Japan's New Recruits: Victims of the Japanese-Style Family and Japanese-Style Employment

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The objective of this paper is to elucidate problems concerning job-seeking activities and the relationships between the family, universities and employment that form the background to them, focusing on the university graduates who are Japan's new recruits, and to explore the future direction of university policy. The first half of this paper introduces the current situation, in which educational reforms and job-seeking activities are giving rise to confusion on university campuses, and points out the fact that behind this lies the relationship between companies and universities, which has been structuralized on an economically rational basis (the Japanese-style employment system). Based on the awareness of this current situation, the latter half of the paper asks "what is it about Japanese universities that makes them characteristically Japanese?" The characteristic attributes of Japanese universities that are unusual from the perspective of the rest of the world are "the requirement to be 18," "the emphasis on graduation" and "the expectation that parents bear the financial burden"; these three attributes are strongly affected by the distinctive nature of the typical Japanese family (the Japanese-style family) and go hand-in-hand with each other. In other words, Japanese universities and new recruits are shackled by the Japanese-style family and Japanese-style employment, and are completely trapped by them. Finally, this paper considers the future direction of university policy, in light of the structural relationship between the family, universities and employment.

I. The Commercialization of Universities

The university lecturers of today are very busy, under pressure from both calls for educational reform and the job-seeking activities of students. Japanese universities began to embark upon educational reform in 1991. As a result of a report by the University Council in February 1991, the standards for establishing a university were streamlined substantially. In accordance with the trend toward deregulation at that time, the standards for establishing a university and the legal regulations concerning the curriculum were relaxed, and the scope for autonomous decision-making by each university was broadened. In addition, in May the same year, the University Council submitted a report entitled "Concerning the Upgrading and Enhancement of Graduate Schools," leading to the announcement of a quantitative expansion in graduate schools. A new system for Japanese universities was established after the Second World War, but from the very outset there was criticism that the legal system based on establishment standards would standardize universities and destroy the possibility of diverse universities; in addition, it was pointed out that the role of graduate schools was ambiguous and undeveloped. The two 1991 reports sought to resolve these concerns that had lingered for the last 40 years. Universities greatly welcomed the reform policies of the

government and began to work proactively on implementing reforms, but nobody imagined that reforms would continue for a long time afterwards.

The reforms have continued for so long because of the impact of the decline in the population aged 18 and the recession. Despite the fact that the population aged 18 had declined, the number of universities increased and Japan entered an age in which anybody who so desired could go on to university. At present, 40% of universities cannot secure their full capacity of students and the decline in the academic ability of students has become a serious social problem. Private universities (accounting for 75% of all universities in Japan) are run using the tuition fees paid by students, so if they cannot secure students, they cannot survive. There are those who say that universities that accept students who lack basic academic skills are in the wrong, but the only shops that refuse entry to paying customers are special clubs. Although they lament the decline in academic ability, the reality is that private universities are becoming commercialized because they cannot survive unless they secure students.

In addition, the financial difficulties caused by the recession and the difficulty in finding employment faced by students are serious. These financial difficulties are encouraging greater efficiency in university management and reforms oriented toward privatization are progressing steadily, based on the approach of entrusting to the private sector the things that the private sector can do. In addition, if the number of students who cannot find employment increases, universities will lose their popularity. In a bid for survival, an increasing number of universities trumpet themselves as being "a good university for finding employment." Curriculum reforms focused on providing education about qualifications and careers education are progressing, and universities have been completely transformed from the leisure colleges of yesteryear into business colleges.

Population decline and the recession are shaking the whole structure of the university system, from the entrance gateway and exit pathway to the content of education in between. Long, ongoing reforms are an inevitable consequence of this. From the perspective of the students, finding employment is a much bigger, more pressing problem than the content of education or attendance at classes. Classes that do not appear to be useful in finding employment are given a wide berth. In fact, even if a university prepares a skills program that will undoubtedly be useful in the future, students prioritize their job-seeking activities and skip classes. Even if attendance is incorporated into the assessment of academic achievement, absence due to job-seeking activities is classed as attendance. Guidance concerning graduation research is divided up piecemeal and does not form an educational corpus. This is because universities are swayed by both educational reforms and job-seeking activities. Fundamentalists who believe that market competition by universities will bring about greater efficiency may consider that there is still not enough competition and that more competition will lead to poor universities, poor lecturers and poor students being weeded out.

One can only hope that such market fundamentalists do not exist any longer. Rather than deregulation or the commercialization of universities, one would like serious consideration to be given to the strengthening of regulations and support in the form of public funds.

As a member of a university myself, I believe that ignoring this kind of situation is unforgivable. However, the ranting of a single lecturer will not change anything; most university academics are resigned to the situation, feeling that there is nothing that they can do about it, and themselves become mixed up in the endless round of reform and confusion.

II. The Split between Those Who Find Employment Quickly, Those Who Take Longer, and Those Who Do Not Find It at All

It is even harder for students than for lecturers. Why are job-seeking activities so arduous? The following provides a brief explanation for the benefit of those who are not aware of the circumstances surrounding job-seeking in Japan. Under the Japanese university system, students enter university in the spring, in April, and graduate in March. In addition, it is customary for both high school students and university students to begin working immediately after graduating. In other words, the mass hiring of new graduates is a fundamental personnel policy of Japanese companies. Consequently, by the time they graduate, students must decide at which company they will find employment, and companies must decide on which students to hire. Through repeated screening of application documents and interviews, companies select a limited number of new hires from among the many candidates. Popular companies are inundated with applicants, so such companies have to spend a considerable amount of time in screening candidates. Students have a strong desire to find employment at the most decent company possible, so there is intense competition focused on the companies that they wish to join. In the USA, the competition for a better job is called the "job competition model," but in Japan, rather than focusing on particular jobs, there is a "company competition model" focused on searching for a company to join.

