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## Youth Employment

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Young women working at a fast  
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**Back Cover Photo**

Students gathered at a group  
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**Editorial Notes**

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All personal names are given in  
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Five years after our "Young Workers in Japan" issue (April, 2000), *Social Science Japan* revisits the employment situation of young Japanese. Although the Japanese economy currently seems to be showing signs of recovery, the employment system of Japanese youth has undergone changes since the 1980s and early 1990s, and, as Kosugi Reiko points out in our second article, economic recovery alone will not solve the employment problems faced by Japanese youth. Genda Yuji introduces us to a new category of young person, the "NEET" (Not in Employment, Education, or Training), and compares their situation with that of "freeters," while describing the differences between "job-seekers," "non-seekers," and "discouraged" among the non-workers. Hori Yukie describes the nonprofit organizations which have been established to help young people find jobs, due to the increasing numbers of young people failing to make a smooth transition from school to work, and Kudo Kei, the director of one such nonprofit organization, gives us a first hand account of how they work to reach young people, especially "NEETs," and help them to reenter society. Sato Kaoru points out the importance of taking regional variation into consideration when thinking about solutions to the employment problems of young people. Finally, Genji Keiko shows that gender role attitude is closely correlated with the educational aspirations and life course expectations of Japanese female high school seniors. We end this issue of SSJ with a Research Report by Liv Coleman, a visiting researcher here at the Institute of Social Science.

With this issue of *Social Science Japan* we welcome three new editorial committee members: Professor Ishida Hiroshi, Professor Hirashima Kenji, and Nakamura Mayumi. I would like to thank Ishida-Sensei, Hirashima-Sensei, and Nakamura-San for their help on this issue, as well as extend my thanks in advance for their cooperation on future issues. よろしく！

As always, if you are not a current subscriber, but would like to receive *Social Science Japan* by airmail, please email us at [ssjinfo@iss.u-tokyo.ac.jp](mailto:ssjinfo@iss.u-tokyo.ac.jp), with the words "SSJ subscription" in the subject box, for a free subscription.

Thomas Blackwood  
Managing Editor

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# The "NEET" Problem in Japan

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## What is a "NEET"?

In the past, when speaking of jobless young people, images of full-time housewives or students often came to mind. Since the 1990s, however, the number of jobless single youths has been increasing rapidly. The Cabinet Office of the Japanese Government has organized a research project on youth employment, and in March 2005 issued an interim report on the project. Since I serve as the Chairman of this project, I would like to use this opportunity to explain the main points of this report here.

The *Employment Status Survey*, which carefully examines about 400,000 households in order to capture contemporary working situations, is conducted every five years by the Statistics Bureau. Using this survey, we investigated the situation of people ages 15-34 years old who satisfied the following conditions: (1) they do not attend school (high school, university, preparatory school, or professional school); (2) they are unmarried; (3) they usually do not work for a remittance. Hereafter, the word "jobless" refers

to non-working young people who fit the above conditions.

The latest survey shows that the number of such jobless youths reached 2,132,000 persons nationally in 2002. This number is almost equivalent to the 2,090,000 "freelance part-time workers," also known as *freeter*, calculated by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. In 1992, just after the collapse of the bubble economy, there were only 1,307,000 such jobless youths. Thus, the population of young jobless persons increased 800 thousand or more during the so-called "Lost Decade," from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s.

It is not only the number of jobless people, however, but their distinguishing characteristics which are important. Among the jobless, there were 1,285,000 "job-seekers" in 2002, i.e. those who wish to work for earnings and actually search for jobs. Those unemployed who are represented in the labor force surveys conducted by the government correspond approximately to this "job seeker" type.

In contrast, some jobless can be classified as "non-seekers." Although they may wish to work, they are often not actually searching for jobs. Such persons, who are not counted statistically as unemployed because they are not looking for jobs, numbered 426,000 in 2002. Finally, besides the "non-seekers," there remain jobless youths who do not even wish to work. They can be categorized as "discouraged," and their number reached 421,000 in 2002.

Now, a new category of jobless young persons, called "NEET," or those who are not in education, employment or training, is attracting attention in Japan. While this term originated in the United Kingdom, where it describes recent school graduates aged 16-18, the Japanese NEET includes such people as the "non-seekers" and the "discouraged" among the 15-34 year-old jobless single people. Japanese NEETs are also distinguished from "job seekers," who are considered unemployed. According to this definition, young people falling into the NEET cate-



gory in Japan reached a total of 847,000 persons in 2002.

### **The Effects of Social Structure**

One of the notable features of Japanese NEETs is the strong correlation with educational background. The proportion of junior high school or high school graduates among jobless people is the highest for the "discouraged" type. Next, the proportion of junior high school or high school graduates is clearly higher for "non-seekers" than for "job seekers." Those with a post-high school education account for almost 40% of the "job-seeker" type, while junior high school graduates, high school dropouts, and high school graduates account for 80% or more of the "discouraged" type of jobless youth. And, looking only at the "non-seekers," 78% of the college or university graduates answer "I will work sooner or later," compared to 32% of high school graduates and 36% of junior high school graduates who say "I am not sure if I will ever work in the future."

Therefore, jobless persons with higher education tend to become "unemployed," in that they are more likely to be seeking for jobs, while jobless youths with lower education are more likely to give up their search for work entirely, and therefore not be counted in government unemployment statistics.

In addition to educational background, a large decline in family income has had a serious influence on the rapid increase in the number of NEETs in Japan. When NEETs first started to become an issue, we often heard criticism that NEETs were simply the spoiled children of rich parents, and they avoided even attempting to work. In fact, however, far from being of wealthy backgrounds, a significant number of NEETs come from economically disadvantaged families.

Granted, some NEETs do come from wealthy families; more than 20% of households with "non-seekers" earned more than 10 million yen/year in the 1990s. However, for households living with "discouraged" jobless youths, the proportion of such rich families fell from 23% in 1997 to 14% in 2002. As a result, in the 2000s, upper-income households have become less likely to generate the "discouraged" jobless youths while lower-income households have become more likely to produce NEETs.

