

Prolonged Transitional Period and Policy

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1. Why Do We Focus Attention on the Transitional Period?

Young people do not plunge into mature life overnight, but pass through a transitional period. In recent years, this transitional period has been getting longer and a new stage is emerging in the course of the lives of young Japanese. This writer calls it the ‘post-adolescent period’ (Miyamoto [2002] and [2004]). While the traditional life-cycle theory defines this stage as the period when persons shift from youth to maturity, the pattern of the transition is regulated by the social system and socio-economic structure, as well as by culture and accepted practice. This article is based on the fact that the pattern of the shift, which was forged within the framework of industrialization and the country’s commitment to social welfare, has substantially changed (as in the cases of the Western nations).

Changes involving young people began to be recognized in the 1980s in developed countries. Such changes may be summarized under the following six aspects:

- (1) As more people go into higher education, the imbalance between the effects and the cost of education increases. This makes it more difficult to form a social consensus concerning scholarship.
- (2) The severe employment situation not only increases the unemployment rate but also leads to workers alternately finding and losing jobs for a longer period (a phenomenon that had not been observed in Japan until recently).
- (3) An increasing number of people tend to prefer not to search for a job while receiving education or to remain jobless after graduation until the right opportunity occurs. The employment problem among young people is a problem caused by a combination of factors—the unavailability of jobs (unemployment) and their failure to get satisfactory jobs.
- (4) Young people are inclined to avoid embarking on a specific vocational career at an early age.

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- (5) They also tend to delay getting married and having a family, which has a substantial impact on their family formation—the trend to get married late or remain single, to live together with an unmarried partner, to get divorced relatively quickly, and so on. Additionally, in the home environment in which such young people are raised, divorce and remarriage of their parents is often observed.
 - (6) Together with the changes in their attitude towards work, their general outlook is also changing; for example, some put off getting a job in order to travel, while others tend to choose a job, which will give higher satisfaction, rather than one that will promise a higher income.

Tasks which young people ought to achieve during the transitional period include:

- (i) Establishing a foundation for a stable working life.
- (ii) Becoming independent of their parents and establishing a basis for an independent life.
- (iii) Acquiring status as a wholly committed member of society and being able to fulfill the obligations involved.
- (iv) Obtaining a specific role for participation in society.

What is implied by the six items cited above is that the realization of these tasks will entail great changes. Consequently, these changes have altered the pattern of the transition into adulthood. The transitional path from childhood to adulthood in the industrial age has been transformed since the 1980s from the straightforward transitional path whereby people moved step-by-step, to a more complicated zigzag one. The transitional patterns began to be personalized and diversified with greater fluidity.

Since around the end of the 1970s, unemployment in Western nations had been treated as an issue of great importance in direct connection to changes affecting young people. In Japan, however, the problems were swept aside until the end of the 1990s, partly because of the extreme shortage of young labor during the bubble boom around 1990. As Chapter 2 will show in detail, this has created a transitional period unique to Japan. It was not until the end of the 1990s, and employment problems that arose with changes in the transitional process, which the U.S. and European

countries had already experienced, were recognized in Japan. In spite of the fact that the birthrate had already begun falling due to late marriage, changes in the transitional process in Japan began some 20 years after they were observed in Western countries.

The protracted transitional period had both positive and negative impacts on young people. On the one hand, it raised the educational level and created 'affluent-looking young people' who enjoyed a longer period of dependence. Increased opportunities to go on to higher education brought the younger generations more opportunities in life and increased their freedom and self-determination. The disappearance of the traditional framework was to make their life course more flexible. All this was valued favorably. On the other, however, because of the deterioration of the labor market for young workers, an increasing number of those who did not belong to the middle class began suffering from unemployment and poverty. In addition, the government gave up its generous welfare policies on the grounds of financial stringency, so that it took less, rather than more, responsibility for the prolonged transitional period. Their independence was postponed and the support from the government no longer existed; instead, parental responsibility increased. The strain on many households became increasingly apparent. It is this social climate that lies behind the active research being done in EU countries since the latter half of the 1980s, in a new field focusing on the 'transitional period.' Faced with the problems arising from the transitional period, governments in EU countries have assisted young persons to shift to adulthood by, first of all, approving the right of young people to be independent of their parents and to make their own livelihood (the right to be independent) and by launching various policies concerning employment, education and training, family structure, housing, and social security. In Japan, on the other hand, the transitional period was not clearly recognized until recently, and policies of respecting the independence of young persons and supporting their shift to adulthood were confined to those related to the drop in the number of children.

