

# Salaryman Masculinity in *One-Punch Man's* Kynical Narrative

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## Abstract

This article examines the world of *One-Punch Man*, a popular manga and anime series by ONE and Murata Yusuke. It focuses on the friction between the role of the individual superhero versus the system that values their efforts. I argue that *One-Punch Man* evaluates its heroes based upon their productivity. Thus, *One-Punch Man's* heroes fall prey to a broader ideology of "Japan, Inc." In *One-Punch Man*, this ideology shapes its heroes into workers rather than agents. More specifically, *One-Punch Man* envisions its heroes through the lens of salaryman masculinity.

**Keywords:** ideology, salaryman masculinity, Japan, manga, anime

## Introduction

In episode 9 of *One-Punch Man*, a Japanese animated feature (anime), the main character, Saitama, stands alone against the Deep Sea King. The arc spans two episodes. The Deep Sea King is a massive, muscled, and chitinous monster. He is leading a vast army to invade and take over the land. Heroes attempt to stop him but all are unsuccessful. Citizens of the city hole up in a giant domed bunker and it does not take long before the Deep Sea King penetrates the walls. Mumen Rider, a low-ranked hero, attempts to stop him. Unsurprisingly, he fails. Before the Deep Sea King can slaughter the civilians, Saitama arrives. In one punch, he defeats the Deep Sea King. The citizens of the city are grateful, shocked, and confused. They are grateful because they were spared; shocked that the Deep Sea King died so easily; and confused because such a minor hero is the one who defeated the villain. One citizen theorizes that the other heroes are frauds; if a no-named individual such as Saitama could so easily defeat the Deep Sea King, what is the point of supporting heroes at all? Saitama, sensing the growing unrest, lies to the crowd, "Today's my lucky day! I barely did anything and now I get all the credit!"<sup>1</sup> The crowd turns on him.

The denouement of the Deep Sea King arc mirrors a testy negotiation between a subject and a structure. By witnessing Saitama's immense strength, the crowd questions the role of the Hero's Association, an organization that evaluates, compensates, and legally defends superheroes. By presenting himself as a slimy opportunist, Saitama does two things. One, he stresses the necessity of the Hero's Association. The crowd cannot question the organization's role. As such, Saitama makes himself a type of martyr. Second, the crowd's questioning unveils an assemblage of logics. The conversation revolves around the supposed uselessness of the hero's hierarchy. Regardless of the hero's rank, they all fall before the Deep Sea King. It is Saitama, a C-rank hero, who defeated the

Deep Sea King. Yet the sequence is only briefly jovial. By sacrificing his reputation, Saitama upholds the ideology of the hero's association. Such an ideology extends beyond the story of *One-Punch Man*. This ideology is one of masculinity, in particular, referring to salaryman masculinity. *One-Punch Man*, as a cynical take on superheroes, reveals how pervasive such an ideology is in contemporary Japan.

### ***One-Punch Man* and Superheroes in Japan**

*One-Punch Man* refers to various media properties. It began as a webcomic by ONE. It then became a collaboration between ONE and Murata Yusuke for *Weekly Shonen Jump*. It was then adapted into an anime by Studio Madhouse. ONE intended for the comic to test out how to draw comics.<sup>2</sup> ONE's intentions were to publish these comics on Nitosha, a free publishing platform for comics. Since the comic began as an experiment, *One-Punch Man*'s initial art style was crude and simplistic. ONE rendered characters in full black and white with thick lines. The resolutions were small and the designs were simple. *One-Punch Man* exploded in popularity when manga artist Murata Yusuke (*Eyeshield 21*) came across the webcomic. According to ONE in a *Weekly Shonen Jump* interview, "Murata Sensei just happened to find my website and became interested in *One-Punch Man*. I had always been a fan of his, so I jumped at the opportunity to work with him. I get really excited seeing my work transformed into something with so much passion and amazing art."<sup>3</sup> Murata is largely the artist for the manga collaboration. Through the collaboration, the character designs have become well-defined and the heroes, intricate. Overall, the manga was much more visually complex. Yet the collaboration between ONE and Murata runs deeper than a writer-artist collaboration. Murata became involved in writing the collaborative *One-Punch Man* manga. The result was Shonen Jump-specific arcs that never appeared in the original webcomic. Likewise, both ONE and Murata played clear advisory roles for the *One-Punch Man* anime.