The proportion of families with an annual income of below 3 million yen is consistently higher for jobless youths than for the population of 15–34 year-olds as a whole. And the share of poor families increased remarkably for jobless youth from 1997 to 2002. The percentage of families with annual incomes below 3 million yen was especially pronounced among those jobless young people who could be classified as "discouraged" NEETs, where it has continually risen, and was expected to reach 40% by 2002.

As I explained above, the concept of NEET originated in the United Kingdom. There, teenagers not in education, employment, or training are, at least in part, the result of a strong hierarchical social structure; i.e. jobless youths are not jobless simply because of a lack of work ethic, but because of a social class structure over which they have no control. Young people from disadvantaged families or disadvantaged regions, as well as those coming from underprivileged classes are more likely to become NEETs.

In Japan, as in the United Kingdom, one's educational attainment and family income has a strong effect on whether one will become a NEET. Young people with less education and those from poor families are more likely to end up in jobs with poor working conditions, and are thus more likely to quit their jobs. Such class structure, or social segmentation, evolved during the long recession, and the presence of so many NEETs in Japan today is one outcome of the changing social structure in Japan in the 1990s and 2000s.

### **The Effects of Working Conditions**

In addition to social structure, the working conditions in Japanese firms may have a serious influence on the increasing number of NEETs. Regarding the reasons for giving up looking for work, many of the current "non-seekers" said, "in the past, even though I searched, I could not find a job," or "I could not find the kind of job I wanted." A decrease in the demand for regular workers among youths, especially those with lower education, and a rise in mismatches between job openings and applicants, resulted not only in an increase in unemployment, but also an increase in number of NEETs.

Furthermore, many NEETs claim that they cannot

search for jobs because they lack confidence in their knowledge and capability. NEETs feel that they do not have the appropriate skills, such as "communication skills," required for working in companies. This lack of confidence in their working ability is another notable feature of NEETs.

There are also many "non-seekers" who respond that they cannot work because of illness or injury. The number of sick or injured jobless youths increased rapidly in the late 1990s and the early 2000s, reaching almost 100,000 persons in 2002. About half of such NEETs with poor health conditions had experi-

enced work at least once before exiting the labor force, and it is possible that some NEETs injure their health at their workplaces, or as a direct result of the intense pressure in Japanese firms which emphasize a merit-based assessment. Although, with the data available, we cannot determine the specific type of illness or injury they suffered from, the deterioration of the workplace environment may be a cause for the increasing number of NEETs, and better mental care in the workplace should be considered an important means of preventing the further growth of NEETs in Japan.

# The Problems of *Freeters* and "NEETs" under the Recovering Economy

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The Japanese government has been grappling with youth employment problems since 2003, but the Japanese economy is currently showing signs of recovery, and the number of companies expressing plans to hire more new graduates next year has increased. This is not, however, likely to end the problems of youth employment, as the following three problems will remain: (1) opportunities for stable employment will continue to be limited among the less educated; (2) the increase of *freeters* and NEETs in their late 20s and early 30s poses generational problems; and (3) the system of recruitment for college graduates deprives employment opportunities for youth who fail to develop well-defined career goals.

## Differences in Employment Opportunities based on Educational Attainment

The term *freeter* refers to youth who do not find employment as *sei-shain* (full-time tenured employees) and work in untenured short-term and/or part-time jobs after leaving school (either by graduation or by dropping out). 'NEET,' on the other hand, refers to youth who do not engage in any type of employment at all after leaving school. The term *freeter* was invented

in Japan in the late 1980s, while the term 'NEET' originated as a policy-related term in Britain, and was adopted by the Japanese, who transformed its meaning to fit the Japanese context. Both *freeters* and NEETs are deviations from the basic school-to-work transition model in Japanese society, in which students start working as full-time tenured employees upon graduation and are trained in companies to become full-fledged workers. The problems of *freeters* and NEETs arise from their deviated statuses from the normative model.

*Freeters* and NEETs are between the ages of 15 to 34, and exclude married women. According to government statistics, in 2002 there were about 2,500,000 *freeters* and between 650,000 to 850,000 NEETs in Japan. Both *freeters* and NEETs are on the increase. An examination of their background attributes based on government statistics suggests that both *freeters* and NEETs are more likely to be found among those who are less educated, and younger. The same trend has become increasingly prominent among the "officially unemployed" as well.

The same problem – i.e., the fact that the younger and less educated are having increasing difficulty finding opportunities for stable employment – can be seen in many other advanced countries as well. The transition towards value-added industries in the globalizing economy, which requires the concentration of demand for workers with higher education, acts as a backdrop to this problem. The increase in youth unemployment observed in many countries between the late 1970s and 1980s seems to have been caused by this economic transition. In Japan, however, an employment system in which companies trained their young employees remained intact, and this kept Japanese youth with secondary education safe from the problem of unemployment during this period of industrial transition. In the 1990s, however, due to the recession, industrial circles came to limit the application of this employment practice, and became more selective in hiring newly graduating students. As a result, the number of youth failing in the school-to-work transition increased sharply, and they have come to constitute the population of unemployed, *freeters*, and NEETs. Thus, the youth without specialized education and the drop-outs (from high

schools and colleges) who are deprived of sufficient support for the school-to-work transition are the most likely to face problems in the transition. Measures of support which address these problems will become increasingly important in the future.

### **Inter-generational Problems of Freeters and NEETs as the Children of Baby Boomers**

Moreover, the population of *freeters* and NEETs is aging. In 1992, 60% of NEETs fell within the age ranges of 15 to 24, but in 1997 60% fell within the age ranges of 20 to 29, and in 2002 60% fell within the age ranges of 25 to 34. In other words, as the populous *dankai-junia* generation (generation of baby boomers' children) aged, the core group of NEETs aged as well. The same tendency is also observed among *freeters*.