During the period of economic boom, companies hired a large number of people, so it was comparatively easy to find employment, but as a result of this long recession, the number of fortunate people hired by good companies is declining rapidly. The competition among students pursuing limited opportunities is harsh and students who are unable to obtain a position repeatedly go through the application and interview process. As this is repeated, their job-seeking activities gradually become prolonged.

Nowadays, from the summer vacation of their third year, students think about whether to participate in an internship (short-term practical experience at a company) and at which company. They are beset by such obsessive thoughts as "If I participate in an internship, will it give me an advantage in finding employment?" and "I must find a topic of conversation that will be useful in a job interview."

In the fall, company introduction seminars begin for job-seekers. Some seminars last for several days, leading to students prioritizing attendance at the seminars over attending their university classes, as they worry that "If I go to one, I won't be able to find employment unless I attend all of them." Their heads are filled with nothing but thoughts of finding employment.

After New Year, full-scale company information sessions and selection begin. Quite a few companies issue early unofficial job offers (an advance promise of employment) before the April when students become fourth-years. Leading companies decide on hiring in April or thereabouts. However, fewer than half of all students are able to secure a decision on their place of employment before the summer vacation of their fourth year. Accordingly, the situation in which it is almost impossible to provide students with guidance for graduation research continues even at the beginning of the fall of the fourth year.

That is the least of their problems. The number of students who cannot find employment even after they graduate is increasing. Students who graduate without being able to find employment lose their biggest opportunity to find employment. It is not the case that one can only find employment when graduating, but it does put such young people at quite a disadvantage. The point of departure for one's working life is a major factor that determines one's future career.

The long process of job-seeking activities that begins from the latter half of the third year divides students into those whose employment is decided quickly and those who have to carry out activities for longer; however, there is now also a group consisting of an increasing number of students who are unable to find employment and graduate from university without having secured employment. As well as strengthening the creation of a hierarchy, consisting of famous universities that provide an advantage in finding employment and obscure universities that put job-seekers at a disadvantage, this split intensifies competition, both between students and between universities.

In response to a request from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, the Science Council of Japan conducted deliberations concerning the "Quality Assurance Framework for University Education" and reported back on their findings (Science Council of Japan, 2010). Of the three subcommittees, the Subcommittee Examining the Ideal Connection between University and Employment considered revisions to the approach to job-seeking activities and formulated both short-term, interim measures and long-term measures. Particular attention was paid to the proposal that "employment should not be limited to new graduates." The subcommittee was of the opinion that it would be desirable to relax the fundamental element of Japanese-style employment, namely the mass hiring of new graduates, and proposed that, for the three years following graduation, young people be treated in the same way as in the simultaneous recruiting of new graduates.

Rather than short-term, interim measures, searching for a path that will resolve the issue of the connection between university and employment in the long term is a major challenge for universities. The Science Council of Japan is also undertaking deliberations that take the long-term perspective into account. These are beneficial in understanding experts' ways of thinking, but the harmful effects of job-seeking activities in real life are intolerable.

From the perspectives of both students and companies, employment transactions are decisions made with incomplete information. However, it is not the case that one will gain

the complete information if one carries out activities over the longer term. The job-seeking = hiring mismatch can occur at any time. Most adults in Japan scold young people for a lack of perseverance if they quit a company, which differs completely from the situation of young people in the West, who frequently change jobs while searching for a suitable occupation. I do not think it is necessary to stop searching for a job just because one has found employment at a company, and I think it is healthier to find the work that suits oneself through a variety of social experiences. The top priority is perhaps to create a society in which it is as easy as possible to change job. Based on the premise of changing job, it would be better for job-seeking to take the form of a short, intensive attack, taking place during the summer vacation of the fourth year, or for a period of one to three months before graduation. I strongly feel that job-seeking activities outside those periods should be prohibited.

However, from my own experience of speaking out on this matter, one will end up being laughed down from all directions if one proposes such a ban. There are objections from the "can't be done" faction, who say that even if a ban were put in place, nobody at all would obey it. In addition, there are objections from the "shouldn't be done" faction, who believe that it would be an unacceptable restriction in terms of the principles of both the freedom of job selection and a free labor market. Both are correct, perhaps. Nevertheless, I think that the commotion of job-seeking activities carried out by students while neglecting their studies for 18 months is an overly stupid Japanese-style event.

III. The Relationship between Universities and Companies Has Not Changed

Perhaps good sense among the public is stronger than the indignation of a single lecturer. It is hoped that sensible business sectors will emerge even without a ban. Recently, there was a great deal of talk about the recommendation by the Japan Foreign Trade Council—a non-profit industry group for trading companies—that employment activities be revised. According to proposals posted on the internet, the group has stated that "Concrete deliberations will be carried out, with a view to delaying the whole hiring schedule, including PR activities, starting with the new graduates from the cohort who would be due to join companies in 2013." It also states that it will call for cooperation on the part of related groups and seek to deepen understanding.

