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INTRODUCTION

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As was indicated in the preface above, the aim of this symposium was to foster the exchange of ideas on various aspects of class society in Japan. This delicate issue has never been taken seriously in this country for many years. Indeed, until recently, most social scientists as well as sociologists inside and outside Japan tended to assume that Japanese society is classless, relatively open and equal. Although this perception, which was shared widely among academic as well as non-academic people in Japan, has become discredited in recent years, particularly since the collapse of the bubble economy in early 90's, the notion of class itself is still rarely discussed. For this reason, this symposium was unique and challenging. In fact, it represented a major breakthrough of the way in which the subject was openly discussed with the first real possibility for a fuller investigation of this hidden aspect of our society.

The underlying motifs running through this symposium were threefold. The first, and the major aim of this symposium, was to identify working-class culture, though in embryo, hopefully in its full potential. The second aim was to consider the role that academic credentials or credentialism played in post-war Japan as a major contributing factor to the formation of a class society. The third aim was, specifically in this context, to discover the vital role of school system in Japan as a powerful mechanism in the making of a Japanese working class. This is the common ground which the following papers shared. This introductory essay attempts to briefly map out the terrain of the debate and to situate the individual papers within it.

(1) The first paper, "Class Difference and Educational Opportunities in Japan" was presented by Masao Watanabe. Because of some editorial reason, this paper was published separately in the previous issue of this journal (*Hitotsubashi Journal of Social Studies*, 29, December 1997, pp.49-71). In it, Watanabe provided a useful conceptual introduction to the rest of the collection by offering an analytic framework to account for the relationship between education and class, which demonstrated just how powerful the class-impact on educational opportunities had been in post-war Japan. His framework accounts for the manner in which Japanese class society must be seen as part of the tightly structured credential society (Gakureki-Shakai) so well-known in Japan.

(2) Brinton presents the second paper, "Manufacturing Class: Urban Japanese High Schools at Work." The subject of this paper is two-fold. In the first half of the paper, she sets out to examine the job placement mechanism of the low-status high schools in Japan. Quite effectively in this context she criticizes the rosy picture depicted by the policy makers in US, who, she claims, meticulously distorted the realities of the Japanese society. In the latter part of the paper, the focus moves onto the institutionalized aspect of this mechanism as she

outlines the class reproductive mechanism which is emerging in these types of high schools. She particularly sheds light on the process through which the employers screen student applicants, a process that prioritizes students compliance to school rules and their willingness to work hard. But as she notes, these criteria are invoked primarily in evaluating working-class students, while middle-class students are more likely to be judged on their academic ability. In this way, Brinton demonstrates how individual character traits become institutionalized in schools to fit the class-specific pattern.

As a positive response to this interesting insight, I would like to add some follow-up data on each of the two main topics. Firstly, as to the job placement mechanisms, Brinton is quite right when she suggests that the supposedly 100% placement rate for high school students has been artificially manipulated. There certainly is a gap between the middle stage of the job placement process of every year, for example in October, when the top students of each class find jobs rather easily, and the final outcome as manifested itself in March of the following year. Somehow, those lower down in each class are difficult to find jobs, and this is a problem for all concerned. For example, in 1990, the best year to find a job in last ten years, the percentage of job placement was reported to be 84.3% in October and 98.3% in the next March. Accordingly the gap is more than 10 % between these two stages. In 1994, the most unfavorable year, the figures were 71.4% and 95.2% respectively. This gap became even wider. This original differential gap between these two stages in the process suggests the enormous task of the individual teachers, particularly those in Shinnro-shido section, to find a full-time job for these students. Probably, as Brinton suggests in this paper, it appears that they have manipulated these figures by decreasing the number in the denominator at each stage of the job placement process, so that they have come to terms with this hard task by not counting those students who could not find a job.