2. The Framework of the Japanese-Style Adolescent Period: Socio-Economic Structure Obscuring Problems of the Transitional Period

In Japan, until the emergence of employment problems, society's attention to young people in transition focused on the decline of the birthrate due to late marriage. As symbolized by phrases such as 'the aristocratic bachelor' in the 1980s and 'parasite singles' in the following decade (Yamada [1999]), Japanese society focused attention on the affluence, outlook and behavior of young people who remained unmarried for longer periods, which was quite different from other developed countries. At the same time, it was rather odd that, despite the end of the bubble boom and the steady increase in the number of NEET young people and 'freeters', people paid no attention to the great upheaval in the basic lives of young people, but instead treated 'parasite singles' in an unsympathetic manner. This was not simply due to the late emergence of employment problems. Rather, the fact is that the practice of parents providing for their children is still prevalent enough to conceal the weakened ability of young people to live on their own. It should be noted that, unlike their counterparts in Western countries, the reason why young people in Japan were not left out on the streets was that during the transitional period they were protected by the unique Japanese family structure. It is this protection that has created Japan's unique adolescent or transitional period (Miyamoto, Iwakami and Yamada [1997]).

As seen above, the great parental responsibility for the upbringing and education of their children and a parent-child relationship focusing on the protection of children saved young people from plunging into poverty (Esping-Anderson [1990]; Jones and Wallace [1992]). Instead, responsibility for the problems accompanying the transition to adulthood was passed on to individual families, and no supporting social system was developed. Behind the fact that there was hardly any debate concerning the social safeguarding of the basic lifestyle of young people, even at the time when the increasing number of freeters, NEETs (not in education, employment or training) and social shut-ins could be no longer ignored, lay the presence of the Japanese social system which relied financially on the

traditional parent-child ties.

The rise in the problem of the employment of young people, that first became serious in the late 1990s, finally spurred a trend to discuss the question of young people as a problem of the socio-economic structure—a sign of the transition to age (Yajima and Mimi'zuka [2001]; Takeuchi [2001]; Genda [2001], Ohkubo [2002]; Kosugi [2002]; Miyamoto [2002], [2004]; and Kosugi [2003]).

In this article, the adolescent period which emerged within a unique framework during the high economic growth period led by the chemical and heavy machinery industries in the 1960s and the early 1970s will be referred to as the 'post-war adolescent period' after Akio Inui (Inui [1999], pp. 38-45). The most outstanding feature of the post-war adolescent period is that a tripartite system of family, school and firms served as a device to help young people become independent: schools cooperated with firms under a recruitment scheme, providing them with stable, future jobs. Families supported them while they were at school, and played a role as a bridge between schools and firms. Pupils and students (people under the protection of their parents) on the one hand, and working persons (excluded from protection) on the other are clearly differentiated; thus the former started working once they completed education at school and at the same time left the protection of their parents to step into adulthood. This pattern had been established as the standard path. Thus, public vocational training schemes remained underdeveloped, and there was virtually no organization to help young people that belonged to neither school nor workplace with opportunities for education, training, counseling, or job hunting (Miyamoto [2004]).