The subject has also been highlighted in various newspapers, which have signaled their approval for the good sense of these trading companies. It would be wonderful if such sensible rules became established, avoiding interference with university education, while not requiring a ban. If sensible companies and educational reform at universities could bring about the resolution of the problem of job-seeking activities, it would be splendid.

The Central Council for Education has also established the Special Committee on Careers Education and Vocational Education, which is discussing a "specialized framework for practical vocational education in higher education." Matters discussed include a rehashed version of foreign vocational qualifications in the form of a "career grade system"

and proposals for incorporating work experience within a company into university education. Having been positioned a long way from vocational education and practical education, Japanese universities now find themselves in a period of transition to a new age. It looks as though reforms will continue for quite some time to come.

Kariya and Honda (2010) have carried out an analysis of changes in the transition from university to work, based on valuable data. The prevalence of the internet and the recession have combined to bring about changes and progress in such areas as the job-seeking process, the content of job-seeking activities, and hiring policy. Although it is a fact that one can see changes in the various tools used for job-seeking activities and the attitudes of students and companies, if we look at the relationship between universities and companies at the macro level, I do not believe that there has been much change, nor do I think that the situation will alter greatly in the future. Accordingly, if the recession had not continued for so long and the job-seeking situation had changed for the better, the situation concerning reforms and job-seeking activities would undoubtedly also have calmed down.

The reason why I think that they have not changed is based on experience of having observed the relationships between universities and companies for many years. It was in 1974, while serving as the research assistant of Professor Yoshio Hara, that I first analyzed data concerning the situation in relation to job-seeking and hiring. All I did was sort by university the data concerning the names of companies at which students found employment and sort by company the names of the universities from which companies hired new staff, but there was a clear relationship between universities and companies in terms of job-seeking = hiring. It was quite bold data processing for the time, involving classifying universities by the degree of difficulty to enter on the basis of student's test results (Hara and Yano 1975).

This highlighted the reality that those attending more famous universities were more likely to seek employment at more famous companies, and famous companies were more likely to exclusively hire those attending more famous universities; the situation was as pronounced as the public imagined, if not even more so. Above all, there was a marked concentration and monopoly in the case of universities focused on the liberal arts. Job-seeking and hiring in the technology field was relatively diversified and well-dispersed.

This was the time when the theory was beginning to gain currency that society's placing undue emphasis on academic background and school background was having a deleterious effect on education. Hara and Yano (1975) pointed out that it is necessary to break free of this situation of concentration and monopoly in job-seeking = hiring, in order to remedy this situation in which society places undue value on academic background. In order to emphasize the necessity of this, the paper made the bold proposal of prohibiting the monopoly of famous companies on personnel (a Personnel Antimonopoly Act). The proposal for a ban or measures was made with the full awareness that there are many who say that a ban cannot or should not be imposed. It is rhetoric aimed at sounding the alarm about the excessive concentration and monopoly of some famous companies. In addition, the paper

proposed that it would be desirable for hiring companies to pay a form of employment tax so that they bore part of the burden of education expenses.

Subsequently, I used indicators such as job-seeking, promotion and income to conduct a multifaceted analysis of the relationship between universities and companies. In 1980, I reported that the society placing undue value on academic background was being structuralized on more economically rational lines (Yano 1980). Becoming structuralized means that it is harder to change. However, at the same time, the pathology and harmful effects of a society placing undue value on academic background began to be pointed out by many people and there was a desire for a solution. I expressed the following opinion in this paper as one method of solving the problem.

One method is to reduce as far as possible the uncertainty in the information involved in job-seeking = hiring. Thinking about the current situation in which the ease or difficulty of entering a university is used as handy information when hiring new recruits, I pointed out that, rather than a "common first-stage university examination," it might be important to introduce a "common first-stage employment examination."

Furthermore, I stated that, rather than placing the cost burden on the family finances, it would be desirable to consider placing the burden on the individual, in order to promote equality of educational opportunities. This method involves all students bearing the burden of educational expenses, irrespective of each family's level of household income, with the costs incurred being repaid from income after graduation.

It was 30 years ago, but all of my proposals remained nothing more than deskbound theories. One could say that this demonstrates how difficult it is to achieve transition in the economic structure. It is also due in part to the fact that I thought that there was no way to eliminate the harmful effects of the economic structure, other than a ban that would restrict freedom.

Even based on my experience of analysis since the 1980s, the relationship between universities and companies from the perspective of job-seeking, or the economic structure of the society placing undue value on school background, has not changed a great deal in subsequent years. Positioned atop this kind of structure, the personnel departments of Japanese companies have continued to say "Knowledge from school is no use to companies. We don't have any expectations concerning specialist knowledge from schools. What companies want is individuality, creativity and vitality, not knowledge." Personnel departments have openly stated this, so it is inevitable that job-seeking students will lack enthusiasm for their studies. From my own experience, having both studied in a faculty of engineering and been involved in education in such a faculty for many years, education in the liberal arts and hiring by companies are more serious problems. Japanese universities have been criticized for having been careless about education, but education in engineering certainly has not been poor. It has been done well for many years. Social commentary often emanates from people with a liberal arts background, so quite biased views tend to circulate in society. I believe it would be fair to say that the job-seeking activities of students at leading liberal

arts universities and the hiring policies of leading companies have stripped Japanese university education of its substance, thereby weakening it.

