.

Response: Keiko Ochiai, female writer

For humans sex is not just a functional process performed for reproductive purposes. It is one form of communication between a husband and wife. In a conversation, if the husband alone did all the talking, the two people would not be communicating effectively. The reverse also holds true.

If you both agree that you do not want any more children, then taking safeguards against pregnancy is the responsibility of both partners. Since the female becomes pregnant, the male should take contraceptive measures to show his consideration for the relationship. It has been said that in sexual matters a person reveals his or her true nature. After all, what is the real difference between sex that ignores the feelings of one partner, and rape.

Some contraceptives do not require the husband's cooperation; perhaps you should use this type of method. Please consult your gynecologist.⁵ It is a pity that your husband should have to be handled this way. He shows scant concern not only for your body but also for your feelings.

This does not just concern limiting sex because you already have children; it pertains to the basis of marriage, which is respect for each other's physical and mental well-being.

The above letters express easily identifiable faults in husbands: complaints against physical abuse, womanizing, and drinking too much are heard frequently in every society. However, wives speaking through *Jinsei Annai* were more likely to lament about the more intangible facets of married life.

For the most part, disgruntled wives whose letters were published during the year did not describe their situation as one of pitiable victimization; there were only a few cases involving any spectacular villainy, such as wife beating, on the part of husbands. Of course, there are likely

to be a large number of wives in that kind of predicament in Japan as there are everywhere. Perhaps women with "dangerous-case" husbands felt that their problems were beyond the scope of a mere advice column. Nevertheless, most of the letters of this type painted a picture not so much of a hopeless victim, but simply of a very disappointed person. The most common complaint involved a woman choosing a lifelong partner whose personality and behavior did not satisfy her expectations, and also the woman's lack of control over the situation and her inability to mold him and her predicament into an agreeable situation.

Sometimes it seemed that a husband was just a convenient scapegoat for a general feeling of dissatisfaction. In several letters the husband did not seem to irk the wives as much as the cultural style that allows the husband a great measure of sanctioned self-centeredness.

There is a new wind stirring in Japan, promoted more than anything else by women's magazines, and it carries with it the idea of a far more integrated family life. Unquestionably, more companionship exists between husband and wife in the Japan of today than ever before. In every city Sunday has become a kind of unofficial family day; in good weather young husbands and wives and their small children crowd the parks and amusement centers. Drinking with the boys several nights during the week is not as much of an absolute requirement for young workers as it was just a few years back. Something called the "my home" movement (the English term is always used in this regard) contributes to an increased emphasis on family life for men. The movement began about ten years ago as a larger number of Japanese families moved into suburban houses with larger rooms and more space for such things as decorative gardens. My home-ism features life around the house as a source of pleasure—a brand new idea to the majority of middle-class Japanese men. As magazines—including some that men read—focused on the theme, it gained in popularity, and now some men feel they have a perfectly respectable excuse for refusing to spend so much time with fellow workers.

Nevertheless, the more traditional ideas of separate personal and social spheres in which great intimacy is not a major feature of the relationship between husband and wife are not easily swept away. Women are more inclined to accept the emerging themes than are men; consequently an unusually large gap between the expectations of the two sexes—or at least what

they hope marriage will be like—is emerging. One letter describes a husband who does not or will not perceive any need to accommodate emerging changes in family roles.

INSENSITIVE, JOB-RELATED MARRIAGE

No Warm Conversation, Husband a Tyrant, She Yearns for Divorce

I am a housewife in my mid-twenties, married for six years with two young children. A man I worked with proposed to me, and since I had already become pregnant by him, I decided to marry him. The family I was raised in was extremely feudalistic,⁶ so I wanted to escape as soon as possible. I was very naïve, looking forward to spending a lot of time with my husband; I didn't expect the reality of everyday life as a housewife.

