

# From *Ikumen* to *Ikuboss*:

Family-Company Relationship in Post-Bubble Japan

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In 2010 the Japanese government launched the *Ikumen* project to promote the active participation of fathers in family life as a countermeasure against the worrying declining birth rate. *Ikuboss* was publicly proposed by the NPO Fathering Japan in March 2014, and was soon followed by the government's launch of the *Ikuboss* Award to recognize corporate managers who provided good and supportive condition for fathers. The paper will offer a critical examination of the recent shift in the focus from men to corporations' management as reflected in the shift in the popularity of the buzzwords *Ikumen* and *Ikuboss*. This will be analyzed against the background of the current interest in Work and Life balance (WLB). The paper will offer critical examination of the relationship between discourses and practices. Thus asking "why work-life balance [in Japan] now?" (Fleetwood 2007) or, in other words: Are we facing an increase in the working *practices* associated with WLB or merely an increase in *discourse*?

Prof. Ofra Goldstein-Gidoni teaches at Tel Aviv University in the Departments of Sociology and Anthropology and East Asian Studies. She is the former Chair of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. Her current research focuses on family, gender, women, "new fatherhood" (*ikumen*) and the relationship between work and family in Japan, on cultural globalization and the incorporation of New Age spirituality in Israeli mainstream. Her first book titled *Packaged Japaneseess: Weddings, Business and Brides*, was published by Hawaii University Press in 1997. Her latest book *Housewives of Japan: An Ethnography for Real Lives and Consumerized Domesticity* was published in 2012 by Palgrave Macmillan (second edition in paperback August 2015). Goldstein-Gidoni has also published a large number of Japan-related articles in leading academic journals, the latest published in *Asian Studies Review* (Vol 41(2), 2017) "The Joy of Normal Living" as the Promise of Happiness for Japanese Women and their Families.

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