Companies are still ignoring university education and are simply bringing forward the hiring process. However, companies that have reduced the number of staff they hire have recently begun to say "We need immediately-effective workers" and "You should provide useful education." At the same time, as a result of the impetus provided by the words "basic skills as a member of society" and "employability," universities are tinkering with the educational curriculum. There is nothing particularly new in the skills and abilities referred to in those terms. They are things that one will learn naturally, if one engages earnestly with one's general and specialist university courses. Based on this opinion, I have conducted a study of the relationship between learning experience during the student years and subsequent career development. One of the conclusions is the proposal of a hypothesis of learning habits. I will not repeat it in full here, but I discovered that learning experience during the university years enriches learning after graduation and this ongoing learning becomes the source of career development.

IV. What Is It about Japanese Universities That Makes Them Characteristically Japanese?

The foregoing constitutes my understanding of job-seeking activities nowadays and the relationship between universities and companies that lies behind them. Based on the premise of this understanding, I would next like to consider the Japanese-style employment system, focusing on Japan's new recruits.

With regard to the employment policies of Japanese companies, the study conducted by Iwawaki (2006) is an example of analysis that carefully traces the abilities of students that are sought during the process of selecting candidates for hiring. This study analyzes how the abilities required of new graduates have changed over the 30 years from 1971. According to this, the universal characteristics in the personnel profile sought in every period have included a positive attitude, vitality and motivation, but in recent years, importance has come to be attached to the willingness to take on a challenge and the ability to set targets and translate them into action. It has been pointed out that these are indications of the tendency to value the potential to become an immediately-effective worker, as well as the aptitude for long-term, stable employment.

Recently, many books have been published about job-seeking activities, and are also being disseminated by those in charge of personnel at companies. The sharp rise in the number of employment journalists and employment consultants is a recent major change. The process leading to hiring seems to have changed, but the atmosphere feels like a game of cat-and-mouse between job-seeking activity manuals and personnel departments. There has been no major change in the hiring policy of attaching importance to using interviews to seek counterparts with whom one wishes to work. Although immediately-effective workers

are being sought, it is not the case that specific knowledge and skills are required. In many cases, importance is placed on personnel profiles, specifically their mental toughness, and the fact that employers are still not paying attention to specialist knowledge and academic performance from university remains unchanged from that day to this.

Rather than changes in hiring policy, the question "Why doesn't it change?" is actually a more practical, important issue. I would like to explain my interpretation of this issue below. This is why it is necessary to ask "What is it about Japanese universities that makes them characteristically Japanese?" It is not sufficient merely to explain that the relationship between universities and companies has become rigidly structuralized. While it is a fact that universities are constrained by Japanese-style employment, the roots of Japanese-style universities go much deeper. This is because it is not only the exit pathway from university that is deeply involved, but also the entrance gateway and, in fact, the economic infrastructure that supports the entire education system.

V. The Sickness of the Japanese-Style Mass University

If universities become "massified," their quality will inevitably decline. In addition, universities worldwide are undergoing "massification." The rate of advancement to Japanese universities is lower than the average for all OECD countries, so it is certainly not the case that this massification is only taking place in Japan. It is not the case that Japan is the only country troubled by a decline in quality. However, if one compares massified universities around the world with those in Japan, the major attributes stand out clearly. More specifically, these attributes are "the requirement to be 18," "the emphasis on graduation," and "the expectation that parents bear the financial burden." I use the collective term "the Japanese-style mass university" to refer to this three-piece set. As is common knowledge among everyone in Japan, these attributes have been maintained almost unchanged for decades since the end of the war. However, one certainly cannot describe this as a healthy situation. It is a pathological phenomenon that is far removed from international standards.

The first attribute is the requirement that university entrants be 18 years old; it is surprising that this has been stubbornly maintained, having been accepted as a matter of course for many years. The data providing international comparisons of educational statistics published by the OECD include figures for "age distribution of new entrants" in regard to tertiary education (OECD, 2007). No data are provided for Japan, but as you may be aware, young people aged 18 account for the 80th percentile of new entrants to Japanese universities, with most of the rest being accounted for by those aged 19. However, in the case of the USA, the highest age of new entrants included in the 80th percentile is 26.5. This means that 20% of new entrants are aged above 26.5 years old. Looking at the ages of new entrants based solely on this 80th percentile benchmark, in France it is 26.6, in the UK 25.2, and in Germany it is 24.1. It is even higher in Nordic countries, at 26.6 in Finland and 28.3 in Denmark. In Sweden and Norway it exceeds 40 years old.

The second attribute relates to the exit pathway. At Japanese universities, hardly any attention is paid to the proportion of students who drop out. The OECD statistics feature university survival rates and state that "drop out and survival rates can be useful indicators of the internal efficiency of tertiary education systems." If the conditions for graduation in terms of academic results are strict, this definition is probably valid, but in Japan at present where such conditions are not strict, it cannot be said that the low dropout rate represents high efficiency. An educational institution that enables students to graduate without acquiring any specialist university education is not a healthy one.

The tertiary level survival rate is the number of graduates divided by the number of new entrants in the year of entrance. According to these data providing an international comparison, the Japanese survival rate is 91%. This makes it far and away the highest in the world. The average for the countries of the OECD and for the 19 countries of the EU is 71%. It is 78% in the UK, 73% in Germany, and 54% in the USA. The only countries where it is in excess of 80% are South Korea and Ireland, where it is 83%.