An outstanding feature of the Japanese situation in comparison with Western nations was the heavy financial responsibility of families towards their young members, together with parsimonious public assistance compared with some Western welfare nations. With the proportion of those who went on to higher education increasing, educational costs increased further, further tightening the parent-child tie as an economic unit. Moreover, this was backed by the seniority wage system, which was adopted by most large firms and was generous to middle-aged employees. With educational competition heating up, an unquestioning enthusiasm

among parents for education of their children, and a consequent willingness to bear the cost, has been the sources of the steadily rising educational level. In Japan, where the parent-child relationship as a resource lasts longer and thus masks the potential of young people to fall into poverty, it takes time to identify young people facing serious problems. It is quite difficult to discover where and how many families exist which are unable to support their children in stepping up to the next stage (Miyamoto [2004]).

3. Social Measures for the Transitional Period in EU Countries

Japan has only just embarked on discussing possible measures to deal with the issues involved in the transitional period, whereas other advanced countries set about this in the 1980s. Changes in the nature of academic interest in young people can be observed in studies from the 1980s to the 1990s, which started to focus on the ‘transition to adulthood.’ The lives of young people in transition from childhood to the stage where they acquire social citizenship were highlighted (Furlong and Cartmel [1997]; Jones [2002]; and Jones and Wallace [1992]). What most encouraged such a shift in academic interest was the unemployment problem among youth. In the preface of his book, “The Nature of Adolescence (3rd edition),” an English adolescent psychologist, John Coleman, states that socio-economic environments affecting adolescents changed in many ways from 1980 on, and that the largest change occurred in the area of the family and the labor market (Coleman and Hendry, Japanese edition [2003]). This chapter is devoted to the development of measures to deal with the transition in EU countries, particularly in the UK and Sweden.

(1) Special features of measures for the transitional period

Faced with the difficulty of young people in making a smooth transition to adulthood, and their risky tendency to zigzag, the governments launched measures to support them in the transitional period (transitional policies). The primary challenge for such transitional policies was to ensure that young people would acquire status as adults, and be integrated into society.

Underlying systems, which are important major concerns in transitional

policy, include the educational and training system, the employment system, career advice, counseling, the social security system, and housing policy. These comprise the factors of the transitional policy, and preeminent among these is the employment policy.

(2) Policy concerning the employment of young people

(a) Workfare

Advanced countries have taken various measures to deal with unemployment problems affecting youth, which emerged at the end of the 1970s, but have not necessarily found any decisively effective solutions. Nevertheless, establishing a vocational base was an essential task for young people to achieve during the transitional period to adulthood, and ‘integration into the labor market’ was recognized as the most vital condition for incorporating them into society. This must be considered in relation to the question of citizenship.

With this shared understanding, at the Jobs Summit held in 1997 in Luxemburg the EU member states, adopted ‘European Employment Strategies’, which included guidelines for assistance in the employment of youth and stated that each state was obligated to tackle youth unemployment. The countries agreed to offer an educational and training program called ‘New Start’ to all young people before their period of unemployment reached six months.

In the meantime, ‘independence’ and ‘activity’ were gaining ground among EU members as focal concepts in the debate over young people, and the idea of workfare was introduced in order to motivate them by doing something useful for society. This scheme represents an active labor market policy taking advantage of the dual concepts of rights and responsibilities. The launching of this workfare policy was seen by some as a shift from the traditional view of citizenship, and was subject to criticism that, by making participation in the labor market obligatory, it laid responsibility for a structural problem on the individuals themselves. EU member states commonly opt for workfare, but individual states differ from each other in their primary focus within the scheme. For instance, while the UK attaches importance to participation in economic activities (in the sense that people ought to have economic responsibility), Sweden and Denmark emphasize

“active participation in society” (Wallace and Loncel [2002], pp. 43-48).

(b) Integrated transitional policy

While individual countries have unique features in their policies based on the idea of workfare, they all share the change in the principles underlying the policy embodied over the years. While the governments formally attached emphasis to providing vocational training and encouraging swift employment (emphasis on employment), they are now shifting the focus of their employment policy for youth in the transitional period to ‘education’, in the belief that flexible, lifetime learning will lead to success.