If we put the whole picture of this job placement mechanism in a wider social context, we come to acknowledge the differentials of job turnover rate by age group. According to the official statistics, in 1997, it was 10% for those aged 15-24 while 3.5% in average for the rest of the population. These official figures mean that the turnover rate among those without university background was extremely high: three times higher than the rest of the population. If we look at the educational background of those out of job in general, this contrast is even more striking. Out of all those unemployed, 76 % were high-school graduates and the rest, 24 %, were those with university background. For those with less privileged educational background, the chance for employment in the market is indeed quite limited. Japan is no exception as to this common characteristis underlying all market-oriented society.

If we look at the particular social group characterized by those categories, such as turnover rate, unemployment figures, and the job-placement gap in this particular age group, we can identify here the most vulnerable part of the whole population: the high-school educated young work force. This is the main body of what we might call Japan's "industrial reserve army," which, in fact, constantly fluctuates in number and composition from time to time depending on the volatile market situation.

Secondly, as to the class-reproductive nature of the job placement mechanism, it is extremely interesting to know from this paper that the low-status high schools are not in a separate hierarchy which would enable them to be ranked depending on their own set of value, criteria and standard. Indeed those low-level schools are preoccupied with the number of students they push into universities, even though this number is such a small fraction of

their total student population that it appears to be a meaningless indicator. Nevertheless, these low-status schools still seem to give top priority to that segment of students going to the university. As absurd or ironic as it may be, this picture shows how powerfully the middle-class ideology of higher education dominates the whole scene of secondary schooling, and how indiscriminately those lower-status high schoolers are trapped in this system of ideological dilemma. This dilemma seems to be well dipicted by the fact that the teachers of such low-status public high schools are sometimes reported to be hostile to the post-high school trade or vocational schools, Senmon-Gakko. It is well-known that these schools tend to boast proudly their highest record rate of job placement. Then, it is quite natural to assume that there is some rivalry between these two institutions. This particular situation for the public low-status high school illustrates an overall ideological picture of how the working-class culture has long been neglected while dominant middle-class ideology of meritocracy so strongly imposed in Japan.

(3) In the third paper presented, "Finding Class Culture in Japan: Institutional Strategies and the Breakdown of Authority and Identity," David Slater provides another fascinating insight into the Japanese high school. Responding to recent renewed sociological concern about the hardening reproduction of social inequality, his main aim is to give closer attention to the structures and practices that generate class-specific aspirations, strategies and dispositions at the very locus where the process of differentiation becomes institutionally articulated and legitimated: the high school. This paper attempts to outline the central theme of the theoretical question of class culture and apply it to materials he gathered at low-level high schools in Tokyo area.

As is widely known, the national consensus over the lack of class culture has been widely claimed and accepted inside and outside Japan, and this assumption might be the major reason for discouraging Japanese social scientists from further development of class studies in this country. In such a general atmosphere, this paper is a pioneering effort to identify the nature of working-class culture, which, as this paper suggested, might be in its very early stage, only identifiable as class-specific orientations rather than full-blown class identity. Nevertheless, there certainly is a huge difference in school culture between elite schools and low-status ones. It is, then, quite natural to assume that this gap has something to do with the overall class structure according to which each school has to be systematically allocated. Also natural is to assume that the different orientation in school will lead to a possible different class attitude outside school. In fact, it is widely reported that the school system, particularly in its lower end of the spectrum, is so much embattled these days that students become more alienated and demoralized than ever. Critics often claim the system has failed and this failure is sometimes characterized and expressed as the "hollowing out" of the school system. Growing number of demoralizing students in low-status high schools must be the unmistakable sign of the crumbling of old value of school system. However, as Slater notes, still missing is the particular shape of new value system to take its place. What will come next is still a big question. In that sense, much effort should be needed to identify the particular style and form of social identity of those students. Obviously, this question is closely linked with the class-specific values of the middle and lower working class.