Little attention has been paid to changes in the survival rate in Japan, but detailed figures are reported among the statistics published by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. It can be found in the tabulation of the number of graduates by year of entrance. For example, looking at the graduates from the 2007 academic year, 79.7% of those who were entrants in 2003 graduated after four years. The four-year survival rate in 1987 was 78%, so there is not a great difference. The highest figure over the last 20 years was 82.3% in 1996, meaning that over 80% of entrants went on to graduate without any problems. Less than 10% graduate a year late (having repeated a year). Looking at those who repeat two years, the figure drops to less than 2%. The proportion of those who graduate, including those who repeat a year or two, is between 90% and 93%.

Over the last 20 years, there has been no major change in the four-year survival rate (80%), the completion rate for those who repeat a year (10%), and the dropout rate (10%). The students' flow from the entrance gateway to the exit pathway is quite stable and firmly established. Making the appraisal of academic performance more rigorous has been advocated in the recent reforms, but I have never heard any talk of making it harder to graduate.

These statistics from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology do not go back very many years, so I have calculated the following figures. Figures calculated on the basis of (number of graduates/number of entrants four years previously) provide the approximate survival rate. If the proportion of those who graduate after repeating a year or two is the same each year, this will be the same as the survival rate. As can be seen from Figure 1, the rate has remained around 90% over the long term, from 1953 to 2008. The conspicuously low rate in 1970 alone (82.2%) was due to the impact of the student unrest. The fact that it has been above 90% since 1990 is probably due to the fact that students are more serious about graduation than they were in the past.

Compiling this graph, I was surprised once more. The rate of advancement to university in the 1950s was less than 10% and the universities were only for a small elite. Subsequently,

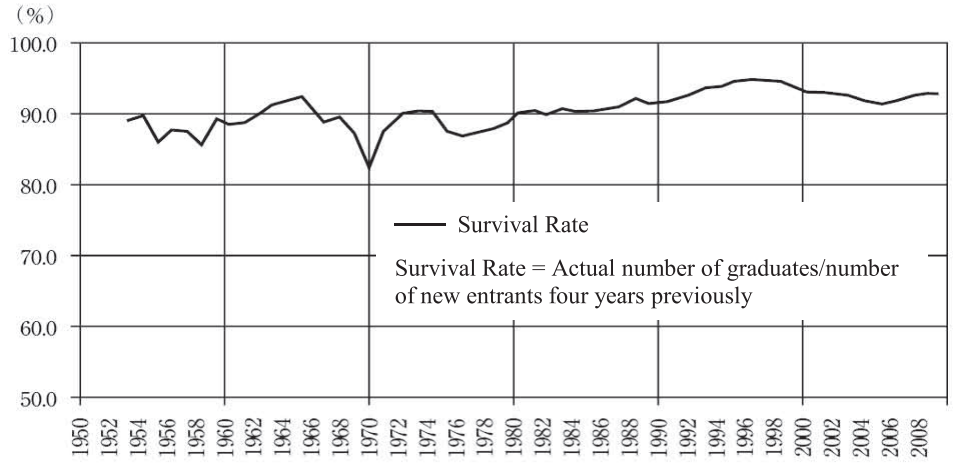

Figure1. University Student Survival Rate

the rate of advancement rose sharply and has now reached 50%. The quality of the students entering university must inevitably decline, but the survival rate remains almost unchanged. If anything, it has actually gone up a little of late. It is not the case that assessment of results for graduation has become more rigorous. The era in which it is taken for granted that one will graduate if one enters university has continued for 60 years. The emphasis on graduation, which has been regarded as self-evident, is the second attribute of the Japanese-style mass university.

The third attribute relates to the economic infrastructure that supports university education. The running of private universities, which account for 75% of all universities, is funded by the tuition fees paid by students. In around 1980, subsidies were paid to private schools to cover as much as 30% of their ordinary expenditure, but these subsidies have now dwindled to around 10%. At the same time, the tuition fees at national universities have risen, approaching 63% of the figure for the private sector. The figure used to be no more than 15% of private university tuition fees, so there has been a remarkable decline in public expenditure.

It has frequently been pointed out that the proportion of public expenditure spent on universities is the lowest in the world. I call this third attribute "the expectation that parents bear the financial burden of educational expenses." As is commonly known, the proportion of the burden of private funding is high, but in order to understand the nature of the cost burden in Japan, it is appropriate to express it as an expectation that parents will bear the financial burden. Even within the burden of private funding, there is a big difference between the burden on parents and the burden on the individual student. There are cases in which the individual student pays their tuition fees themselves, funding them through casual work or a scholarship, but in most cases, it is actually the parents who bear the burden. The Japanese-style family principle emerges markedly in the fact that parents push themselves

to the limit for the sake of their children. As can be seen clearly from statistical data in the Family Income and Expenditure Survey, if children go on to university, the household savings rate plummets sharply to -10%, and the proportion of income spent on food (the Engel coefficient) also declines. Most of the child allowance paid by the government should be diverted to saving for the child to go to university.