As soon as we settled into an apartment my husband said, "I want you to act just like the wives do in television dramas; as soon as I come home I want you to put away my shoes, help me to change clothes, and serve me tea." Having two small children only a year apart, I cannot run around serving him just as he desires. Sometimes I ask him to take care of himself, which almost always starts a fight. My husband loses his temper and calls me names like "asshole" and "pig"⁷ right in front of the children. I have told him many times not to do this, but he is so frustrated by the behavioral norms he must follow all day at work that he does not restrain himself at home. I would feel a lot better if he would just tone down his language.

We never speak to each other warmly as a normal husband and wife. I had a cold and stayed in bed one day, and he became so mad when he came home that he actually kicked my head. No matter what the situation, he treats me like a servant, always expecting the house to be in perfect order. It was exactly this type of relationship in my family that I wanted to escape, but with this husband I have ended up in the same kind of environment.

Is this normal? Do you think that my complaints are unreasonable? I am convinced that I would be happier together with my children if I got divorced. What do you think?

—C., KANAGAWA PREFECTURE

Men can still ignore the pressures created by this gap in expectations. The idea that home is a kind of refueling and rest station where men

only have to go to for essentials, and where the relationships don't have to be nurtured with attention, is still widely supported in Japan. A large proportion of men, and probably many women as well, would find it difficult to understand the depth of disappointment experienced by a young wife who wrote the following letter.

**HUSBAND RARELY STAYS HOME AT NIGHT
Works on Holidays, Goes Out Drinking All the Time,
Ignores Children**

I am a housewife in my mid-twenties. I want to discuss the situation concerning my husband. He is a taxi driver, about ten years older than I. Perhaps because he was in his thirties when we got married, he cannot learn to take family life seriously. Due to the nature of his work he is out every night until dawn. He works every holiday, and takes only two or three days off each month. In spite of this, his income is very small; I find it difficult to believe that he is really working hard.

Even on his rare days off, rather than staying at home, he goes out drinking with his friends. Whenever he finally does decide to stay home, he complains that he is too tied down to the place, and we usually begin to fight. Our child hardly knows his father. I'm beginning to be bothered emotionally by this situation, and I wake up in the middle of the night deeply irritated. Recently I have been seeing a doctor about my condition.

My husband was like this since right after our marriage, and it is slowly getting worse. I don't think he has another woman; whether he does or not, I feel I cannot continue with this meaningless life. I really feel sorry for our child. What can I do?

—K., SHIZUOKA CITY

One reason Japanese wives tolerate disappointing relationships is that most of them don't see any escape. Divorce is a growing phenomenon in contemporary Japan. Although it is still only about one-fifth of the U.S. rate, it is not only at an all-time high, but it has gradually increased since 1980 as American divorce rates have leveled off. However, it remains very difficult for a Japanese woman to contemplate. Until about fifteen years ago, husbands were more likely to win custody of all young children in a divorce, and while it was well within

the realm of possibilities for him to remarry, the wife rarely could. Even today divorce visits a degree of shame on a wife's parents, but the real deterrent is the bleak economic prospects for self-support. For women, jobs are offered with the assumption that they provide strictly supplemental income: A woman without special talents or training could not possibly support herself; although she is more likely to be awarded legal custody today, the prospect of divorce would probably force her to give up her children to her husband anyway because she simply could not afford to raise them alone. The following letter expresses this dilemma.

**SHE SIMPLY CANNOT STAND HER HUSBAND
But Rejects Divorce Because She Does Not Want to Give Up
Her Children**

I am a housewife in my early twenties, married for three years with one child. I think it was during the time when I was pregnant that I really began to understand how different it is being married from what people expect before they get married. Anyway, it was about that time that my husband and I began to fight all the time.

The real problem in our marriage is that my husband can't break away from his mother—she still completely dominates him in every way. Every holiday he goes to visit his parents' house without even taking me along. What really makes me mad is that he is always comparing everything I do with his wonderful, perfect "mama."