Secondly, another interesting aspect of this paper is the suggestion that the Japanese working-class lads seem to share the same characteristics or dispositions with their British

counterpart, which Paul Willis once depicted so vividly. Educational as well as labour sociologists in Japan quite often quote his study and refer to the title of his famous book, but only to show negatively and ironically that such a class culture has never existed in Japan. Then, it is extremely interesting to know that Slater reported in this paper the defiant attitude and determined contestation against the teacher's authority among the students of low-status high schools. Also notable is that this defiance is balanced by acquiescence, or tacit compliance, among many of these students. The whole discussion in this paper reminds us repeatedly of the need to seek out the sign of their brand new positive attitude and learn to read the possibility of their social identity from this seemingly negative outlook of disgruntled students.

(4) As far as the popular ideology of women's role is concerned, the Japanese are now in the transitional phase from an old image of gendered role to more liberal models. It is, then, quite common for them to overstate this historic change irrespective of any class differences. However this change does not always have the same impact on the people's attitude of each segment of the population. In this way, quite impressively, Glenda Roberts, in her paper, "Blue-Collar Women in a Culture of Professional Housewives: Expanding the Meaning of Good Wife, Wise Mother," starts her discussion with the sharp contrast between two groups of women, those who are middle class and those of the working-class. The particular reference, in the first part of this paper, to Iwao's view is very interesting. What we can notice here in Iwao's view is the hall mark of the specific attitude of middle-class women who tend to stress the opportunity of increased individualistic life chance or benefit in it free from traditional gender roles. Iwao's view largely represents a particular social attitude which is in perfect tune with middle-class ethos of meritocracy, individualism and professional career-orientedness. What Roberts shows us here is that this view is in sharp contrast with the views of blue-collar working-class women in a highly critical sense.

The whole discussion in this paper is based on the material which the author gathered at a large garment manufacturing factory where she spent a year working on the assembly line and documenting the lives of her female co-workers. The persuasive portrayal was given in her book, *Staying on the Line, Blue-Collar Women in Contemporary Japan* (University of Hawaii Press, 1994). This very interesting documentation leads us to ask the big question how we can accordingly summarize the very nature of class culture in this part of the population. The rich portrayal presented in this book would give us a clue as to identifying the emerging contrast of life-style between blue-collar female workers and white-collar housewives or career-oriented professionals.

(5) With regard to the male counterpart of blue-collar working class, James Roberson's paper "Manufacturing Men: Working Class Masculinities in Japan" represents another fascinating insight into the life-style and culture of this large group of Japanese population about which surprisingly little is known. First of all, this paper is trying to challenge the dominant image of Japanese working men as all white-collar salaryman. In place of it, Roberson quite successfully introduces the blue-collar realities which he found in his own experiences in "Shintani-Metal Company," a small manufacturing company in Tokyo, where he conducted fieldwork for more than one year.

In fact, from inside and outside this country, the Japanese people have long been misled

by the scholarly discourses which strongly claimed that, since after the War, there has been no blue-collar/white-collar divide, particularly in cultural terms. Under such academic control, it is quite natural that people have so naively accepted the misguided perception of the classless life style. The general as well as academic neglect of the blue-collar realities in Japan is also reflected in our resulting poor stock of good ethnographic observation written in Japanese. Only two titles can be picked up at the moment as far as this kind of participant observation is concerned. The first one is *Those living in the Factory: The Working People's Realities Depicted from Inside* (Kojo-ni-ikiru-hitobito: Uchigawakara-Egakareta-Rodosha-no-Jitsuzo) by Akira Nakamura, Gakuyou Shobou, 1982 (out of print), which is a wonderful documentation of the life and work of ordinary steel workers in a middle size company. The second one is the serial report by the academic who conducted her fieldwork in a factory as a buffer. The title is "Time in Working Clothes: the Structure of Daily Life at A-Metal Tokyo Factory" (Sagyo-fuku-no-Jikan: 1982nen-A-Kinzoku-Tokyo-Kojo-ni-okeru-Nitchijosei-no-Kozo), ①～⑫ by Yoko Tanaka (Associate Professor of Tsukuba Univ.) and was published in *Ohara-Shakai-Mondai-Kenkyusho-Zasshi,* No.406-427, September 1992 - June 1994.