During the period in which the baby boomers' children's generation experienced the school-to-work transition, companies changed their policies to limit the number of recruits and became highly selective in recruiting new graduates. Such bad timing, combined with the over-population of this generation, seems to have caused the increase of *freeters* and NEETs. The people of this generation, composing the 'core' of the *freeters* and NEETs, have aged while remaining *freeters* and NEETs. There are two major problems related to this. First is the fact that once somebody becomes a *freeter* or a NEET it is extremely difficult to move out of either of those statuses and become a full-time tenured employee. While Japanese companies still view newly graduating students as the basic source of recruitments, they have come to expand their recruitment to include those in mid-career, in their search for trained individuals who are ready to step in as full-fledged workers. However, the targets for mid-career recruitment are those who have work experience as full-time tenured employees in other companies, and *freeters'* experiences as untenured part-time workers are not highly valued by companies. In Japanese companies there is a large gap not only in wages, but also in the range of responsibilities between tenured full-time employees and non-tenured employees. Thus, companies do not value the experiences of untenured workers highly. Moreover, the evaluation of NEETs, who are not even in the labor force, is even lower than that of *freeters*. Since Japan is a society with rigid age norms, it becomes increasingly difficult for *freeters* and NEETs to become tenured full-time workers after they reach their late 20s and 30s.

The second problem is that many *freeters* and NEETs live with their parents. NEETs, especially, pose prob-

lems since, not having their own source of income, they are financially dependent on their parents. Since their parents are baby boomers who will be retiring in the near future, the time is approaching when NEETs may end up living off their parents' old-age pensions. If the younger generation, which is usually expected to shoulder the cost of the welfare system, stays financially dependent, it could pose a grave problem. There is no time to waste before taking action to promote the independence and employment of this young generation.

### **The Employment System of College Graduates**

The problems of college graduates' employment are less severe than those of their less educated counterparts discussed above, but some measures still need to be taken, although they will differ from those prescribed for their less educated counterparts.

Until recently, it has been common for Japanese college graduates to be hired for entry-level clerical or sales positions, and to move on to administrative and specialized positions within companies through intra-organizational training. Thus, it was not considered a problem if students did not have clear career goals or specializations at the time of entry. Companies developed intra-organizational training systems which presupposed such insufficiencies of young employees. In recent years, however, the number of students going to college just to avoid the difficulties of the job search at the level of secondary education, or to postpone career decisions, has increased. An oversupply of college graduates has increased competition for employment among college graduates. In addition, students have become less likely to seek support from job-placement services provided by colleges, since they can obtain information directly from organizations through the internet. Moreover, the timing of the job hunt has been moved forward, and has come to begin as early as a year and a half before graduation. These factors pose difficulties for college students' job search, and an increasing number of college students and graduates simply quit job-hunting midway through the process, and choose to become unemployed or *freeters*, stating that they do not know what kind of work they want to do. It is important to help these college students develop well-defined career goals. It is also important to expand the boundaries of the college level employment system (which now only accepts job applications from those who are still in college), to accept job applications from those who have already graduated from college as well.



# Characteristics and Problems of Youth Support Agencies in Japan

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Until recently, there have been very few public agencies in Japan providing support for those who have failed in the school-to-work transition. This is largely because, after World War II, Japanese youth faced few problems in finding stable employment after graduation from schools. Recently, however, high rates of youth unemployment, and increasing numbers of *freeters* (young part-time workers) have become more conspicuous. Youths' inability to find stable employment deprives them of the opportunities to form social networks and to accumulate occupational skills. It is also feared that this may pose problems for Japanese society at large, since it can decrease Japan's international competitiveness and increase social insecurities. As a countermeasure to such problems with youth employment, last year the Japanese government's "Strategic Council for Youth Independence and Challenge" (*wakamono jiritsu-chōsen senryaku kaigi*), consisting of four cabinet ministers from the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare (*kōseirōdōshō*), the Cabinet Office (*naikakufu*), the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (*keizaisangyōshō*), and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (*monbukagakushō*), announced its "Plan for Youth Independence and

Challenge" (*wakamono jiritsu-chōsen puran*). In the first three years, the goal of the plan is to reverse the current trend of increasing numbers of unemployed youth and *freeters*.

One of the selling points of the "Plan for Youth Independence and Challenge" is the Job Café. Job Cafés are all-inclusive support centers for job-hunting youth, established (primarily) by public agencies, such as local self-governing bodies. The youth who visit Job Cafés are provided with various services, including information on job vacancies, employment placement services and on-the-spot job consultation.

In addition to these services, which are common to Job Cafés throughout Japan, some Job Cafés have characteristics particular to their region, since the content of services are decided by local staff. For instance, in Job Cafés in Gunma prefecture, a non-profit organization mainly consisting of youth provides services called "Support for Youth by Youth." Although specialized support, such as job consultation and job placement, are provided by entrusted private enterprises, youth from the NPO provide help as receptionists and guides at the Job Cafés, as well as make plans for seminars and work on public relations. The youth hold attendant meetings once a month, and submit proposals and ideas for improvements for Job Cafés to the staff members, and the staff members often incorporate the proposals and ideas in the services of their Job Cafés.

In 2004, the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training conducted interviews with nine support agencies. This study pointed out three problems which were shared by public youth support agencies such as Job Cafés and Career Centers (Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training, 2005). First, most Job Cafés are required to achieve a target number of service users. According to the staff at Job Cafés, however, reaching the target figure tends to become an objective in itself, and consequently, they do not have enough time left to reach out to those potential users who really need support, but who



haven't yet visited a Job Café.

