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MANUFACTURING CLASS: URBAN JAPANESE HIGH SCHOOLS AT WORK *

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Introduction

American public high schools in large urban areas are currently facing a number of problems which reverberate into American urban society. Such problems include high rates of absenteeism and dropping out from high school, a gap between the wages of high school graduates and university graduates that has widened over the past 15 years, and high rates of unemployment for high school graduates and dropouts (Hess et al. 1994). In the discussions of educational sociologists and educational policymakers, Japan is often raised as an example of a country that has a well-established system of connecting high school graduates to employers, thereby facilitating the efficient matching of youth into available jobs (Kariya 1991; Lynch 1994; National Research Council 1993, 1994; Rosenbaum and Kariya 1989). This frequent praise of the Japanese system is one of the stimuli for my current research, in which I attempt a closer examination of how urban Japanese *shokugyō kōkō* and low-ranking *futsū kōkō* accomplish job placement for their graduates.

The title of my paper, "Manufacturing Class: Japanese High Schools at Work," is purposely a play on words in two different ways. The second half of the title is meant to signify that my research concerns the **work** that Japanese high schools do and also the way that they are connected to the **world of work** through placing students into jobs after graduation. The beginning portion of the title is meant to signify that I am concerned not only with how high schools produce graduates for **manufacturing jobs** but how these high schools also may be **manufacturing "class"** in the sociological sense of the word, that is, reproducing the working class. I thus ask two major questions in this research: 1) What are the positive outcomes (e.g. low youth unemployment rates) that Western admirers attribute to the school-work guidance process in Japanese high schools? To what extent can high schools truly take credit for these outcomes, and to what extent must we look at other reasons, especially the abundance of jobs during Japan's high-economic growth period up until the early 1990s? and 2) What are the implications of Japan's institutionalized school-work process for the social reproduction of class inequalities?

* I would like to thank officials at the Japan Institute of Labor for helping me to gain access to high schools in Kanagawa-ken, and Professor Akinaga of Tōhoku University for providing me with access to high schools in Miyagi-ken. The responsibility for interpretations and conclusions in this paper of course rests solely with me.

To answer these questions, I draw on interviews and data collection carried out at 20 industrial vocational and low-status general high schools in urban areas of Kanagawa and Miyagi prefectures in fall 1995 and winter 1996. I draw also on interviews carried out at three public employment offices in Kanagawa-ken. My conclusions suggest a much more complex reality than that portrayed by many American admirers of Japanese high schools' placement of students into the economy. In this more complex reality, the mechanisms for placing low-performing students into jobs in the Japanese economy do appear to be "efficient" and to create *anshin* or peace of mind for schools, parents, and some employers and governmental authorities involved in the process. But the effects on individual students and on the reproduction of the class structure remain open to debate.

This research is part of a larger project on how social institutions--especially the educational system and employers--in Japan, South Korea, and the United States--handle youth who will not go on to university. How do these lower-educated young people get channelled into jobs in these societies, which all place a very high value on higher education? How do educators keep these young people from becoming very disillusioned and discouraged because they are not "successful" in the sense of having gotten into a top high school and then a top university? The population I am studying in each country is the students who go to low-ranking urban general public high schools (*kōritsu futsū kōkō*) and industrial vocational high schools (*shokugyō kōkō*).[1]

In this paper, I briefly describe some of the major problems that are causing concern for American educational policymakers and discuss why they find the Japanese system whereby high schools recommend students to specific employers so appealing. Second, I summarize briefly how the system of job referrals in Japanese high schools works. Third and finally, I discuss and problematize the "success" of this system of job referrals, both by examining how **efficient** it really is in solving the problems that trouble American educational policymakers, and by considering the possibility that it **reinforces** rather than levels class differences. I devote most of the space in the paper to the efficiency claims.

I question the dominant American interpretation of why Japanese high schools are so successful. I do this in three ways. First, I place these schools in the context of rapid economic growth and the high demand for labor that continued until the early 1990s. That is, I consider not only what *schools* do well but also how the favorable conditions in the *labor market* contributed. Second, I discuss the types of statistics that high schools do and do not collect, and the ways that those statistics become reified in government statistics from which American policymakers draw conclusions. Third, I discuss some of the interpretations voiced by the high school teachers I interviewed. The sum of these varied materials leads to a more nuanced, and I hope a more complete, picture of Japan's success in graduating and placing high school students into jobs than has been presented thus far in the American social science literature and seized upon by American policymakers eager for positive international models from which to learn.