The target of the assistance is also shifting from the group to the individual. Various studies have shown that ‘individual development programs’ designed in accordance with the individual wishes of young people, are more likely to be successful than the traditional ‘collective programs.’ Accordingly, recent employment programs directed at young people concentrate efforts on career guidance making use of the personal counseling method. This method regards career as a part of personal development and helps young individuals draw up their own development plans in a holistic way (Okita [2004]).

The actual method of active labor market policy has been shifted to personal development programs due to social context and the general situation affecting young people today. At the same time, quite a large amount of research and practical experience have shown that the risk of being unemployed and the ‘social exclusion’ closely related to unemployment are more complicated than previously thought¹. However,

¹ Factors which are cited as likely to force young people into social exclusion are as follows: (i) exclusion from the labor market; (ii) isolation from society; (iii) economic exclusion from systems or organizations, and low qualifications; (iv) a background in a low social class; (v) a passive attitude in the labor market; (vi) unstable economic situation; (vii) lack of social assistance; (viii) absence of institutional support; (ix) low self-evaluation; and (x) chemical dependency and delinquency.

On the other hand, factors which are cited as least likely to exclude young people from society are as follows: (i) high qualifications; (ii) a positive attitude in the labor market; (iii) stable economic situation; (iv) social assistance; (v) institutional support; (vi) high self-evaluation; (vii) lively participation in social

most programs targeting jobless young people simplify the meaning of social inclusion, identifying it with inclusion into the labor market and taking the form of group sessions, and thus they are unable to produce the desired effect. It has been argued that, in order to remedy this problem, it is necessary to understand the culture and ideas, which constitute the structure and background of the transitional system, the life histories of young persons and their work history to date. In other words, what are needed are policies that focus on the individual's life history and integrate education, training, welfare, and the labor market more closely. This is referred to as 'integrated transitional policy'.

(c) Diversification of labor market policy targeting young people

Where the labor market for young people is concerned, policies designed on the assumption that they go straight from school to the workplace are no longer relevant to all young people. Thus, varied labor market policies for youth are now adopted to ensure that each individual develops during the transitional period.

One type of such diversified policy relies on the integration of factors to be considered through the transitional labor market. In other words, the policy regards activities taking the form of training or volunteer activities, and which are thus not paid employment in the traditional sense, as a stage to pass through before reaching actual jobs and encourages young people to become actively involved. Behind this lies the fact that the boundary between paid employment and other productive activities is becoming blurred. Put differently, there is a rapidly increasing recognition that education and training are of great importance in seeking the integration of young persons into society through vocational activities². Here, education

and cultural activities; (viii) high integration into the family (as seen, for example, in countries in South Europe); and (ix) commitment to subsurface economic activities (There is a risk of settling down with an unstable job, but such activities help young people have varied experience, make social contacts, and maintain a certain level of self-evaluation.)

The factors listed above suggest that it would be insufficient to incorporate young people into the labor market in order to protect them from social exclusion.

² For example, the Development Security Program in Sweden, aimed at all young

does not necessarily mean formal education alone; in fact, there is a view that informal or non-formal education is more effective in integrating young people into society.

The second type involves making use of social and youth services to create jobs for young people. This policy reevaluates the third sector from the labor point of view, and aims at leading young people to education, training and employment through activities in a sector in order to help them forge a new sense of value in their careers.

The third type of policy sees the third sector as a group of entities, which can provide informal and non-formal learning opportunities. These are effective in motivating young people, and, while encouraging them to have confidence, offer them chances to take charge of their own lives. (Ito [2001]; The Japan Institute of Labour [2003], pp. 135-159; Walther and Stauber [2002]).