Second, most Job Cafés struggle with public relations, and put great effort into advertisements, to inform as many youth as possible of their services. Job Cafés advertise their services in a variety of ways, such as on television and radio, and by placing free fliers and free small tissue packets with fliers at bars and convenience stores. The Career Center in Okinawa asked high schools to distribute small cleaners for cellular phones (which most Japanese youth own) to students at the time of graduation. Since contact information for the Career Center is printed on those cleaners, if the youth attach the cleaners to their cellular phones, they will know where to seek help when they need it. However, there are few prefectures like Okinawa, in which the cooperation between youth support agencies and schools are truly functioning.

Third, the provision of support for youth who have problems other than employment-related, such as mental health problems, has emerged as a new challenge to be addressed. For instance, although youth with mental problems need help from specialists,

ordinary support agencies do not have mental health specialists among their staff members. The range of psychological problems which can be dealt with by Job Cafés is limited. Furthermore, cooperation across support agencies such as local Job Cafés and NPOs is rather limited.

Problems related to public relations and advertisements, as well as support for youth with mental problems, are among the problems which cannot be solved by the efforts of a single youth support agency. It will be a major challenge to create a system in which a youth struggling with a problem will receive appropriate support regardless of the support agency he or she visits. Youth support in Japan has reached a phase where the formation of networks among the various youth support agencies, including schools, has become necessary.

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The Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training. 2005. "*Wakamono Shugyō Shien no Genjō to Kadai*" (The Situation and Problems of Youth Employment Support Agencies). Tokyo: JILPT Research Report No. 35.

# Outreach: Helping "NEETs" Become Active Members of Society

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No matter how hard we try to provide information to help NEETs reenter society, it is rare for them to visit support facilities on their own initiative. Are NEETs inactive even when they know where to find help, or are they inactive because the information they need does not reach them? People who think it is the former argue "we should not have to support young people who do not have the willpower to change their situation," while those who believe the latter argue that "NEETs will become active once they know where to find help, so it is important to disseminate as much information as possible." As the Director of a support group for NEETs, however, I think that neither view accurately reflects the true situation of NEETs.

At my organization, there are currently 40 NEETs undergoing training to reenter the workforce or some form of schooling. An analysis of their reasons for deciding to come in reveals some very interesting findings. In order to participate in training, applicants must first receive counseling and complete a two-day trial

training session. Since the establishment of this program 10 months ago, we have responded to more than two hundred requests for counseling. However, 70% of these requests have actually been from the mothers of NEETs, not the NEETs themselves, and an additional 20% were made by mothers accompanied by their NEET children. Only 10% (or fewer) of the requests for counseling have been made by the NEET individuals alone, and almost no fathers of NEETs come in for consultation.

On the basis of these numbers alone, it may appear that NEETs themselves have little interest in counseling or training – instead, the problem seems to be primarily mothers worried about their children. In fact, however, although most of those who come in for counseling are the mothers of NEETs, about half of them were asked to come in by the NEETs themselves, to learn such things as what goes on in training or the kind of staff we have. NEETs also want to know what kinds of people actually receive training, including things like their sex and ages, to determine whether they will be able to comfortably participate in training. Therefore, in many cases the NEETs ask their mothers to come in and conduct a preliminary investigation before coming in themselves.

When we ask NEETs how they learned about our organization, 80% reply that they heard about us from a parent (invariably the mother). After first learning about us from a parent, they then look for more information about our organization using the internet and other sources. Thus, although it is extremely rare for someone to investigate without first hearing some useful information, NEETs will investigate further once they hear about us. The fact that most NEETs do not actively seek help without first hearing about an organization is part of the reason that they have not been considered among the ranks of the unemployed in Japan.

From our data, then, we can see that if people in the NEET category are given the right information, they not only have the desire to change their situation, they actively work towards changing it. However, as most

have no social affiliation outside of their family, NEETs receive almost all of their information of the outside world through their family. Because, historically, three generation households have been the norm in Japan (although the recent trend is moving towards the nuclear family), there is little sense of incongruity in having adult NEET children living "parasitically" in the home. I think that this three generation-household norm has also helped to keep the number of homeless youth relatively low in Japan, compared to the West (in addition to the fact that Japanese families have been able to maintain the economic resources to support adult children).

I believe that the fact that the family acts as the primary source of information for NEETs is the key to providing support for NEETs in Japan. Of the estimated 850,000 people who fit the NEET category, a large majority live under the support of a parent. Thus, although NEETs are beyond the age of compulsory education and have no other social affiliation, their whereabouts are known by their families. Last year, when I visited Great Britain and explained the situation of Japanese NEETs, I was told, "We envy you, because you have at least one way to reach the NEETs." Although I did not immediately understand why my British colleagues were so envious of the Japanese situation, upon consideration I realized that when we offer support at our organization, most often information first reaches the NEETs through their families, and the NEETs begin acting on the basis of this information. Without the family, we would have no way of making this initial contact.

Next I would like to discuss the process through which NEETs decide whether to participate in the trial training session, once they have received information from a family member and come in for an initial consultation. The actual percentage of those receiving consultation who go on to participate in the trial training is about 50%; not a low number, but not necessarily high, either. The following are the most common reasons that NEETs give for not coming in for training:

- 1) Even after getting information from a parent, they are not interested;
- 2) They do not find the training program appealing;
- 3) They feel very uneasy about participating in training;
- 4) They feel that they will be judged as "defective" people by those around them if they participate in training.

Unfortunately, it is difficult for a support organization to respond to the first two reasons, without further elaboration. We can, however, take certain measures to respond to numbers (3) and (4). First, to help calm NEETs who feel uneasy about participating in the training program, we have established a system whereby we go to them rather than making them come to us. Before asking them to come to our organization, one of our staff members will go to a NEET's desired meeting place at the desired time, and first work on building a relationship. Since we learn in advance about the person's hobbies and inclinations from their parent(s), it is easy to adapt to their conversation, and we can get them to open up relatively quickly. After such visits, if they do decide to come to the trial training program, often it is because their perspective has changed; instead of thinking: "I'm going to participate in that trial training program," they begin thinking: "I'm going to meet the person I met the other day," and this greatly mitigates their feelings of unease.