Despite the lack of information, it is quite safe to assume that there exists distinctive class-specific life style and culture in this blue-collar section of the Japanese working class. In this context, James Roberson's paper, as well as Glenda Roberts' one is a major effort to uncover the blue collar realities and the biggest challenge to the way the Japanese working class is viewed. In responding to their questioning, we must start now to discover the cultural diversity among the working class people. This is the first course of action for which this paper calls.

We also need more effort for the analytical framework that integrates the two concepts of gender and class. They, in fact, come along hand-in-hand. This statement is quite important because it is commonly argued that class analysis fails to take account of gender stratification. Of course, this is not true. However, in order to avoid this kind of false accusation of "gender-blindness", the study of class must take gender more seriously and irrefutably into account. To put it in more general terms, as Roberson implies, class, gender, religion, age, sexual preference and nationality are all these different factors and have their own determining ground as a source of social divisions. Having acknowledged all the fact, we should take up our firm position that they are all inter-related. And, in fact, this inter relationship was successfully demonstrated in Roberson's discussion around hegemonic and marginalized masculinity. Certainly behind this distinction of masculinity, we can sense the class impact on the very notion of it.

(6) The last paper is "Classlessness and Status Difference: the 'tatemae' and 'honne' in Home-Ownership in Japan" by Ritsuko Ozaki.

The paper deals with one of the most striking changes in post-war Japan, the growth of home ownership. In Japan as well as in other industrial countries, the growth of home ownership has been seen the major factor which brought social benefits to people of all classes. With this owner-occupation, critics often claimed, there emerged a new society, one totally different from the old class-ridden society in pre-war Japan. Praising this widespread home ownership, they went further and claimed that they were living in a middle-class society. The paper challenges this very popular notion of classlessness.

In her introduction, Ozaki sets out to examine the symbolic value of housing acquisition. Then, in the following section, she reviews the available data to indicate the close relationship between housing acquisition and social stratification. Most interesting is the third section of the paper, where the original data taken from recently conducted interviews is presented. It is seemingly true that, as she suggests, the Japanese do not publicly accept the symbolic status value of a house so much as the English do. However this positive evidence of Japanese egalitarianism will be soon proved incorrect once we look at people's actual conduct to relate the material forms of different types of housing to the symbolic value of supposed occupation and social status. As Ozaki clearly points out, after reviewing the patterns of interview response within the Japanese sample, "the Japanese and the English have a similar level of perception of social status within the local area". This findings directly contradict the widely shared view of Japanese egalitarianism. To solve this puzzle, Ozaki draws on the conventional wisdom in the notion of Tatemae and Honne, a simple concept among the Japanese to describe such a contradictory situation.

Having accepted the whole discussion of this self-contradicting notion of Tatemae and Honne, there still remains one question. If the symbolic associations of status differences with the material forms of housing can be read with as much precision as to both groups, why do the Japanese talk so much less about status difference than the British? Of course we can neither presume that the Japanese are egalitarian by nature, nor that Japanese society has no status difference. This study disproves both of these ideas. It is also unfounded to assume that the acceptance of this egalitarian ideology, as well as the predominance of middle-class ideology among the ordinary people, is the simple outcome of the superior coercive or manipulative power of the State. There must be some social mechanism where the Japanese are more strongly compliant to the conformity than the British. We must set out to examine this particular mechanism that accounts for it. This is the real issue behind the whole discussion in this paper. For further understanding of this situation, we also need to know more about the British case. Why, how and in which circumstances do the British keep up with the Joneses'? If "Hitonami" or "Semete Hitonami" is the motto of daily life of ordinary Japanese, why is not keeping up with the Joneses' the motto of the British?

Having finished my introduction of six papers, I hope it is now clear that the analysis of class division and its impact on the social life is, and should remain, a central features of social scientific analysis of contemporary Japan. The various contributions in this issue have offered pioneering projects which set out an exciting agenda for theoretical development, empirical research and academic debate in the coming years.

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