(3) Policy towards social exclusion of young people

Youth unemployment does not only signify that the person in question has no job, but also leads to serious problems, such as poverty, isolation from society, crime and disease, together with loss of the right to social security services. This state, under which young people have no access to what is socially required and thus are isolated from social life and marginalized by society, can be counted as one kind of social exclusion. Thus, one objective of transitional policy is to prevent them from sinking into this situation. In the UK, for example, the prolongation of the transitional period among young people brought about the polarization of such people. The term 'social exclusion' is relatively new even in the UK; in the late 1990s, the Labor Party started to use the term where the traditional term 'underclass' would have been used. In 1997, the British

people aged between 21 and 24, was a labor market program introduced in 1998. In 2003, it was revised and renamed the Youth Security Program, through which local municipalities encourage young persons (those who are unable to find a job and not registered in any other similar program) to participate in selected activities and develop by providing them with opportunities to engage in a full-time activity. The purpose of the program is to prevent long-term unemployed persons from sliding into 'passiveness and permanent exclusion' by giving them job experience, training, or other similar activities to participate in.

government established a ‘Social Exclusion Unit’, through which it started to tackle problems affecting the ‘underclass’ who were segregated from the mainstream of society. In particular, a ‘New Deal Program’ was designed to combat the social exclusion of unemployed people aged 25 and under and NEETs (not in education, employment or training)³ (Jones [2002]).

(4) Participation in decision-making by young people and citizenship policy

Another mainstay of policies, apart from employment policy, is to actively encourage young people to participate in society with the idea that the social integration of young people is a form of citizenship. The idea of involving adolescents and other young persons in decision-making came into existence in 1985—the United Nation’s International Youth Year—and was formulated in 1985 when the Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted in the United Nations, though it really began to take shape in the latter half of the 1990s. The major force of the transition to adulthood is the shift to independence, and the keywords associated with citizenship policy include ability to choose, self-decision, participation, the provision of information, empowerment, etc.

The European Community Commission clearly describes this trend in its white paper subtitled “A New Impetus for European Youth” (Commission of the European Communities [2001]). The white paper defines the distinguishing features of present-day youth with a number of keywords—

personalization and diversification of lifestyles; a decrease in the proportion of young people due to an ageing society with fewer children;

³ One of the new programs in recent years is a ‘connections service’ launched in 1997. Taking into account the difficulty with previous measures in involving NEET youth in various programs, this new service is intended to integrate all necessary assistance services into a single package, in cooperation not only with relevant ministries and organizations but also with private entities and NPOs. A wide range of continuous assistance, such as various types of counseling provision of information, etc., is provided through personal advisors (“Development of Youth Employment Measures in Overseas Countries with a Focus on the U.K. and Sweden,” Japan Institute of Labor, Shiryo Series No. 131, [2003]).

and globalization—and suggests the necessity of a cooperative framework among EU members in youth policy⁴. There are three main points behind this suggestion:

(i) Active citizenship of youth

The involvement of youth in the process of making decisions, i.e. active citizenship, is encouraged. Here, information is a quintessential condition for fostering active citizenship. It emphasizes the importance of the wide dissemination among young people of information concerning employment and labor conditions, housing, study opportunities, health issues, etc. and the guaranteeing of equal rights to access such information. Another important aspect of such information is that it should, for the most part, deal with issues affecting youth itself and that it should also be easy to use and understand.

(ii) Expansion and understanding of one's own experience

Measures have to be taken to smooth the way for young people who, in a society that overemphasizes high educational background, lack practical social experience. Education and training should be limited to traditional, formal activities. At the same time, it is suggested that priority should be given to the creation of new fields that enhance the mobility of youth, such as volunteer activities, and to the connection of these new activities with the education and training.

(iii) Fostering of the independence of young people

Independence is an extremely important requirement for young people.

⁴ This is a clear reflection of the picture of young people, which saw a substantial change in the 1990s, and related discussions made in these countries. It should be noted that the 'consultation exercises' carried out across the EU states between May 2000 and March 2001 were a process of gathering and examining opinions from organizations and individuals at all levels, but at the same time placed emphasis on having adolescents and young people participate in the process and reflecting their opinions. The consultation reportedly afforded an unprecedented opportunity for discussion, in terms of its scale, duration, the variety of participants, and the amount of information. The results of the discussion are compiled in this white paper.