Now that I have a child, at least I have something to keep me interested around the house. I try to ignore my husband's stupidity. Rather than fight with him, I just pray for the time when he will once again go to work. I guess it is not necessary for me to mention that I can't stand him. Around strangers he acts like a perfectly good person, but as soon as he gets home he turns into the same old jerk.

I've thought about leaving him many times, but it would probably mean giving up my child, which I could not endure. Of course, it would be almost impossible for me to support myself and my child if we lived alone. I suppose I just have to put up with the rotten part of my life when he is around.

I wish he would get into some kind of accident and be killed. Sometimes I think I might even kill him myself. The idea of having sex with him

makes me sick to my stomach. Do I really have to live the rest of my life like this? Is there something wrong with me? Please advise.

—N., TOKYO

Another letter has a similar tone.

HUSBAND SHOWS NO LOVE Anxiety over Just Continuing On

I am a housewife in my early thirties. I am upset because there is really nothing you can call love in the relationship between myself and my husband.

We look like a perfectly normal couple to others, but on the inside our marriage is an empty shell. As a joke, I once asked my husband what he would do if he found out that our child was not his. With absolute seriousness he replied that he would divorce me immediately. This is the cold-hearted manner in which he regards our life together. I suppose that by now my own attitude contributes to the problem; I'm not really sure.

At present I still have a child to raise. Someday our child will grow up and leave the house. What will I be left with then? If our marriage is empty now, can you imagine what my life will be like with no child around for company? I yearn for the kind of life that loving couples enjoy. I can't think of anything as meaningless as a loveless marriage.

Frankly, I think it would be more decent of me to divorce my husband and raise my child by myself. Unfortunately this is impossible. For a person like myself with no real qualifications, there is no way for me to solve the dilemma of getting a job around here. I suppose, therefore, that I will just have to endure this meaningless life.

—C., TOYAMA CITY

The way Japanese approach the whole matter of marriage remains an obstacle to the "marriage as companionship" theme which many women would obviously prefer. Most young people say they would prefer to marry as the result of romance. However, the state of marriage is so important in forging a normal adult identity that the significance of the result outweighs the ideals of romantic attraction which often allow for capricious behavior.

From the early part of the twentieth century, the process of court-

ship in Japan has divided into two types. One version is called *renai kekkon*, or “love marriage.” In one of the letters above a wife explains that she married a man “for love.” In other words, the two partners met on their own, without being introduced by a go-between. However, a *renai kekkon* should by no means be confused with the unrestricted marriage selection process commonly practiced in the United States.

Sometimes Americans marry without their mutual families ever getting to know each other very well. In Japan, family considerations are still crucially important in all matters related to marriage. After partners meet on their own, if they do decide to get married, both families must be consulted and involved in the process very early. If for some reason there are serious objections to the idea by important people in either family, it will be close to impossible to continue with wedding plans without winning the doubtful over first. Weddings are highly standardized in Japan, and they are incredibly expensive—easily the most expensive in the world. Without the full cooperation of both families, proper wedding arrangements simply cannot be accomplished.

The other type of courtship system in Japan is called *miai kekkon*, usually translated as “arranged marriage.” A hundred years ago, most Japanese marriages were literally arranged by parents and other family members, and typically the couple did not meet each other until minutes before the ceremony. In the modern *miai* no one is forced, or even necessarily pressured, into marriage. It is “arranged” only in the sense that the initial meeting, called an *omiai*, is arranged by some third party, a go-between who gains the consent of two young people of marriageable age to meet and talk over the possibility of becoming engaged. In the past, a go-between was commonly a relative of one of the two people, but these days it is more likely to be one’s superior at work, or a former teacher or professor, or some other older person who happens to know two eligible people who appear to be compatible.