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[1] My interest in this subject has been heightened by the experience of living in a large American city (Chicago) for 10 years, where there is a high high school drop-out rate. Also, my interest has been shaped by living in the Midwest, where unemployment rates have been particularly high because of the loss of manufacturing jobs in the past 15-20 years.

Social Policy Issues

First, what are the problems that are leading American observers to look at Japanese high schools as a possible model? Four major issues are at the top of the agenda: 1) The high dropout rate from American urban public high schools; 2) the high youth unemployment rate; 3) the increase in the wage and employment gap between American males with a high school education or less than a high school education vs. those who are college-educated; and 4) possible interference of part-time jobs with American high school students' studies. Let us examine each of these in turn.

High Dropout Rates from High Schools. American observers of the dropout rate in urban public high schools point out that it is very high compared to the overall dropout rate for Japan. In public high schools in the city of Chicago, for instance, the dropout rate is currently over 40%. In other words, less than 60% of an entering freshman class finishes high school three years later.[2] In the United States students are legally required to attend school at least until the age of 16. In Japan, even though compulsory education (*gimu kyōiku*) extends only through the junior high school level, currently about 93% of Japanese young people graduate from high school. The rate varies slightly across regions of Japan but these variations are much smaller than in the United States.

High American Youth Unemployment and Job Turnover. A second issue of great concern in the United States is the high youth unemployment rate. This rate is currently about 13%, compared to 5% in Japan.

Rising Wage and Employment Gap between College Graduates and Non-College Graduates. In the United States in the 1980s there was a huge decline in the real wages of low-skilled male workers (meaning high school graduates or drop-outs) and a widening gap between the wages of high school and university graduates. The unemployment rates of American low-skilled and high-skilled workers are also considerably different from each other — low-skilled workers have substantially higher rates of unemployment. These trends are much less evident in Japan. For every 100 high-skilled Japanese workers employed in 1993, 93 low-skilled workers were employed, whereas the figure was only 79 for the United States.

Part-Time Jobs during High School. A fourth issue that is being hotly debated in the United States is whether high school students can benefit from work experience during high school or whether it is of no benefit to their future careers and is instead a distraction from their studies. Many Americans look at Japanese high schools with admiration because they perceive that Japanese high schools have resolved this problem by prohibiting work. Under this model, while still in school, students study. It is only when they graduate that they enter the paid labor force, and at this point the years of hard study pay off.

To put it simply, Japan's labor force seems to better absorb the population at the lower end of the educational spectrum, people who increasingly tend to fall out of the system in the United States and become unemployed or employed in very low-wage jobs.

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[2]. Nationally, the high school graduation rate is between 80 and 85%.

Why? To what extent can Japanese high schools take credit for placing the less-educated into secure jobs when they graduate?

Reports by the National Research Council in the United States and by other research institutions point specifically to the formal and informal institutional arrangements in Japan that get jobs for youth by *matching* them into those jobs.[3] Data from a cross-national survey conducted by the Japan Institute of Labor confirm the degree to which Japanese high school seniors receive job-search asistance from their school (Koyō Shokugyō Sōgō Kenkyūjo 1989). When asked what job search methods they tried, 41% of new American high school graduates said they sought help from family members and relatives; 36% said they sought help from friends and acquaintances (this was a multiple-answer question). This is a sharp contrast with Japan, where only 22% said they tried to get help from family and relatives and only 12% said they tried to get help from friends and acquaintances. In addition, 46% of American high school graduates said that looking at job advertisements was another method they used; only 7% of Japanese high school graduates cited this as a method. How *do* Japanese high school students find the job they will enter after graduating? 63% in this survey said that they used their school. In the United States, this figure is only 14%. It is also the case that Japanese high school students' job search is very focused: over 3/4 report that they searched for jobs in only one field or industry, compared to 1/3 of American high school students.