Despite the minor differences between all three, the narrative structure of *One-Punch Man* remains consistent. *One-Punch Man* concerns a penniless superhero named Saitama. After saving a young child from a crab monster, Saitama develops a taste for heredom. Thus, he undergoes a rigorous training regiment: 100 push-ups, 100 squats, 100 crunches, and running 10 kilometers a day, no exceptions. According to Saitama, there were two by-products: hair loss and insurmountable physical ability. Well into his hero career, he meets Genos, a cyborg. Genos introduces Saitama to the Hero's Association, an institutional body that financially supports and regulates heroes. It turns out that Saitama's lack of notoriety is because he never enlisted in the Hero's Association. Despite his immense physical prowess, Saitama nearly fails the written examination. As such, while he is by far the strongest character in the series, he begins as a C-rank hero.<sup>4</sup> The story of *One-Punch Man* concerns his efforts to climb the ranks.

Why is *One-Punch Man* an important case? There are two reasons. First, Japan, compared to America, has a much more fractured image of the superhero. At a glance, there is a clearer

homology of superheroes in America. Images of Batman, Superman, the Avengers, and other characters from the DC and Marvel comic universes, are clearly marketed and delineated as superheroes. Such superheroes, according to Chris Gavalier, refer to older stories of agential exceptionalism. To Gavalier, “[b]efore the dawn of election ballots, kings represented God and so ruled by divine right. When God retired from politics, supermen claimed the empty throne. Even when they allow some petty president or prime minister to sit on it, superheroes...pledge allegiance to no government.”<sup>5</sup> Thus the image of the superhero in American comics (partially) recalls sentiments of famous revolutionaries like Guy Fawkes and Oliver Cromwell, whose moral compass and political orientation were not supposed to be beholden to any government. Gavalier also notes that superheroes are free agents, “radicals championing their own self-defined liberty.”<sup>6</sup> Exceptional status and ability go together with exceptional capacity. In Japan, such characters do exist. However, they are not usually referred to as superheroes. Son-Goku from Akira Toriyama's *Dragon Ball*, for instance, is an individual of exceptional ability. A savant of combat, Goku's journeys are reminiscent of American superheroes. Goku has enemies, allies, and fights for what he believes is right or true. His immense physical prowess undergirds his ability to enact his morals. However, Goku is not marketed as a superhero. In Japan, characters like Goku, Ichigo (from *Bleach*), Luffy (from *One Piece*), or Naruto (from *Naruto*) act akin to superheroes. However, they are almost never marketed as superheroes, nor do audiences perceive them as superheroes. The cultural distinction becomes even more complex when looking at adjacent or subcultural texts. Takeuchi Naoko's *Bishojo Senshi Sera Mun* (Sailor Moon) concerns a group of schoolgirls who transform into costumed fighters and combat evil. Here, Sailor Moon falls in the lineage of Super Sentai (Sentai meaning “task force”) shows. In *Super Sentai*, a team of heroes work together to fight off threats. *Super Sentai* itself is a form of *tokusatsu* (“special effects”) television, many of which involve superheroes. The result is both a market and a field of study that bears a different registry in Japan. Many of these characters do not fall under the category of superhero. Instead, these characters fall under *nekketsu* (hot-blooded), *shounen* (young boy), *mahou shoujo* (magical girl), among others.

Japan's heterogenous look at the superhero is crucial. Despite its fractured image of the superhero, Japan does have its own superhero genre. Furthermore, the Japanese superhero genre is fully aware of its American influences. The Japanese superhero genre bears significant cross-Pacific influence with America. Thus, on some level, it bears occidental undertones. Kohei Horikoshi's *My Hero Academia* is a chart-topping manga and anime series about students with powers. Horikoshi noted that he was influenced by Marvel comics, specifically *Spiderman*.<sup>7</sup> While billed as *tokusatsu*, Tsurubaya Eiji's *Ultraman* reflexively refers to itself as a ‘hero.’ And while Japan does have numerous hero-related subgroups, one of the earliest contemporary television *tokusatsu* was Toei Company's loose adaptation of *Spiderman*. This adaptation, which ran from May 17, 1978 to March 14, 1979, is *Spiderman* in name and costume only. In fact, *One-Punch Man* is a direct play on words of an earlier Japanese superhero story, *Anpanman*. Saitama himself is a reference to *Anpanman*, a hero whose head is a bean jam bun. *One-Punch Man* bears lineage of Japanese