Since it is derived from the resources at hand—material resources in particular—income problems have a decisive impact on independence. Young people are affected not only by employment, welfare, and labor market policies, but also by policies pertaining to housing and transportation. All these are essential for them to gain independence, and thus should be developed with due consideration for their viewpoints and interests. Thus, policies related to such young people should not be confined to particular fields but should take a holistic approach that enhances their lives. A special feature of such transitional policy lies in its emphasis on material resources.

(5) Rights and obligations in transitional policy

Behind the emergence of the need for a transitional policy lies the fact that the younger generation tends to take a longer time in shifting to adulthood. This prolonged transition is attributable to two aspects: It takes longer for young people to obtain the means necessary for independence (the aspect of rights); and to mature enough to fulfill their obligations (the aspect of obligations and responsibilities). All measures involved in active labor market policy and active citizenship assume one of these two aspects. Where rights are concerned, while young people are permitted to take more time in becoming independent through employment, access to welfare benefits to those who have no work experience is less easy. On the other hand, with the issue of obligations there has been a heightened emphasis on fulfilling such obligations as being employable (the need to increase one's value in the labor market in order to get a job), the introduction of citizenship education, and volunteer activities. At the same time, it has been pointed out that participation in economic activities in the form of employment is also important in itself. Transitional policy, as this shows, is based on a delicate balance between rights and obligations, and thus it is necessary to identify the underlying problems here.

4. Crisis during the transitional period and measures taken in Japan

The previous sections give a view of the transitional period and the series of transitional policies adopted in some EU countries. This section looks at the special features of measures taken by the Japanese government

in recent years to deal with the transitional period in comparison with those of their EU counterparts.

4-1. Attention paid to NEET young people in recent years

In Japan, surveys and studies concerning the so-called ‘freeters’ began around the end of the 1990s, and measures were subsequently taken (Yajima and Mimi’zuka [2001]; and Kosugi [2002] and [2003]). As the facts about freeters gradually became clear and they were classified into various types, attention was drawn to the existence of freeters who worked for an extremely small number of working days, and young people who remained jobless for longer than a certain period (JILPT [2004]). In 2004, these young people, described as ‘NEETs,’ suddenly attracted much discussion. The 2004 White Paper on the Labour Economy, defining NEET persons as “those who are aged between 15 and 34, school graduates and unmarried, not in the labor force, and engaged neither in schooling nor in housework.” Excluding those who are working or who are unemployed, the paper gave an estimate of the number of such young people. Around the same time, Yuji Genda published a book entitled “NEET – Neither freeters nor unemployed.” The result was that the term ‘NEET’ suddenly spread throughout the media.

The distinctive difference between the definitions of NEET in the U.K. and Japan is the latter’s exclusion of unemployed young persons. By definition, an unemployed person should (i) have no job and thus did not work at all during a certain survey period (one week at the end of the month concerned); (ii) be ready to accept a job if it is available; and (iii) be either looking for a job or preparing to start up their own business during the period surveyed. Thus, the exclusion of the unemployed has created a definition of NEET young people as “young people who are reluctant to work” (Genda [2004], p. 10), so that social attention has concentrated on “young people who have no will to work”, creating the risk that steps to increase youth employment may be shifted to measures for these young people who have no will to work. Without a doubt, Japan has a social background that calls for attention to NEETs, since average young people—or the middle-class—face considerable erosion in Japan when compared to Europe and the U.S.

Thus the measures launched since the end of the 1990s have turned into measures for freeters and the young who have no will to work—those who are neither freeters nor unemployed—and therefore pay insufficient attention to the real problems of youth unemployment.

4-2. Special features of young NEETs in Japan and the tasks facing policy

At the heart of the problems affecting youth employment in the EU described in this paper lies unemployment. An unemployed young person means, literally, one who neither goes to school, works, or is engaged in training. At the same time, many studies have found that the transitional process of young people who are apt to lapse into social exclusion takes the form of a curved line weaving back and forth among unemployment, training and employment. In this sense, these studies seem to take a wider definition of unemployment than that used in Japan, where ‘unemployed’ persons must show a will to work and are looking for jobs.