In summary, Japanese students' job search is highly focused and is conducted mainly with the assistance of the school, as opposed to the more scattershot approach in the United States based on who you know. This has been interpreted by American observers to show that there is greater *efficiency* and *egalitarianism* in the Japanese system. In the next section, I outline how the job-placement system operates.

Mechanisms of Job Placement

Japanese employers who want to recruit new junior high school or high school graduates are legally required to submit their *kyūjinhyō* (or requests for new employees) to the local public employment security office (*shokugyō anteijo*).[4] They can submit these as early as June 20 for the number of high school graduates they wish to employ from the following April. The *shokuan* approves the working conditions, starting pay, etc. on the form, stamps it, keeps a copy, and returns a copy to the employers. Employers then either send the *kyūjinhyō* or carry them directly to the high schools from which they wish to recruit, anytime after July 1. They can also ask the *shokuan* to help them (for instance, to get more information about newly- established schools). From this point on, the school takes over, with the school generally recommending only one student for each job offer received. Students have to be recommended by the school, and who will get recommended for which job is determined by the homeroom teacher's and

[3]. In this part of the paper I draw heavily on the descriptions provided in the work of Takehiko Kariya and Kaori Okano, as well as my interviews at *shokuan* and high schools.

[4]. In Kanagawa-ken, for example, there are 15 of these offices.

the *shinro shidōbu senseis'* knowledge of the student and his or her abilities as well as the preferences of the parents and of the student. Of course, the school has already been keeping track of students' aspirations ever since they entered high school. For students who were ambiguous about whether they would aim for *shingaku* to either a four-year university or to *tandai* or would aim for *shūshoku*, the tough decision is usually made at the very latest by the beginning of the third year of high school.

School recommendations can be sent to companies after September 5 and companies are allowed to start interviewing and selecting students after September 16 and to make informal employment guarantees (or *naitei*) after October 1. Students who were recommended for a job and didn't succeed in the job interview and employment exams then have to start over. High schools are required to send in monthly statistics to the *shokuan* about the number of job offers received from companies that month and the *naiteiritsu* by the end of the month. By March, the *naiteiritsu* is typically extremely high or perfect.

The question is, "why"? Why is the system seemingly so efficient? And additionally, is it as meritocratic as it may appear? I argue that to evaluate "efficiency" we must do two things: contextualize high schools' records of job placement in the continued high economic growth period through the early 1990s, and carefully examine how high schools collect and report statistics. Furthermore, we need to evaluate claims of "meritocracy" by opening up the question of who gets into "good" high schools and who gets chosen for "good" jobs.

Job-Placement in an Era of High Economic Growth

Based mainly on the research of James Rosenbaum and Takehiko Kariya (1989), the system described above has been regarded in the United States as exemplifying the virtues of *institutional mechanisms of matching* people to jobs as opposed to *market mechanisms.* In a sense, the "market" for jobs is structured by this system so as to be *within* schools (in other words, among students in a school in terms of which ones get recommended for which jobs) and *among* schools (in other words, which schools are successful in establishing long-term relationships with companies and a good reputation so that they can expect to be able to send a certain number of their students to the same set of employers every year). These institutional relationships between schools and employers are what Kariya calls *jisseki kankei.*

It is very important to look at the *macroeconomic context* within which graduates have been so efficiently allocated into jobs and youth unemployment has been kept low. The Japanese economy fell into a recession in the early 1990s from which it has not yet completely recovered. But the principal research on the high school-work transition in Japan, by Rosenbaum and Kariya, was carried out *before* this recession, when the Japanese economy was still growing. In other words, the research was carried out during the period of labor shortage or *hitode busoku.* In order to understand why Japan has had few youth unemployment problems and a very high rate of matching new graduates into jobs, it is important to put the Japanese economy into an international context. To evaluate the "successes" of Japanese high schools, we need to consider the following

facts.

Employment Growth and Wage Growth. Employment growth in Japan in the past 30 years has been somewhere between the very strong growth in North America and the weaker growth in the EC. However, the job growth that did occur in Japan was in sectors that traditionally have welcomed high school graduates, whereas this was not true in the U.S. Japan was one of only two OECD countries (the other being Greece) that experienced growth in manufacturing jobs in the 1980s. As is well-known, the U.S. experienced a large loss in this sector. Japan also experienced greater growth than the U.S. in those parts of the service sector for which a high school education may be sufficient, whereas service sector growth in the U.S. was much stronger in the areas of finance, insurance, real estate, and business services, where a university credential is typically required.