superheroes that call attention to their herodrom. While the characters in the previous paragraph fulfill the roles of heroes, they rarely identify nor are they marketed as superheroes. Properties such as *My Hero Academia* and *One-Punch Man* directly refer to its own characters as superheroes. The importance of this distinction is that there is an acknowledgement and understanding of the superhero. Recalling Goku, even though he acts like a superhero, he is not sold or understood as a superhero.

### ***One-Punch Man* as a Kynical Text**

This leads to the second point. While *My Hero Academia* employs a complex system of superheroes, *One-Punch Man* foregrounds its own self-reflexivity. Both texts involve systems of hero-dom. Both texts involve characters whose central drama concerns navigating those systems. Both texts, in such dramas, make statements on the necessity of those systems. *One-Punch Man* differs from *My Hero Academia* because *One-Punch Man* is self-reflexive. *One-Punch Man* engages with the nature of what makes a hero. At the same time, asking what makes a hero reinforces its ideology. It is a kynical text. Peter Sloterdijk popularized the term in *In Critique of Cynical Reason*. He argues that when we consider ideological critique, such considerations bear a “polemical continuation of the miscarried dialogue through other means.”<sup>8</sup> For Sloterdijk, critique of ideology already takes on the form of respectability. Yet such respectability is insufficient for proper critique. Drawing on Diogenes, Sloterdijk argues that sufficient critique requires a cheeky, playful challenge to idealistic critiques of ideology. Sloterdijk's kynical reasoning is reminiscent of Bakhtin's carnival: a cheeky, playful space in which systems invert. Building on Sloterdijk, Žižek proposes that such kynical texts draw cynical reasons. For Žižek, whereas the kynic is an embodied vulgarity that challenges idealistic systems, the cynic presupposes such an engagement and operates within such systems. The cynic, in other words, is aware they are a subject of an ideology. They are thus aware of Marx's basic ideological tenet: “they do not know it, but they are doing it.”<sup>9</sup> In fact, cynical subjects of an ideology know they are doing it, but they do it anyways. In doing so, the cynical text is ideology par excellence. In believing they are aware of how ideology shapes them, they become comfortable. Doing so reinforces their ideology. For *One-Punch Man*, there is no clear cynicism. Neither ONE nor Murata has made any pretenses about the critique of ideology; yet, the text bears several critiques (which will be addressed later). In short, *One-Punch Man* engages in playful dismantling of power structures. At the same time, it provides no clear answers on how to negotiate the ideology of its heroes.

This kynical attitude pervades *One-Punch Man*. The rhetoric and deflation of Garou is one such example. A rogue agent, Garou prowls the cities and engages in what he calls a “hero hunt.” The hero hunt is where Garou challenges heroes to test his power and skill. He is often victorious. The hero hunt is so successful, in fact, that the Hero's Association sends out an organization-wide bounty. Everyone is after Garou, now dubbed as “the human monster.” The arc climaxes at the

showdown. Several heroes and monsters are in a pitched battle. Garou is in the fray and he is severely wounded. In chapter 68 of the webcomic, while wounded, Garou laments to one of the heroes:

Garou: Aren't you playing 'hero' as well? It reeks of hypocrisy, it makes me sick. What you're doing now is also part of 'conducting justice and punishing evildoers'? As long as you do the right thing, you gain power, right? That's powerful, sure. Humans conducting violence with no regret or guilt, they can beat anyone. If needed, just throw that kindness overboard. You heroes are shit.<sup>10</sup>

Chapters later, he is defeated. But such precarity unlocks a power within him. He reaches a physical apotheosis, and, ascended, disposes of the heroes and monsters with ease. The arc reaches its nadir, with all hope lost, until Saitama comes to the fray. Saitama's entrance is a visual gag: his appearance, sketchy and simplistic, is disarming. He is rendered entirely with thick, jagged, frenetic lines amidst empty backgrounds. His presentation undermines the tension of the previous chapters. Still, despite his ascended form, Garou is unable to stop Saitama. In a fit of rage, Garou asks Saitama what gives him the power, what drives him as a hero. Saitama's answer is a continuation of the visual gag. He picks his nose, and then says, "It's a hobby."<sup>11</sup>