One way we help to minimize the feelings of shame involved in (4) is by giving advice to the parents who come in for consultation, regarding how to tell their children about the program. If the parents only tell their children that our organization "was such-and-such kind of place, and they did such-and-such kind of training..." the NEETs are not likely to respond. First, it is necessary to relieve them of their psychological burden. NEETs feel ashamed that they must ask for help in the first place; their sense of pride is offended. Therefore, we tell parents to start by saying, "I *promised* them that you would come in for a trial training program when I went in for the consultation..." It is very important for the parent to make it appear like a sincere request. This way, the NEETs can tell themselves that "I am not going to the training program because I want to go, I am only going because my parent promised that I would go, so it can't be helped." If NEETs can feel that it is not for their own sake, but for the sake of their parents, and they can maintain their sense of pride, it becomes easier for them to take the first step.

Finally, about 90% of the NEETs who participate in our trial training formally register and complete the program. Considering these statistics, it is clear that outreach programs like ours can play a major role in helping NEETs make the move towards reentry into society and economic independence.

# The Employment of High School Graduates in Miyazaki Prefecture

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According to the *Gakkō Kihon Chōsa* (basic school survey), in March 1994, the rate of Japanese high school graduates who went on to college was 36.1%, the rate of those who found employment right after high school graduation was 27.7%, and the rate of those who went on to *senmon gakkō* (schools for technical education) was 16.6%. In contrast, in March 2004, the rate of high school graduates who continued their education in college was 45.3%, the rate of those going on to *senmon-gakkō* was 19.2%, and the rate of graduates who found employment right after high school graduation was 16.9%. In the past ten years, then, the rate of students going on to *senmon gakkō* has surpassed the rate of students entering employment right after graduation.

While this phenomenon may be related to changes in the education system caused by the decreasing eighteen-year-old population, we cannot overlook the fact of the shrinking labor market for new high school graduates, or the substitution effect of educational credentials (that is, due to credential inflation, credentials from higher educational institutions

have come to substitute for the role of high school credentials). Furthermore, the changes in paths taken by students after high school graduation have incurred changes within high schools themselves. For instance, job-hunting is mediated by high school officials who introduce (and recommend) jobs to graduating students. This recommendation system is a part of *shinro-shidō* (course guidance), and is considered a part of the regimen of education (i.e. that of controlling and disciplining students). In this sense, the drop in the rate of students seeking employment after graduation is considered the responsibility of the high school education system.

Another difference between high school graduates' employment and college graduates' employment is the impact of regional differences. Since high school education is under the jurisdiction of prefectures, and the employment of high school graduates depends more largely on local companies than that of college graduates, the paths taken by high school graduates present more eminent regional variation than the paths taken by college graduates. In fact, the rate of employment of new high school graduates which was presented at the beginning of this article – 16.9% – is a national average, and there are considerable regional variations across prefectures – from 31.3% in Miyazaki prefecture to 6.8% in Tokyo. There were only two other prefectures in which the employment of high school graduates reached 30%, Aomori prefecture and Akita prefecture (in both prefectures, the employment rate of new high school graduates was 30%).

Why does the employment rate of new high school graduates in Miyazaki prefecture remain so high? This question led us to visit Miyazaki prefecture and conduct interviews in March, 2002. Our interview subjects were members of the board of education, the public employment security office, and four high schools, which we called A, B, C and D. In this article, I would like to present the characteristics of high school education and course guidance in Miyazaki prefecture, based on findings from our interviews.



A major characteristic of high school education in Miyazaki prefecture is the course composition. During their expansion process under the new system (which began in 1948), high schools have consistently increased the percentage of *futsū-ka* (general courses, as opposed to *senmon gakka*, or specialized courses). In recent years, three out of four high school students have graduated from the general course curriculum. This, however, is a national average, and there are large regional variations. For example, while the percentage of general courses is highest in Kanagawa prefecture, where it is close to 90%, the percentage of general courses has been kept relatively low in Kyushu prefecture. In Miyazaki prefecture especially (which is located in Kyushu), the percentage of general courses in the early 1970s was in the 30s, and although the percentage increased slightly afterwards, the percentage remains in the 40s. The percentage of general courses in Miyazaki high schools in 2004 was 43%, the lowest in Japan.

According to research conducted by the board of education of Miyazaki prefecture, more than half of junior high school students in Miyazaki wish to enroll in *senmon gakka* (specialized courses) in high schools (rather than general courses). The officials of the board of education stated, "The general courses are only viewed as preparation for college entrance examinations. That may explain why junior high school students avoid general courses in high schools," and "students do not choose general-course high schools even if the employment situation (for high school graduates) is severe." They claimed that in Miyazaki prefecture, the general-course high schools aim at preparation for college entrance only, and for students to enjoy a 'free-spirited' high school life, it is considered better to choose a specialized-course high school. Finally, although the majority of the graduates of specialized-course high schools continue to find employment (right after graduation), the rate of college attendance of such students is increasing.

In Miyazaki, among the different types of courses, the most popular is the commercial course curriculum (a type of specialized course curriculum), and the second most popular is the engineering course curriculum (another type of specialized course). While 49.0% of the graduates of the commercial course curriculum find employment upon graduation,

57.0% of the graduates of the engineering course find employment at graduation.

The high school graduates of Miyazaki prefecture are distinct not only in their high employment rates in general, but also in their high 'out-of-prefecture' employment rates. Of all the prefectures in Japan, the prefecture with the highest rate of students finding employment outside of their own prefecture is Nagasaki (41.3%), and the prefecture with the second highest out-of-prefecture employment rate is Miyazaki. The fact that prefectures such as Saitama and Chiba, which are located next to Tokyo and have easy access to out-of-prefecture employment opportunities in Tokyo, have only 28.2% and 24.4% out-of-prefecture employment rates respectively, indicates that Miyazaki's out-of-prefecture employment rate is exceptionally high.