Japan's mass universities have been supported by the expansion in private universities and soaring tuition fees. At the root of this is the family principle in which the parents and child form a single unit. It is thought that it is only natural for parents to push themselves to the limit for the sake of their children, and children have been indulged by their parents as a matter of course. The policy of making public universities closer to private universities, rather than making private universities closer to public universities and thereby diminishing the difference in financial burden between the two results in the strengthening and permeation of the expectation that parents bear the financial burden. Students today take it for granted that their parents will bear the burden of their tuition fees. If one tells students that "at most universities in Europe, tuition is free of charge," their response is "Really? No way!" In Japan, tuition fees have already soared to the extent that it would not be at all surprising if a movement opposing fee rises emerged. Even in Japan, there was a fierce opposition movement during the 1960s, but it seems as though everyone has completely forgotten this and takes the tuition fee rises for granted.

VI. The Three-Piece Set Formed by the Japanese-Style Mass University

Everybody knows about the aforementioned three attributes. This is no exaggeration. However, these attributes, which are the tacit premise on which Japanese universities are based, constitute a Japanese sickness that deviates considerably from international norms. Nevertheless, they are not discussed seriously or are ignored on the grounds that nothing can be done about them. They are hardly ever highlighted as the focus of university reform, and even if the distortion is pointed out, it is assumed that nothing can be done to remedy them. It is true that they are hard to remedy. There are two reasons for this.

Firstly, the three attributes are not independent of each other, but influence each other and form a unified whole. They have formed a three-piece set and have become institutionalized. The fact that they have taken root as a three-piece set is a consequence of the massification of universities that took place as a result of high economic growth. During the period of high economic growth during the 1960s and 1970s, the scale of Japanese universities soon overtook that of European universities and approached that of the USA, which occupied the top position. Most of this growth was the result of the expansion of private universities. This outcome was steadily maintained thereafter.

The decision concerning advancement to university is determined by the parent-child relationship at the age of 18. It is only until the age of 18 that parents are willing to provide their child with funds. There are hardly any parents who would be willing to bear the finan-

cial burden if their child wished to go on to university at the age of almost 30. The cost of tuition fees would be too high to finance oneself to go to university at that age. Perhaps the true feeling of parents is that they count on their children to look after them in their old age because they push themselves to the limit to enable their children to go to university.

Recently, advertisements for university open days (exhibitions that provide high school students with an introduction to university education and student life) have become conspicuous on advertising posters in train carriages. On one occasion, I encountered the following superb piece of advertising copy. "Mums! Why don't you interview the university?" Rather than universities interviewing candidates for entrance, the universities are being interviewed by candidates' mothers.

This is an age in which young people attend open days accompanied by their parent (or guardian), many parents attend university entrance ceremonies, parent-lecturer meetings take place while students are enrolled at university, and many parents even attend graduation ceremonies. Students who have gone on to university with financial support from their parents must graduate at all costs. It is normal to want to find employment at a good company and give one's parents peace of mind. This is the filial duty of Japanese people. If a student comes to see a lecturer and says that they want to drop out of university, the lecturer must always ask "Do your parents agree to this?" and advise the student "Please ensure you consult them properly before making a decision." The top subject of conversation in parent-lecturer meetings is the issue of finding employment. The lecturer must carefully explain how they have prepared the curriculum with a view to job-seeking.

What I have frequently heard when visiting countries in Northern Europe is that "education until the age of 18 is the responsibility of the parents, but after the age of 18, it is the responsibility of the individual." Once a young person goes to university, it is usual for them to move out of the family home and support themselves, even if their home is within commuting distance of the university. Young people becoming independent of their parents at the age of 18 is probably the usual pattern of parent-child relationships not only in Northern Europe, but also throughout the West. However, in Japan, parents and their children form a unified whole even at the age of 22, not to mention at the age of 18. Nowadays, there are parents who even attend company entrance ceremonies and visit the company where their child works. The Japanese-style family system in which parents and their children form a unified whole operates in such a way as to reinforce the system of Japanese-style mass universities in which the requirement to be 18, the emphasis on graduation and the expectation that parents bear the financial burden go hand-in-hand with each other.

VII. Universities Shackled by the Family and Companies

The second reason why it is hard to remedy the situation is the fact that Japanese-style mass universities operate in synchronization with the Japanese-style employment system, and have a relationship in which each reinforces the other. During the period of

high economic growth, Japanese-style management began to become the focus of international attention. The three-piece set of lifetime employment, seniority-based promotion and enterprise unions was deemed to be the secret of the strength of Japanese companies. From the perspective of the relationship with universities, the following two points are also important, in addition to the three-piece set of Japanese-style management. The mass hiring of new graduates and the system of internal human resource development by means of corporate in-service training. Companies attach greater importance to the hiring of new graduates, rather than mid-career employment, and the mechanism in which companies educate the personnel that they require forms the basis of the Japanese-style employment system.

This is why company personnel departments have developed the attitude that "We don't have any expectations concerning university education" and "Vitality is more important than what students have learned." Japanese companies have ceased to question the quality of university education and employ university graduates aged 22 as brand new recruits. If a student drops out of university, they will be labeled as someone unsuited to a company hiring personnel for long-term employment, so students have to find some way to graduate. There seems to be truth in the saying that "Two years is the limit you can spend as a *ronin* [student retaking university entrance examinations] (repeating a year or two)." If a student reports that they have found employment, the university finds ways to ensure that they can graduate.