"It's a hobby" is pure cynicism. Compared to Garou's impassioned speech about the unfairness of the world, Saitama's comment decelerates the narrative's forward momentum. At the same time, the comment also reveals the playfulness of ONE's writing. The heroes and villains, in all of their magnanimity, are powerless before Saitama's might. The battle between Garou and Saitama is a negotiation between cynical and kynical. Garou represents the cynical perspective, fully aware of the system, and more broadly, the ideology. For Sloterdijk, the challenge with cynical reasoning is that such critiques can strengthen ideology: "the critic admits that ideologies, which from an external point of view are false consciousness, are, seen from the inside, precisely the right consciousness."<sup>12</sup> For the cynical critic, such falsities are irrelevant—subjects simply believe them to be true. Garou's position is a law of nature that believes itself to be true. Thus, it places him at odds with the heroes and the monsters. He sees both groups as jockeying for power, both behind charged political messages. Garou's behaviour is incredibly cynical. He adopts an air of being above such political dimensions. Yet when given the chance, he proposes his own political position. He believes in being above it, though there is little evidence to suggest he really is. However, his action plan falls within ongoing structures of power. Nothing has changed.

In comparison, Saitama's response bears no further consideration of such ideologies. On a narrative level, his jarring appearance and deadpan character embodies the kynical position. Instead of believing he is aware or above the system, he inhabits the system. At times, his behaviour is akin to Diogenes' vulgarity; it betrays ideological contours. Thus, the implication is that in moments where such cynicism is subdued, ideology is operating without fail. This brings us back to the beginning. The Deep Sea King battle is the failure of such kynical reasoning. Saitama, the jester, is

incapable of joking around. He is beset by a concretizing, ideological pressure. The crowd's skepticism of the Hero's Association is an Althusserian interpellation. To Louis Althusser, interpellation is the hail. A police officer yells, "Hey you!" If a subject responds to that call, they are locked into a system in which they are a subject of a state apparatus.<sup>13</sup> In this situation, the citizens' skepticism is the hail; Saitama chose to answer it. Here, the playful vulgarity has failed. So, if this is a case of ideological interpellation, then what is the ideology of *One-Punch Man*?

### Salaryman Masculinity

*One-Punch Man* is built on an ideology of salaryman masculinity. As simply put, salaryman masculinity refers to an idea of men as providers for a family. Conformity to a masculine image entails work-centric lives revolving around production. Mizuho Aoki notes that salaryman masculinity is a post-war, *Shōwa* era<sup>14</sup> by-product. The image of working men—most of them fathers—legitimises a corporatist productive social fabric. Such an image upholds a broader apparatus colloquially referred to as "Japan, Inc."<sup>15</sup> In *Precarious Japan*, Anne Allison describes Japan, Inc. as a nationwide set of social contracts.<sup>16</sup> In return, members of society are prodigious and productive. In doing so, citizens uphold what supporters refer to as a "super stable society" (*chou antei shakai*). With the *nikkei* crash of the early 1990s, the mentality of a reciprocal, corporatist Japan was severely undermined. Full-time workers began to shift into temporary workers (*haken*). Such dismantling accelerated in the early 2000s. Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi enacted several neoliberal reforms, further compromising any return to "Japan, Inc." Yet despite the transition from lifelong employees to temporary workers, individual identification, arguably, has not kept pace. Aoki notes that while the economic conditions of men are changing, old mentalities persist.<sup>17</sup> She notes, "even when men find it tough to continue working, the traditional masculine image of toughness and stoicism makes them refrain from quitting or even discussing their suffering."<sup>18</sup> In other words, such masculinity is very pervasive.