Unemployment: Youth Unemployment. It is also important to look more critically at the international comparison of unemployment. In almost all OECD countries, youth (adults under age 25) have a much higher rate of unemployment than adults. The exceptions are countries with strong apprenticeship systems such as Germany and Austria. Germany is especially notable because it is the only OECD country where the youth unemployment rate is actually *lower* than the overall unemployment rate. While the 1993 youth unemployment rate stood at 13.3% in the U.S. and only 5.1% in Japan, it is notable that the U.S. and Japan *share* the characteristic that the youth unemployment rate is about two times higher than the overall unemployment rate. From this perspective, Japan does not look better than the United States. Youth unemployment rates are usually compared *across* countries, but if we look at youth unemployment relative to overall unemployment in each country, the picture looks somewhat different. This way of looking at youth unemployment makes sense because of the notorious problems with comparing unemployment rates internationally, given different definitions and methods of calculation. In other words, in assessing the effectiveness of school-work transition mechanisms it makes more sense to internationally compare the youth unemployment relative to overall unemployment in a country than to internationally compare absolute rates of youth unemployment.

The comparison of unemployment in the U.S. and Japan is also interesting if we consider the share of total employment constituted by *long-term unemployment*, that is, people who have been unemployed continuously for one year or more. In the U.S., 11.2% of total unemployment falls into this category, whereas in Japan this figure is considerably higher at 15.4%. Workers face a higher risk of becoming unemployed in the U.S. but are likely to be able to get a new job relatively quickly. The most recent OECD *Jobs Study* suggests that the significant amount of underemployment resulting from firms' general attempts to hold onto their employees even during cyclical economic downturns "could add 40 to 50 percent to the OECD unemployment total" reported for Japan (OECD 1994: 10). It is conceivable given such employment practices that when workers do become unemployed the duration is likely to be longer than in the U.S. (this would be particularly true for women, who face considerably worse labor market conditions than men).

So, however much the institutionalized mechanisms of matching students to jobs can be praised in Japan, it is necessary to give some credit to favorable economic conditions

through the 1980s as well--notably continued economic expansion and growth in the manufacturing sector--and these have been left out of the discussion so far, resulting in an overemphasis on Japan's unique institutional structure. For better or for worse, I arrived in Japan at the end of summer 1995 and was greeted by talk of "Americanization" of the labor market (which inevitably means bad things, such as rising turnover and unemployment rates). A word that several high school teachers used in my discussions with them was the "ice age of employment" for new graduates. Unhappily, the system is in a stage of flux--I do not believe that it is a beautifully operating, efficient, egalitarian system as has been portrayed to American scholars and policymakers. There are advantages and disadvantages in each system, and we need to look at the total picture.

In addition to considering the system in the context of favorable employment conditions through the early 1990s, we need to consider how the seemingly admirable job placement and other statistics are constructed. Let us examine assumptions that have been made about these.

Measuring Dropout, Job Placement, and Youth Unemployment and Turnover Rates

The overall **high school dropout rate** in Japan is only about 7 percent, and varies little by region of the country. American observers generally end their U.S.-Japan comparison here. However, how does the dropout rate vary by school? Quite a lot. Yet data on this issue are not at all easy to obtain. At each of the 20 high schools I visited, I obtained a copy of the guidance handbook given to students as well as the glossy pamphlets given to parents who inquire about the high school. No record of the dropout rate from each grade appeared in any of these materials, and when I asked about the dropout rate, teachers almost uniformly said that such figures were not calculated by the school. Several teachers, however, pointed out to me that I could examine on my own the materials they gave me and figure out the approximate dropout rate by calculating the difference between the number of students who are in the sophomore and senior classes. If one assumes, as one generally can, that in Japan very few students' families move to another school district while they have a child in high school, the difference between the numbers of sophomores and seniors is approximately equivalent to the dropout rate. The schools I chose for study were all in the bottom one- third to one-half of schools in their district based on *hensachi* (the minimum standardized score for their entering class on the prefecture-wide high school admissions exam) and the proportion of graduates from the previous year who went directly on to university. Among the lowest-ranked schools in the districts I visited, the dropout rate can be estimated at between 15% and 20%. This does not approach the rate for the "worst" American urban public high schools, but it is certainly far higher than the nationally-cited average for Japan.