In parallel with the mass hiring of new graduates, what is important is hiring based on a uniform starting salary. Everyone who joins a particular company has the same starting salary. In addition, the differences between companies in terms of starting salary are very small. With regard to starting salaries at companies in China, I was surprised to discover that the difference between the companies with the highest starting salaries and those with the lowest between fivefold and tenfold. This is because starting salaries for IT engineers at foreign-owned companies can be very high. There can be no doubt that there are big differences between new entrants in terms of ability. Nevertheless, hiring in Japan takes place on the basis of a uniform wage. This means that if a company hires someone talented, it is a major gain for the company. The competition to secure the most capable students available is because there is an economic incentive in that companies effectively profit if they hire someone talented. This spurs on the tendency for job-seeking activities to start earlier.

The Japanese-style mass university is shaped by the Japanese-style family principle. The Japanese-style mass university is shaped by the Japanese-style employment system. These three systems of family, university and employment complement each other, shaping the Japanese-style mass university, which is accepted as the norm and has become unchangeable. Figure 2 depicts the situation of universities, which are shackled by both families and employment. Japan's new recruits accept both the Japanese-style family and Japanese-style employment as customs that they cannot change, so they engage earnestly in job-seeking activities within those narrow confines. I believe that ultimately, from the perspective of Japan's new recruits, the Japanese-style employment mechanism has not changed at all.

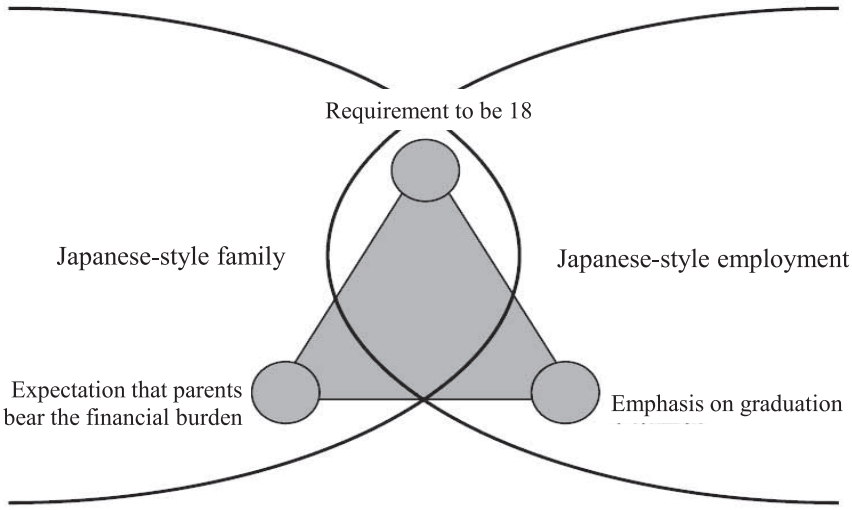

Figure 2. The System of Family, University and Employment

VIII. No Reform without a Policy on Educational Expenses

The foregoing is a commentary on "why things are not changing," but I believe that this is a serious problem that cannot be dealt with merely by explaining the current situation. It will be difficult to cure the sickness of the Japanese-style mass university, but I would at least like to consider the whereabouts of a prescription to treat it.

The Japanese-style family in which parents and their children form a single unit exacerbates the tendency to think "It's fine as long as my child is OK," while Japanese-style employment, which is enduring a recession, is fully occupied with the thought that "It's fine as long as our company is OK." These true feelings become the hidden curriculum in universities. As a result, they cultivate egocentric students who think "It's fine as long as I'm OK." The appointed task of education is to cultivate personnel who can all help each other out and contribute to society. Where this mission becomes devoid of substance, one finds the impoverishment of the Japanese-style mass university.

So what kind of university system is desirable? The best system would be one in which anyone—as long as they had the motivation to learn and basic academic skills—could go to university at any time, irrespective of their parents' financial situation (the universities of today are distorted, as anyone can go to university as long as they have the money, even if they do not have basic academic skills). If one does not have the motivation to learn or if one's academic performance is poor, one should be able to drop out at any time. If, while working, it becomes clear what one wishes to study, one should be able to return to university at any time. One should be able to "happily drop out and cheerfully re-

turn." Adults should be able to come to university in order to change their careers. It is also fun to study at university after retirement. In addition, universities should have the confidence to apply themselves to providing general education and specialist education.

If the current situation in Japanese-style mass universities were turned around, they would become such splendid universities. However, in order to rescue the universities shackled by families and employment, there are things that must be done before reforming the legal system. Examining the diagram, one can see which variables can be controlled. The only one that can be controlled is the burden of educational expenses. I believe that a policy on educational expenses that liberates students from their parents is the only way to transform this structure. Even now, I do not think that I was mistaken in the proposals I made 30 years ago, when I stated that it was desirable to impose an employment tax on companies and to introduce a system that would impose the burden of educational expenses on students themselves.

In order to design an education system in which everyone helps each other and contributes to society, we must support it from money provided as mutual aid, rather than from money focused on self-interest (the household budget). It is crucial to invest tax money, which is, above all, money to provide mutual aid. If opportunities to learn are guaranteed through financial support provided by people whom one does not know, this will become the hidden curriculum, leading to the formation of education focused on repaying one's obligation to these unknown strangers. Considering the large tax burden, it would be desirable to explore a path that involved introducing a financial burden for both individual students and companies, thereby liberating them from the expectation that parents bear the financial burden. If students are liberated from their parents, they can make decisions about their career path freely, based on their own independent responsibility. In addition, university entrance, academic work, and graduation must all be properly regulated. Such regulations cannot be introduced in universities as they stand at present, which will go bankrupt if they regulate university entrance and graduation.