Despite the simple definition, salaryman masculinity is an incredibly robust ideology. Because it revolves around masculinity through the lens of productivity, salaryman masculinity penetrates much of Japanese society. Likewise, while salaryman masculinity tends to refer to working men, it also involves a wider field of what Gilles Deleuze might consider as becoming-subjects.<sup>19</sup> The becoming-subject collects references around it to compose of an image. But that image is neither static nor a mirror.<sup>20</sup> Instead, development acts alongside desire, with both implicating one other. The image of the salaryman is resilient because it is reminiscent of such identification. Salaryman masculinity can simply refer to "manly men are men who produce." Such a simple description ignores critical compositional nuances. For instance, Ian Condry notes that salaryman masculinity is a hegemonic framework that affects discussions beyond work. When Condry refers to the "otaku" (super fans), he notes that "many interpretations of otaku masculinity share an assumption with salaryman masculinity — namely, that value...tends to be grounded in

productivity.”<sup>21</sup> For Condry, *otaku* masculinity orbits around presuppositions of salaryman masculinity. To be a ‘good’ *otaku*, for Condry, is to be a productive one. Yet such good or bad *otaku* debates do not happen without a relative position to the salaryman. Condry makes such a concession: “if the salaryman stood for one model of Japan's economic productivity, I would argue that *otaku* represent a new form of manhood.”<sup>22</sup> Tomoko Hidaka notes that such stoic, collective productivity manifests in topics as broad as love and gender. For instance, Hidaka notes that one of her respondents looked for a wife who was “to have a wife who represented a ‘good wife, wise mother’.”<sup>23</sup> Marriages of love are classified entirely differently (*ren'ai kekkon*). In short, while there is a specific, simple definition for salaryman masculinity, its operative implications are broad. When referring to salaryman masculinity, I reference its productive aspect. A man is a man when he produces. Salaryman masculinity is thus not as concrete as one might conceive of an ideology. Rather, it exists as nodal points, in which elements revolve around it. On occasion, it pulls elements into its orbit. An element adjacent and sometimes involved in salaryman masculinity is becoming a *shakaijin*.

### ***One-Punch Man's Salaryman Masculinity***

Why is this important to *One-Punch Man*? *One-Punch Man* might not be addressing salarymen with specificity. However, salaryman ideology undergirds its narrative. The specific permutation of salaryman masculinity emphasized in *One-Punch Man* is referred to as “going into society” (*shakai ni hairu*). Though *shakai* generally translates to society, it connotes a working society. As such, people can be considered going in or out of *shakai*.<sup>24</sup> The reciprocal, contractual relationship between member and society is key. Being a member of *shakai* requires certain responsibilities. The most applicable is one of measurable productivity. When a citizen is measurably productive, they become a ‘person of society’ (*shakaijin*). One distinction to note is that *shakai* is not always subservient to the salaryman label. Mary Gobel Noguchi notes that students can be considered *shakaijin* (*shakaijin gakusei*).<sup>25</sup> However, salaryman masculinity is a form in which *shakaijin* concretizes its subjects. People work because they wish to be seen as members of society. Doing so, they uphold the corporatist order that legitimises the society they wish to be a part of.

In *One-Punch Man*, Saitama does not begin as a *shakaijin*. Instead, Saitama was working part-time at a convenience store. By the time of the main story, Saitama was jobless. He lived in a desolate, destroyed city, and had no job prospects. Saitama’s clash against the crab monster—and thus the moment in which he decides to be a hero—happens after a failed job interview. Saitama exists outside of the productive sphere of the salaryman. Regardless, despite his meager funds and destitute living, he continues to be a hero. It is in his lack of fame where *shakai* is revealed to be ideological. Shortly after defeating a monster, Saitama runs across the cyborg Genos. Genos offers to pay Saitama in exchange for the opportunity to shadow the blasé Saitama. From Genos, Saitama learns that there is a Hero’s Association. Furthermore, because Saitama is unregistered, his exploits

have gone uncredited. The story thus sets up the necessity of the institution as a negotiating factor of value. Saitama's actions as a hero—defeating villains and monsters—is a net benefit to society. Yet because his actions fall outside the purview of the Hero's Association, he is an abject agent. His lack of presence is because he inhabits the space outside of the association's control. In fact, the Hero's Association directly refers to self-proclaimed heroes (such as Saitama) as “weirdos” and that they should be “viewed with suspicion.”<sup>26</sup> In other words, his value to society is only valuable insofar as society can register them. Thus, for Saitama, his immediate registration at the Hero's Association is an act of *shakai ni hairu*. He is going into society.