Turning to the **job placement rate**, when one examines national or regional statistics for the *shūshokuritsu* (or the rate of successful job search) for high school graduates, it is surprising to find rates of 100% nearly across the board. In other words, it is reported that 100% of high school graduating seniors who sought jobs had found them by the point of graduation. This is indeed an impressive record. In fact, it is one that several

Japanese scholars working in the field of labor could not explain to me.

Interviews with high school *shinro shidōbu* (guidance) teachers clarified this puzzle as well. Each month, high schools are required by law to send their job placement statistics to the local public employment agency. These statistics consist of the numbers of graduating seniors who have successfully been placed into a job that will commence after graduation. By December or January, these rates are much lower than they are earlier in the job-hunting season, as they consist of students who were unsuccessful in their first interview and have had to try again at a second, third, or fourth firm. By this time of year, high schools may shift many of these students out of the category of "job-seeker" and into the category of matriculating to another level of education (typically some type of *senmon gakkō*) or perhaps shifted into the category of having found a job through *enko* (connections). In either case, they are in effect taken out of the denominator, which means that the denominator by which the academic year-end *shūshokuritsu* is created may in fact be only those students who succeeded in their job search. This of course makes the rate a perfect 100%--but artificially so.

Turning to the **rates of youth unemployment and turnover**, as mentioned earlier the youth unemployment rate compared to the overall adult unemployment rate is only slightly lower in Japan than in the United States. But when one examines the statistics for the destination of graduates from low-status urban public Japanese high schools, there is a surprisingly large category for whom such information is "unknown."

TABLE 1. GENERAL HIGH SCHOOLS IN A REPRESENTATIVE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Founded Year	university	Junior College	*senmon gakkō*	started Jobs	*rōnin* & others	Averege Deviation in Kanagawa Prefecture
1963	57	8	1	0	34	63
1974	34	19	6	1	40	57
1979	18	20	18	4	40	54
1984	23	24	16	4	33	50
1975	5	17	34	13	31	49
1976	5	6	30	32	27	43
1978	2	3	28	36	31	35
1983	2	1	25	60	12	35

Table 1 shows a typical school district in Kanagawa-ken. This district has eight public high schools. The table shows for each high school the proportion of students who went directly on to university or junior college the following year, the proportion who went to *senmon gakkō*, the proportion who started jobs, and finally, the proportion who did not fit into any of these categories. The latter number is the largest for the top schools in the district on the one hand, and on the other hand, for the bottom schools. For the top schools, it can be safely assumed that virtually all students in this category are *rōnin*, studying for another year to try to pass university entrance exams. But in the bottom-ranked schools this is not the case; in these schools, only a handful of students entered university directly after their senior year, and it is very doubtful that this number will increase through *rōnin* the following year. This means that the "catch-all" category comprises as many as 30% of the graduating class in these schools. While these

graduates may not be counted in the official government unemployment statistics, their destination is nevertheless not known by the school. Most likely, these are students who entered low-level jobs in the service sector after graduating or, in some cases, before graduating. Such jobs include "legitimate" positions such as cashier or stock person at *conbini* (convenience stores) as well as less socially legitimate jobs in bars or other entertainment establishments. In short, these are students whom the school was unable to maintain control over, and they do not show up in either the placement statistics reported by schools to the *shokuan* or in the statistics such as those in Table 1, collected by private firms that specialize in publishing information about school quality.[5]

It is also noteworthy that as many as one-half of the graduates from the "worst" high schools go to *senmon gakkō* (post-high school vocational schools). The quality of *senmon gakkō* varies widely, as do tuition rates. There is not enough space in the present paper to go into the interesting issues surrounding the growth and popularity of *senmon gakkō* in recent years.