In Miyazaki prefecture, where the majority of local companies are smaller enterprises, organizations do not necessarily conduct well-planned employee recruitment. "Even after they start recruiting students, if their business goes sour even a little, they abort the recruiting process. There are many companies like that" (B high school). "The large companies outside of the prefecture start recruiting exams in September. If you do not have any job offers from local companies by that time, there is no guarantee that you will get an opportunity for recruitment (from local companies) in the future. Thus, you have to go outside of Miyazaki prefecture (to find employment)" (Miyazaki Prefectural Board of Education). Recently, the number of high school students seeking out-of-prefecture employment has decreased, however. There are several possible explanations for this, such as the decreasing number of children, which makes parents more reluctant to send their children away from home, and the equalization of income levels across prefectures, which makes out-of-prefecture employment less attractive. Anyway, the tendency for high school students in Miyazaki to seek local employment seems to be increasing.

In such an environment, what are the characteristics of course guidance in Miyazaki prefecture? In a nutshell, Miyazaki high schools, in cooperation with the Miyazaki Board of Education and the public employment security office, offer scrupulously attentive course guidance through three main

means. The first is through the active appeals of high schools to students and their parents. Miyazaki high schools begin their course guidance in freshman year, when they offer mock job entrance examinations to students who indicate a desire to seek employment after graduation. Furthermore, they ask parents of students expressing a desire to attend college to prepare financially for future college costs.

The second way is through follow-up course guidance, conducted through the cooperation of high schools with the board of education, which continues until June – well after the end of the school year. In other prefectures, course guidance usually ends at the end of the school year (in March) when students graduate from high schools. In Miyazaki, however, it is taken for granted that course guidance will continue well after seniors have graduated.

The third way is through offering students a *shokuba taiken jyugyō* (a class for job experience). This is part of an attempt to increase students' *shokugyō ishiki* (aspirations for and understanding of occupations), and to reduce mismatching between students' aspirations and companies' demands. This system has become available under the close cooperation of the public employment security office with high schools.

In addition to the above three, there are other efforts as well. The Prefectural Board of Education exercises influence over local companies, not only to secure local job offers, but also to coordinate the timing of recruitment. Individual high schools try their best to obtain job offers from local companies - especially from those which have previously hired their graduates. Specialized-course high schools encourage their students to go on to higher education if the economic conditions of their family allows it, and provide those students with attentive guidance for college attendance.

The youth employment environment is currently quite severe, and high school graduates' entrance into the labor market has become especially difficult. Currently, various means of help are available, but in order for such means to be effective, we need to understand the problems more clearly. As we have seen in this paper, the high school graduate employment environment varies across regions, and the problems to be solved also vary across regions. In recent years research on the employment of high school graduates has been increasing rapidly, but most of it focuses on employment in metropolitan areas only. In order to grasp the whole picture, however, more research which takes regional differences into consideration is necessary.

# What Do Female High School Students Think of Their Futures? Educational Aspirations, Life Course Expectations and Gender Role Attitudes

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## **The Expansion of Women's Higher Education and Women's Participation in the Labor Market**

Does the attainment of higher education increase women's work opportunities? In 1969, Japanese women's rate of advancement to high school (79.5%) exceeded that of Japanese men (79.2%), and this trend has continued to the present. In 2004, the rate of advancement to high school reached nearly universal levels for both sexes (96.7% for women, 96.0% for men). At the level of higher education, however, there have been sex differences. Until recently, the increase in men's higher education was primarily at the university level, and the increase in women's higher education was at the junior college level. In 1996, however, women's rate of advancement to university exceeded that of junior college. Moreover, in recent years, there are increasing numbers of women going to *senmon gakkō* (specialized two-year training schools oriented towards the acquisition of vocational skills [Brinton & Lee, 2001]).

On the other hand, the rate of women's labor force participation shows a gentle upward trend until

1991, after which it shows a gentle downward trend. Furthermore, although the bottom of the M-shaped curve of female labor force participation by age group has risen, the M-shaped pattern is still clear, and this differs from Western industrialized countries. Although the rate of female labor force participation by education level shows that the participation rate of university-educated women is higher than that for other women, it is still lower than that of women in Western industrialized countries.

## **The Youth Labor Market**

In recent years in Japan, it has become increasingly difficult for high school graduates to find employment, and the number of high school graduates with neither job nor postsecondary education has increased. The unemployment rate among young people is especially high, and the number of young people entering the labor market as non-regular workers has increased, reaching 28.3% for new male high school graduates and 38.6% for new female high school graduates.

## **Women's Educational Attainment and Occupational Attainment**

Highly educated women have higher occupational aspirations, because a higher level of education mutes the belief in traditional gender roles (Amano, 1986). Therefore, the proportion of highly educated women who continue to work after marriage is high (Imada, 1985). At the same time, however, many highly educated married women choose to not participate in the labor force (Ministry of Labor, Japan, 1991). Thus, highly educated married women can be divided into two types, one type being those who work before and after marriage and the other being those who become full-time housewives after marriage (Higuchi, 1991). In the case of female high school students, those who disagree with traditional gender roles have higher educational aspirations than those who agree with them. Moreover, the students who plan to continue their work after marriage also show a higher rate of university advance-

ment (Kimura, 2004).

## Educational Aspirations, Life Course Expectations and Gender Role Attitudes

What do young people think of their futures under the present circumstances? How do gender role attitudes contribute to female students' educational aspirations and life course expectations? How do educational aspirations contribute to female students' life course expectations? By examining the relation among educational aspirations, life course expectations and gender role attitudes, this paper explores these questions, based on data collected in a social survey on the lives of high school students conducted by the University of Tokyo's Institute of Social Science in 2004.