To become a registered hero, hopefuls must undergo an examination administered by the Hero's Association. When Saitama and Genos take the hero examination, there is both a physical and a written test. Genos passes both with stellar marks, thus putting him in the upper echelon of heroes: S-rank. Saitama, in comparison, smashes the physical records. But due to his poor test scores, he places at C-rank. The test is reminiscent of company entrance tests (*nyuushashiken*). Here, organizations use the test to evaluate the fit and ability of the recruit. Regardless of ONE's intentions in crafting such a test, the fact that the association utilises a writing portion with significant weight (given that Saitama's physical score was affected so profoundly to derank him) suggests some sort of reference to larger Japanese corporate structures. On one level, the story plays Saitama's low rank (especially compared to his 'student' Genos) for laughs. The C-rank juxtaposes both his efforts and his power versus the Hero's Association view of him. In *One-Punch Man*, the Hero's Association enlists numerous petty, Machiavellian heroes, many seeking glory and fortune over an exercise of morality. It often does so by mimicking the corporate politics of Japan. For instance, Saitama's first meeting with Fubuki, leader of the Blizzard Group (*Fubuki-gumi*), is confrontational. Fubuki's intentions are to establish a pecking order through a seniority system. Thus, the Hero's Association operates much like an abstract approximation of a large Japanese company.

Nowhere is the ideological pressure more visible than in the hero King, dubbed “the greatest.”<sup>27</sup> An intimidating man, King is an S-rank hero who, it turns out, is powerless. His exploits and achievement, in a twist of fate, are Saitama's. Given that Saitama leaves immediately after dispatching monsters, the Hero's Association attributed such deeds to King, who happens to be present at many of Saitama's heroic deeds. Thus, the praise showered upon him are unearned. King is no stronger than an ordinary civilian. He acts as a character foil to Saitama. While Saitama is powerful and relatively unknown, King is famous yet powerless. In chapter 39 of the manga, King meets Saitama. Saitama asks King two relevant questions:

Saitama: Have you become so strong that fighting is too much of a hassle for you?

After finding out that King is a fraud, he nonchalantly asks him:

Saitama: Just become strong, and then you'll be fine, right?<sup>28</sup>



Saitama, despite realising that King stole his achievements, does not chide him. Rather, in kynical fashion, he dismantles the dramatic tension of the scene. The text presents Saitama as above it. This revelation is particularly prescient given that Saitama and King are connected by only one thing: labour. King's fame is a by-product of Saitama's efforts, but Saitama does not care about such labour. This moment is what Frederic Jameson would consider a symbolic act. Jameson argues that a text fundamentally runs into social contradictions.<sup>29</sup> Such contradictions are then resolved or transcended through the text, via interpretation: "the individual narrative, or the individual formal structure, is to be grasped as the imaginary resolution of a real contradiction."<sup>30</sup> In resolving such a contradiction, we understand what Jameson refers to as an "ideology of form." These are significations representing a social collective hidden in the text. The conversation between Saitama and King, I argue, is one such symbolic act. Remember that Saitama's intention for joining the Hero's Association is to accrue fame. The moment where he can reclaim the fruits of his labour, he casts it aside. The chapter proposes an imaginary resolution to its real contradictions: there is something greater than the labour. Saitama's herodom - which has remained largely vague and abstract—emerges as an endeavour that seeks no glory. *One-Punch Man* presents something greater than the efforts of the hero. In an idealistic fashion the stories propose that *true* heroes do not seek selfish desires. Thus, Saitama's kynical response is one of a 'true hero', ascending above such petty reasons. But at the same time, *One-Punch Man* continues as if this conversation never happened. The story never addresses the conversation again. Despite the dramatic display of herodom, the ideology of the text reconstitutes itself. Thus, at the same time, Saitama's speech reaffirms the salaryman ideology. Subjects internalize the value of their work because they want to. When Saitama asks King whether fighting is a hassle, Saitama is referring to the labour of herodom as alienation. Despite those concerns, Saitama continues to be a hero.

## Conclusion

*One-Punch Man* is, in effect, a treatise of the pervasiveness of salaryman masculinity. Very little suggests that ONE nor Murata wrote the comics with the intention of writing about salarymen. However, such discussions emerge regardless. The images of *One-Punch Man's* superheroes are, in effect, the image of its salarymen. They are productive bodies placed in a broader machinery that shows them how to internalize their own (given) values.