As for the **turnover rate** for those graduates who do go directly into jobs after high school, statistics are very scarce. The rate is assumed to be low by Kariya and Rosenbaum and the American policymakers who cite their research, and this is considered another piece of evidence attesting to the efficiency of the job placement system. However, when I visited high schools I found that they do not keep statistics on the number of graduates who quit their jobs or are fired. Schools quite understandably do not have the resources to track their graduates. Some of the teachers I interviewed estimated that the *rishokuritsu* (job separation rate) is as high as 50% in students' first year after graduation from their school. The person in charge of high school placement at one of the *shokuan* I visited gave lower but still non-trivial estimates for the high schools in Kanagawa-ken: 17% within the first year, 23% within the first two years, and 38% within the first three years.

In summary, statistics on the high school dropout rate, job placement rate, and unemployment and turnover rates must be considered carefully in the context in which they are collected. The next stage of research in the current project will allow me to go into greater depth on these measures for the 20 schools in my sample, but a provisional assessment of the efficiency of the high school-work placement process in Japan leads to a less rosy picture than the one previously assumed by American policymakers. When comparisons with the U.S. are made, the system certainly appears to be much more efficient. But the U.S. arguably has one of the most dismal records of job placement for its lowest- performing high school students among industrialized societies. Looking at the Japanese system on its own terms--that is, in terms of what it claims to do--is a different yardstick that produces somewhat different conclusions.

The View from the Ground: Japanese Urban Public High School Teachers' Perceptions of Educational "Meritocracy"

The second major question of this paper is how successful Japan's high school-work

[5]. Statistics such as those in the table are not available through the government, even though all of the schools listed are public schools. Instead, they are published by private firms specializing in the publication of school statistics for parents, students, and junior high school guidance counselors.

placement system is in dampening the reproduction of class inequalities. Given the limitations of space, I will only make a few comments regarding this question here and will save a comprehensive analysis for the book I am currently writing.

Certainly one of the most important claims of the advocates of this institutionalized job-matching system is that it not only provides jobs for everyone, but that it effectively sorts the "best" students into the "best" jobs. This is ostensibly accomplished by two specific mechanisms. First, as Rosenbaum and Kariya state, "Japanese high schools are ranked, students compete to attend higher-ranked schools, and the high school hierarchy is a crucial part of the institutional work-entry system" (Rosenbaum and Kariya 1989: 1337). Second, students' grades rather than other attributes or behaviors are claimed to have the largest impact on which graduates get desirable (white-collar) jobs: "...grades have strong positive influences on getting desirable jobs for males and females. No other variable has consistently significant effects" (Rosenbaum and Kariya 1989: 1353). Let us briefly examine each of these claims in turn, keeping in mind the implications for the reproduction of social inequality.

Competition among High Schools. The first claim implies that high schools compete with each other for a higher reputation based on the quality of the employers with whom they have linkages. If this operates anywhere, it should be at the bottom 1/3 of high schools in each district (the group where I conducted interviews) because these are the schools where the highest percentage of students is work-bound rather than college-bound.

However, my own finding was that in interview after interview in these low-ranking high schools, when I asked the question "On what basis does your school maintain or raise its reputation?" the answer was the same: "The proportion of students we send to university." In no case did guidance counselors in these schools say that the school's reputation--and by extension, its ability to attract students--depended on the employers with whom it maintained connections. Instead, they said that the numbers of students they could get into university each year was the only measure of their success or reputation. As one teacher put it, "Once students get placed into this school, they have almost no chance of getting into university. We can't teach the curriculum at the pace they need to be able to compete. At [such-and-such a school], our reputation was based on how many students we got into Tōdai every year. Here, it's how many students--one, maybe two a year--we get into any university." In sum, I began this research with an important misconception. I had thought that Japanese general high schools, even at the lower end where few students go to university, establish or raise their reputation based on the jobs they get their students. This is one of the reasons that American policymakers talk about the Japanese system. But my interviews revealed that this is not at all the case. Over and over again I asked teachers what the reputation of their school is based on, and over and over again they said the same thing: *shingakuritsu*, mainly to *daigaku* (and in addition, sometimes a university with a famous sports club!). The important thing is how many students the school gets into university--thus these schools are *not* in a separate hierarchy of their own as has been assumed by American researchers.