Regarding the educational aspirations of female students, 35.8% indicate that they wish to attend a university, 13.6% wish to attend a junior college, 23.3% wish to attend a *senmon gakkō*, and 20.9% plan to get a job. Thus, most indicate that want to get a higher education. Furthermore, almost half of the female students (49.6%) said that they planned to leave the labor force upon marriage or childbearing, and reenter the labor force when they no longer need to care for their children; 32.0% replied that they would continue working after marriage or childbearing; 10.4% said they would withdraw from the labor force altogether; and 8.0% answered that they have not yet decided. Finally, regarding gender role attitudes, it seems that the traditional gender role attitude, assuming men should be the primary breadwinners and women the primary caregivers, is weakening among female students, as 89.2% of female students disagreed with this attitude, and only 10.8% agreed.

For the relationship among educational aspirations, life course expectations and gender role attitudes, see the data below (Figures 1–3). First, Figure 1 shows educational aspirations by gender role attitude. Of the students who expect to attend a university, there is an 8 point difference between those who agree with the traditional gender role attitude (29.1%) and those who disagree with the traditional gender role attitude (36.8%). On the other hand, of the students who expect to get a job upon graduation from high school, there is a 10 point difference

between those who agree with the traditional gender role attitude (29.1%) and those who disagree with the traditional gender role attitude (19.9%). These results show that educational aspirations differ according to gender role attitude.

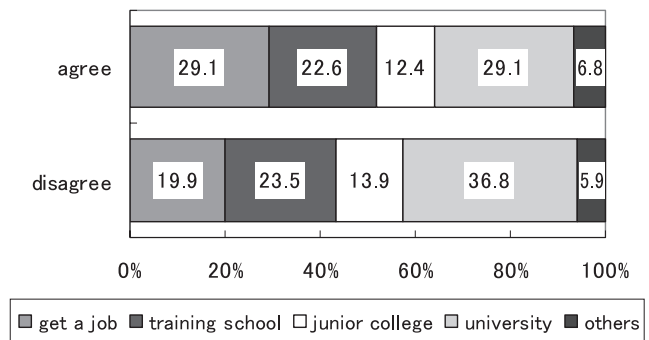


Figure 1. Female High School Students' Educational Aspirations by Gender Role Attitude. (agree = agree with traditional gender role attitude)

Second, Figure 2 shows life course expectations by gender role attitude. The proportion of students who think their career will be temporarily interrupted at the time of marriage or childbearing (yet intend to reenter after their children are older) is similar on both sides of the gender role attitude question. But 33.9% of the students who disagree with the traditional gender role attitude expect to continue working, in contrast to 18.0% of the students who agree with the traditional gender role attitude. And far fewer students who disagree with the traditional gender role attitude expect to retire from the labor force at the time of marriage or childbearing than students who agree with the attitude (8.8% compared to 23.7%). These results show that life course expectations are affected by gender role attitude.

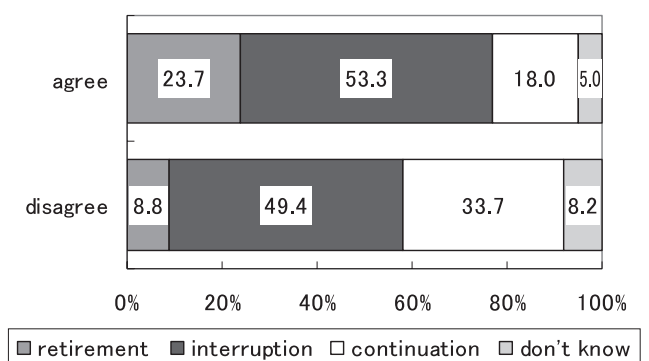


Figure 2. Female High School Students' Life Course Expectations by Gender Role Attitude. (agree = agree with traditional gender role attitude)



Third, Figure 3 shows life course expectations by educational aspiration. The students who expect to get a job soon after they graduate high school are by far the most likely to respond that they intend to retire from the labor force at the time of marriage or childbearing. Furthermore, many more students who intend to go to a university or *senmon gakkō*, compared with the other types, want to continue working. While junior college and *senmon gakkō* entail the same number of school years (two), this difference between junior college applicants and *senmon gakkō* applicants regarding life course expectations suggests that attending a university and attending a junior college hold different educational meanings, even though they are both said to be "higher education."

cational aspirations of attending junior college or completing high school have a significant positive effect on job interruption.

Twenty years have passed since the Equal Employment Opportunity Law was established, but sex segregation in the labor market still exists. Moreover, there is substantial evidence that the occupational aspirations of young people are highly sex-typed, which reflects the sex segregation of the labor market. Despite the increase in highly educated women and the fact that many Japanese women do not agree with the traditional gender role attitude, almost half of Japanese female high school students expect that they will leave the labor force upon marriage or childbearing, and then reenter the labor force when they no longer need to care for their child, and gender role attitudes affect both their educational aspirations and life course expectations. In this connection, there remain considerable numbers of young men and women who hold to the traditional gender role attitude, and resign themselves to the duties in line with this attitude (Taga, 2005). Furthermore, some women have recently begun expressing a "*Shin Sengyō Shufu Shikō*" (an orientation to a new type of housewife), that is, they desire to share childcare with their husbands but to maintain the status of the "male-breadwinner" model, and to try to achieve self-realization through a hobby or odd job (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 1998). When the position (or status) of women in the labor market changes, will the link between women's education, especially at the university level, and their labor force participation change? A married woman's decision about her labor force participation is not only a reflection of her own gender attitude but also a reflection of the family's demands of her (Yu, 2001). Thus, we must reconsider women's labor force participation as not only an issue for women, but for men as well.