*One-Punch Man* also naturalises the labour of its superheroes. The ideological fabric of its world requires acknowledging the heroes' hidden labour. The Hero's Association is the gatekeeper of Saitama's recognition. His measurement of a hero is arbitrary: his initial ranking is not an evaluation of him as a hero, but what the association values as a hero. Such measurements are couched in productive rhetoric, recalling salaryman masculinity.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> *One-Punch Man*, “Unyielding Justice,” Season 1, Episode 9 (September 17, 2016), directed by Shunichi Yoshizawa, Netflix.
- <sup>2</sup> SUGOI JAPAN Award 2016, “‘Wanpanman’ tanjō hiwa! Kon'nanimo omoshiroi riyū ga akiraka ni,” <https://web.archive.org/web/20160326034723/http://sugoi-japan.jp/sugoi/03.html>.
- <sup>3</sup> Murata Yusuke, “Weekly Shonen Jump Interview,” *One-Punch Man Wiki*, 2015, [https://onepunchman.fandom.com/wiki/Interviews#Weekly\\_Shonen\\_Jump\\_Interview](https://onepunchman.fandom.com/wiki/Interviews#Weekly_Shonen_Jump_Interview).
- <sup>4</sup> In *One-Punch Man*, heroes are ranked with a number and a letter class. At the top are the S-rank heroes. At the bottom are the C-rank heroes. Within each class, heroes are also ranked by number, with 1 being the highest. In *One-Punch Man*, hierarchies often form within each letter class.
- <sup>5</sup> Chris Gavalier, *On the Origin of Superheroes: From the Big Bang to Action Comics No. 1* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2015), 48.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> Megan Peters, “Interview: ‘My Hero Academia’ Creator Kohei Horikoshi Talks Quirks, Comics, and Detroit Smashes,” *Comic Book*, August 2, 2018, <https://comicbook.com/anime/2018/08/02/my-hero-academia-kohei-horikoshi-interview-anime-manga/>.
- <sup>8</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 15.
- <sup>9</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 2008), 25.
- <sup>10</sup> ONE, “ワンパンマン *One-Punch Man*,” <http://galaxyheavyblow.web.fc2.com/fc2-imageviewer/?aid=1&iid=95>.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup> Sloterdijk, *Critique*, 20.
- <sup>13</sup> Louis Althusser, *On Ideology* (London: Verso, 2008), 48-49.
- <sup>14</sup> Japan’s periods tend to correspond with the reign of its emperors. Periods end when the emperor abdicates or dies. Emperor Akihito’s abdication in 2019, for instance, marks the end of his reign, known as the Heisei period, spanning from 1989 to 2019. The Shōwa period refers to the reign of Japanese history from December 25, 1926 to January 7, 1989, under Emperor Hirohito. In this case, the post-war Shōwa period refers to the period of Japan’s massive economic boom after the Second World War.
- <sup>15</sup> Anne Allison, *Precarious Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).
- <sup>16</sup> These contracts are defined by long-term employment, low crime, financial stability, and firm social connections.
- <sup>17</sup> Mizuho Aoki, “Modern Japanese Men Dogged By Stoic Salaryman Stereotype,” *Japan Times*, December 27, 2016, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/12/27/national/social-issues/modern-japanese-men-dogged-stoic-salaryman-stereotype/>.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>19</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 171.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup> Ian Condry, *The Soul of Anime: Collaborative: Creativity and Japan’s Media Success Story* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 188.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid., 194.
- <sup>23</sup> Tomoko Hidaka, *Salaryman Masculinity: Continuity and Change in Hegemonic Masculinity* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 98.
- <sup>24</sup> Mary Goebel Noguchi, “Shakai vs Society: Exploring Divergence in Meaning,” *Kansai University Institutional Repository*, March 20, 2014: 47, <http://hdl.handle.net/10112/8393>.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>26</sup> *One-Punch Man*, “The Modern Ninja,” Season 1, Episode 4 (August 16, 2016), directed by Nobuhiro Mutō, Netflix.
- <sup>27</sup> ONE and Yusuke Murata, *One-Punch Man* (San Francisco: VIZ Media, 2012), 21.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>29</sup> Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 75.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.