The three-piece set underpinning the Japanese-style mass university must be reformed simultaneously. One cannot change only the requirement to be 18 and the emphasis on graduation, based on the premise of the market principles implicit in the expectation that parents bear the financial burden. Under the present financial difficulties, the "can't be done" faction and the "shouldn't be done" faction will doubtless appear on the scene again. However, hardly anyone knows that with the tax revenue from just 1% of the consumption tax, the tuition fees for universities could be reduced so far as to make them almost free of charge.

As a result of the long process of reform, the reform of the legal system has come almost full circle. What will be required in the future is not a change in the legal system. We must change the allocation of resources invested in education. A change in the allocation of resources is the policy. Although there have been educational reforms in Japan, there has been hardly any education policy. We stand at a point at which we must understand that the

policy on educational expenses is the basis of education policy, and must draw up a grand design for the future of our society.

IX. Japanese-Style Distortion in the Lifetime Policy

You might think that this is no more than vain theorizing. However, I cannot be so optimistic as to think that Japanese universities will improve through the cooperation of "conscientious companies" who do not merely think "It's fine as long as our company is OK," and the "specialized framework for practical vocational education in higher education" formulated by the Central Council for Education. To be perfectly honest, I am deeply despondent about the serious illness of Japanese-style mass universities. Unless not only employment, but also the mechanism of society as a whole is discussed, we will not be able to save Japanese universities. The reality that "university graduates are unvarnished new recruits" constitutes a serious illness. Japan's new recruits, who are haunted by the need to conduct job-seeking activities, are the victims of the Japanese-style family and Japanese-style employment and are suffering from a serious disease.

We are carrying out surveys of attitudes among citizens concerning education and social security. This is because we think that education policy must be considered on the basis of its relationship to employment policy and social security policy. We have reported on some of the survey results at a meeting of the Japan Society of Educational Sociology. In closing, I would like to introduce just a small fragment of these results.

In relation to a number of policies, we asked the question "Do you think that this should be actively promoted, even if taxes have to be increased, or do you think that there is no need to actively promote it if taxes will increase?" The table shows the results in terms of whether the response was "agree" or "disagree" (including those responding "somewhat" in one or other direction), in regard to four policies.

The proportion indicating agreement was highest in regard to medical care, and more than 60% of respondents answered that it was acceptable to invest tax money in three of these issues, namely pensions, medical care, and employment. However, when it came to opportunities for going to university, only 25% of people agreed. Looking at the other survey items as well, it seems that people believe that families should resolve issues concerning education, rather than investing tax money in this area. This reflects the fact that there is a very strong family principle in education.

While we thought "It's just as we expected," we also suspect that a fundamental problem with the "lifelong social policy" in Japan lies in a distorted awareness of the lifetime policy. Let us think about the flow of a person's life: education – employment – pension. There are three principles in this lifetime policy: the principle of self-responsibility, the principle of family responsibility, and the principle of social responsibility. If we envisage a consistent principle, there is a method focused on making all policies throughout our lives consistent with just one of these three. If one took the principle of self-responsibility as the

Should Be Actively Promoted, Even If Taxes Have to Be Increased

	Agree	Disagree
Stabilization of pensions	69.3%	30.7%
Upgrading of medical and nursing care	78.0%	22.0%
Upgrading of the employment environment	62.7%	37.3%
Opportunities for going to university	24.9%	75.1%

Source: Yano et al. (2010).

guiding principle for education, employment and pensions, that would be understandable. On the other hand, it is also easy to understand the method based entirely on the principle of social responsibility, based on funding from tax revenue.

In Japan, where there is a strong family principle, only education is run on the basis of the principle of family responsibility, while everything else is significantly oriented toward the principle of social responsibility. If we are to resolve the problems of education based on the principle of family responsibility, we should also make all other issues consistent with this principle. I believe that this distortion is quite characteristically Japanese in its nature. In the period of economic growth, problems did not become apparent, despite this distortion. However, when thinking about a zero-growth future, this distortion might exacerbate social contradictions.

This is because there is no consistent lifetime policy. Pensions are supported by the working generation. If employment is jeopardized, pensions will also collapse. In addition, it is education—including workplace education and training—that supports vigorous employment. If education alone is subject to the principle of family responsibility, future employment will be jeopardized. If the attitude that "We don't have any expectations concerning university education" continues in the future, employment in Japan, which is becoming an increasingly knowledge-based economy, will cease to be viable.

Education is not closed to the matters of individuals and families. Education is a public investment over a lifetime, which benefits everyone. This is precisely why everyone should cooperate with each other in sharing the cost of educational expenses. We can create opportunities not only for 18-year-old students, but also for everyone to study at university at some stage in their lives. Dividing the 5 million yen cost of tuition fees over four years is a substantial burden. However, if one were to pay that 5 million yen in installments over one's lifetime, the annual burden would become smaller. This is what supporting universities from tax revenue would mean.

In order to resolve the problems of Japan's new recruits and employment, what is required is not only a connection between university and employment, but also a lifetime policy for changing the very structure of society.

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