Miai kekkon began to fade in importance during the 1960s. However, for about the last ten years it has made somewhat of a comeback; presently, nearly a third of Japanese marriages originate this way. Its great virtue lies in its use as a safety valve for people who haven’t been

smiled upon by romance as they pass through the prime marriageable age. Japanese life is more conservative than in many other places, and there are fewer opportunities for young people of the opposite sex to interact and get to know each other. Obviously, there are merits to a social system that allows young people, if they so desire, to circumvent the horrors of the dating game and still enjoy the fruits of marriage through a perfectly legitimate vehicle such as *omiai*. Perhaps its greatest drawback is that an *omiai* tends to create a rather businesslike atmosphere which can easily clash with the hopes for more intense companionship that are now held by more and more women.

In the letter below, the way the pair met may or may not be the real root of the problem, yet it is blamed for at least the perceived coldness of the husband.

HUSBAND SAYS, "WE HAVE NOTHING TO SAY TO EACH OTHER"

Lifeless Marriage, Meaningless Days

*I am a wife in my late twenties with two children. I got married through a *miai*, but I made a big mistake in agreeing to proceed because it was obvious from the beginning that he was just not my type of person. I decided to settle on him because I felt I didn't have a wide choice: I had no brothers or older sisters and I was in line to inherit the family business, so my parents insisted on my marrying a man who would agree to be an adopted husband.⁸*

*A little before that I had turned down another *omiai* partner even though my family put a lot of pressure on me to accept. So after the second one I just didn't have the energy to fight with them anymore. I decided to accept and get it over with and start a family of my own. I didn't care for the person, but I thought that at least he would be a good family man.*

Ever since we first met it has been like dealing with a stranger. I have tried to open up lines of communication with my husband, but it is like trying to talk to a clam. The man is totally unable to carry on a conversation. When I have tried to discuss this problem with him he usually says something like, "We are husband and wife, but why do we have to talk to each other all the time; after all we really have nothing to say to each other." He comes home from work late every day and I spend

meaningless days without any adult companionship. If these conditions continue it will eventually affect our children. Please advise me.

—S., NIIGATA PREFECTURE

Comparing a husband to “that wonderful guy” a woman almost married or should have married is a phenomenon familiar to people everywhere. In Japan, it can have the added poignancy of being welded with the common feeling that a marriage is loveless and dutiful; yet for those lucky enough to marry for love, all the little irritations of life are melted away by the heat of romance. Although the next letter could have come from a person in many other societies, it has a particularly Japanese feel to it.

**AFTER THREE YEARS OF MARRIAGE,
DISAPPOINTED IN HUSBAND
Husband Sullen and Stubborn; Was the Other Man a Better Choice?**

I am a housewife in my early twenties with one child. We have been married for more than three years. I met my husband at work; we dated for more than two years, but gradually I was sort of disillusioned and at one point we broke off the relationship. He was very persuasive, and because my family was anxious for me to get married, I eventually accepted his proposal. Before getting married I met another man at work, a person with a bright outlook on life; the exact opposite of my sullen and stubborn husband. This was a gentle person with a very modern personality. I wanted to break off the engagement and go out with the other man, but I also wanted to avoid trouble, and I lacked the courage to take such a bold step.

I had always thought that if a woman is loved, then she will be happy. However, I know now that it takes more than that. Since I don't really like my husband, it is impossible for me to be pleasant to him. Since our wedding, my husband has revealed himself to be incredibly finicky, becoming nasty about inane things like overly salty miso soup. Because he earnestly wanted to marry me, I assumed he would always treat me with respect.

Until I understood that it is kindness, not education or a fancy job, that really counts in a man, I really wasn't qualified to select a husband. I guess there is nothing left for me to do except devote my energies toward raising my child and thinking about the other man for the rest of my life.

Please advise me if you know of any way I can forget about the other man and learn to love my husband.

—M., YOKOHAMA CITY

As complaints against husbands encompass a broad array of problems pervasive in the *Jinsei Annai* column, this theme extends into the next chapter although from a different perspective.