Among jobless young people, some are eligible for public assistance and are actually looking for a job, while others have given up looking for jobs and have become latent unemployed after spending a long time job searching. Moreover, in many cases, job-searching activities are done in fits and starts with frequent switches of statuses between ‘active’ and ‘inactive.’

As seen earlier, the EU members, who have reached consensus not to leave anyone unemployed for six months or more, make it a rule to take certain specific actions. In Sweden, measures will be taken if a young person has been jobless even for three months. This suggests that the view of NEET and unemployed people is quite different: On the one hand, the EU countries never leave young persons to become NEET but instead give them status as unemployed, and encourage them to search for jobs while providing counseling service and vocational training programs, while on the other hand, such measures have been rarely taken in Japan. Where governments such as that of Japan have no clear, definite measures for youth unemployment, it is easy to understand how young people who have no responsibility for their living expenses are liable to become NEET, rather than unemployed. In particular, people are likely to be left as NEET between the time when they give up halfway through or graduate from high

school, and the time when they reach their mid-20s (when a majority of their generation has begun to work).

According to a survey concerning marginal freeters conducted by JILPT, the freeters surveyed departed from the traditional path to regular employment at certain stages where they were required to make decisions: Some did not undertake job-hunting activities, or did not succeed in getting a job at the time they decided not to go to high school; some gave up going to high school halfway through or graduated from high school; others gave up a regular job or higher education in the early stages and took on a temporary job. Thus, they have all experienced being NEET at some stage in their life regardless of the length of their work experience. Their picture is fairly consistent with that cited in studies concerning NEET young people in the U.K. (JILPT [2004]). However, what seems to be unique to Japan is that the problem of demoralized 'ordinary young people' is viewed as more serious. In line with this, general attention is likely to concentrate more on the question of their independence (lack of determination, views on work, and sense of self-reliance). This view may well lead to calls for moral discipline, typically expressed as 'putting some backbone into them,' and thus conveniently sidestepping the issue of the socio-economic structure which created an excessively reliant young generation in the first place. The issue of the Japanese-style transitional period is hardly discussed, except in connection with the structure of Japanese society, whereby responsibility for the education of children rests largely with their parents. It usually takes time to recognize young people with serious problems in Japanese society, where the fact that they are financially hard up remains hidden. Put differently, it is quite difficult to discover where and how many families exist which are unable to support their children to step up to the next stage in their lives. This is reflected in the fact that youth employment measures are aimed at teenagers and those in their early 20s in EU countries, but at people in their 20s and early 30s in Japan. This is not unrelated to the social and cultural setting in Japan, where it is not until young people have reached the mid-20s or beyond that their difficulties come to the surface.

It should be recognized that the problems affecting Japanese youth in the transitional period have arisen from the fact that various conditions

have created a unique generation and thrown them into a situation where they are unable to respond to rapid changes in society. Such conditions include the tripartite structure of family, school and firms that form the post-war adolescent period; the seniority wage system; the Japanese-style family institution; a culture that attaches emphasis on protection rather than independence; and a higher educational system that assumes that parents should bear the cost. Hence, what is necessary for addressing the problems is an understanding the structure underlying (Miyamoto [2002] and 2004).

Whatever social segment they belong to, the longer an individual continues in unstable employment, the more pessimistic they become about the future. With a low income level, such a person is highly likely to be obliged to stay with their parents even into their 30s. They would lead a subsistence life if they attempted to live alone; they would clearly be unable to afford to start their own family. To break through such circumstances, it is necessary to provide some system of assistance system, apart from school or firms, to help such a young person get a job in collaboration with school, family, and firms. To this end, in addition to actual job creation, comprehensive assistance in resolving complicated problems which threaten young people will be of importance,.

This article is a conflation and expansion of two earlier studies, “A Picture of the Prolonged Transitional Period and Transitional Policy” in ‘Youth – the Transitional Period and Social Policy,’ Society for the Study of Social Policy (ed.), and “Social Exclusion and NEET Youth,” Nihon Rodo Kenkyu Zasshi, No. 533.

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