Japanese students who enter a low-ranked public high school thus appear not to be choosing it because of the job opportunities it will lead to. They are choosing it because

it is the best they can do based on their test scores at that point in their life. Is there a correlation between test scores and socioeconomic status? I conducted my interviews at schools on the assumption that this would be one of the most sensitive questions I could ask--so sensitive, in fact, that I assumed I would not be able to ask it. To my surprise, when we discussed the rate of proceeding on to university, the majority of high school counselors offered the view that it was low partly because of *katei no jijō*. When I queried what was meant by this, they stated baldly that the parents of most of their students did not have the resources necessary for their children to go to university. I then generally asked, "Do you mean there is a relationship between socioeconomic status and education?" to which the responses were of the form: "Yes. The students at this school are from lower-class backgrounds, and their parents cannot afford to send them to *juku* or *yobikō* or to pay university tuition even if they do get into a third-ranked university."

What Determines who Gets a "Good Job"? The second claim regarding meritocracy or egalitarianism is that the best students in a high school get the best jobs. There are two issues I wish to raise concerning this claim. First, Rosenbaum and Kariya's basis for this conclusion is a logistic regression analysis that does not include the high school rank as an independent variable. They assert (and in fact show in a previous analysis) that high school rank has a strong positive effect on the percentage of graduates who get desirable jobs. Given that there is a strong positive correlation between grades and school rank, their analysis cannot definitively show that *within* a school it is those students with the best grades who get the best jobs.

Second, and more directly to the point, when I asked guidance counselors which criteria are the most important for recommending students to employers, they said "attendance, grades, and *kurabu katsudō* (club activities)", usually in that order. Yet attendance notably was not a variable that was included in the Rosenbaum-Kariya analyses. Instead, based on the statistical insignificance of "rule violations" and "tardiness", Rosenbaum and Kariya concluded that a Marxist hypothesis (notably that proposed by Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis) is disproved. Such a hypothesis suggests that employers who have working-class jobs screen applicants based on indicators that they will be compliant, hard-working employees. Two of these three characteristics are precisely the ones that Japanese high school teachers do use in recommending certain students to the best available jobs.[6] Thus while grades did matter, the characteristics of working-class jobs were clearly dictating which behaviorial characteristics were valued in the job applicants from high schools.

Conclusion

This paper has only brushed the surface in attempting to answer how efficient and

[6]. The first few times I asked teachers why club activities were important, I naively asked if it is because participation demonstrated leadership potential. Teachers found this assumption on my part to be amusing. Their reply was that it indicated stick-to-itiveness and physical strength, not leadership. In reviewing Rosenbaum and Kariya's research, their finding that leadership was *negatively* related to a student obtaining a desirable job was particularly striking to me in light of this.

egalitarian Japan's high school-work system can be judged to be. The main points I wish to emphasize are three:

1) The system's efficiency must be evaluated in the context of Japan's pre-1990s rapid economic growth and abundance of manufacturing jobs for which a high school education was sufficient--conditions that disappeared in the U.S. at least a decade earlier.

2) Given the extraordinary hierarchy of public high schools within a given school district in Japan, summary statistics for all Japanese high schools can seriously mislead observers to draw conclusions about what happens at the lowest-ranking public high schools. Upon closer examination, one can even go so far as to say that these schools are more similar to at least some American urban public high schools than educational policymakers in the U.S. would imagine.

3) The hierarchy of Japanese public high schools and the profound effect this has on who enters university raises again the troubling question as to who gets into which school and why. It is not enough to argue that grades in high school help one to get a "good" job. Everyday behaviors such as regular attendance at school and in club activities serve as powerful screening devices for teachers who hold the control over choosing the one student who will be recommended for each job opening. Moreover, economic recession and massive deindustrialization (*resuturaa* in Japanese) increasingly mean that as in the U.S., the "good" jobs in the economy will not be ones for which high school graduation is sufficient. This may be part of the reason why many high schools simply do not have information on the immediate post-high school employment or unemployment outcomes for a substantial percentage of graduates. One wonders if some of these graduates are essentially becoming a new floating working class in postindustrial Japan. This is a question that bears serious consideration and analysis.

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