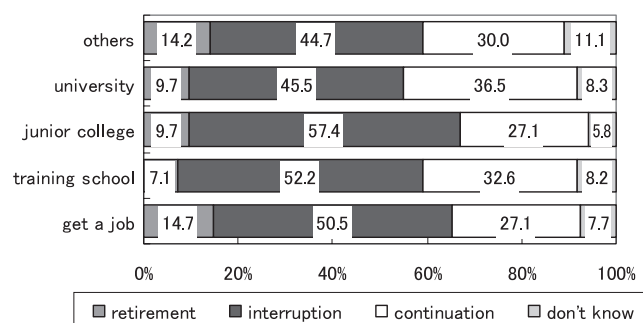


Figure 3. Female High School Students' Life Course Expectations by Educational Aspiration

These data were also analyzed by a multinomial logit model, which can deal with categorical variables as dependent variables, to explore the determinants of life course expectations (Table 1). The results show that holding the traditional gender role attitude has a significant effect on life course expectations, that is, a negative effect on a student's expectation of staying in her job, and a positive effect on a student's expectation of retiring from the labor force at the time of marriage or childbirth. Education affects life course expectations differently. Only edu-

Table.1 Determinants of Life Course Expectations

	Life Course Expectations (base category=don't know)		
	retirement	Interruption	continuation
gender role attitude	0.73 **	0.12	-0.42 **
grade in school	0.03	0.10	0.13 *
school with a high ratio of students who continue to the next stage of education	0.00	0.02	0.15
not a school with a high ratio of students who continue to the next stage of education	—	—	—
success in her job	-0.08	0.38 **	0.71 **
talks with parents about higher education	0.17	0.31 *	0.31 *
talks with parents about job	0.10	0.07	0.06
get a job	0.49	0.68 *	0.46
training school	-0.47	0.33	0.15
junior college	0.42	0.86 **	0.45
university	0.03	0.16	0.19
others	—	—	—
intercept	-1.67 **	-0.73	-1.09 *

Cox &amp; Snell=0.089, Nagelkerke=0.010, McFadden=0.041

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ 

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# Social Risk, Value Change, and the Life Course: Japanese *Shōshika Taisaku* and Global Norms

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With the total fertility rate falling to 1.29 in 2003, Japan is undergoing a major demographic transition, prompting policymakers and social commentators to debate the future of Japanese society, given predictions of a declining labor force, falling GDP, negative economic growth, and waning national power. Policy responses to boost the declining birth rate, *shōshika taisaku*, have centered on expanding the number and hours of daycare centers, allowing citizens to achieve an appropriate work-life balance in their everyday lives, and making young adults more "marriage-ready." Debates over these demographic changes and policies have opened a window onto processes of global norm diffusion related to stages of the life course, and offer us an opportunity to consider how the state is embarking on a curious security project — to increase individual expression for the "sake of the nation."

Although reproduction is regarded as a sacrosanct individual choice, policymakers justify policies to boost the declining birthrate in the context of a risk management frame, much the same way that policies related to the environment, public health, and terrorism are usually discussed. In the case of declining fertility rates, policymakers point to negative externalities generated by individual choices not to get married or have children, including less social security, less job security, a sputtering economy, and ultimately declining national power. The risk management frame implies that people who do not have children are "free riders" of social security and economic benefits on the backs of those who do have children. Although few have put it as brazenly as former Prime Minister Mori Yoshiro, who suggested that childless women should not receive social security in their old age, policymakers commonly refer to the "socialization" of childrearing, with the recognition that entire communities should support children as "public goods" or "society's treasures." The risk management frame thus suggests that personal lifestyle choices are, and *should be*, political, for fear of the potentially disastrous negative externalities that might otherwise result. A November 2004 *Asahi Shimbun* poll (11/20/04, p. 15) shows that the risk management frame apparently resonates with a majority of citizens, with 80 percent of respondents concerned about the declining birth rate, and 58 percent reporting that it is a "social problem" as opposed to an "individual problem."

The risk management frame is also usually supported by a narrative of modernization and value change in postwar Japan. The narrative suggests that after the Second World War, Japan rose from the ashes to become an economic superpower. But with the achievement of prosperity, the advancement of women in society, and the development of a consumer economy that caters to individuals through convenience stores and mass-produced goods, came

a breakdown of community due to urbanization, and a change in attitudes toward marriage, family, and children. The narrative also suggests that modernization and value change are distorting the "natural order." As Kawamoto Satoshi, one of the writers of the first government white paper on the declining birth rate in 1992, put it, Japan has increasingly fewer children because of the difficulty of harmonizing individual self-realization with a society that prizes natural rhythms and continuity (*Asahi Shimbun*, 11/20/04, p. 15). Along similar lines, LDP Member Nakayama Taro, chair of an alliance of Diet members that spearheaded the 2003 Basic Law for a Society with Few Children, has argued that the "typical" family of the high-growth era has been disappearing, and that the country is becoming "strange" (*okashikunattekiteiru*) (*Asahi Shimbun*, 6/12/03, p.15). An LDP committee studying the declining birth rate has referred to a family with a housewife and two children as the "standard family" or *hyōjun katei* (*Asahi Shimbun*, 6/12/03, p. 15).

The risk management frame shows how *shōshika taisaku* sit uneasily aside global norms related to the sanctity of individual choice in the life course. Sociologist John Meyer suggests that globalization of the life course is a process of developing "institutionalized individualism" on a global scale. That is, "expanding global society increasingly legitimates the structuring of the life course as built around the project of the individual's life and perspective, and decreasingly derives life course rules from the needs, projects, and perspectives of corporate groups and societies" (2004). Meyer sees the content of global life course norms as essentially liberal, with individuals having more choice over various aspects of their lives, including education, employment, health, politics, and retirement, but he also recognizes new forms of social control over these choices by other individuals and associations.

So how do Japanese policymakers cling to an image of the "ideal" family, stereotypical of the high-growth era, grapple with pressures to conform to global norms of individualized life courses? Most frequently, policymakers point to the gap between the average number of children citizens report that they would like to have and the actual total fertility rate to suggest that there must be artificial social barriers that prevent the population from naturally reproducing. By removing barriers to allow these

various lifestyles to flourish, policymakers can encourage individuals to make their own choices, while simultaneously attempting to structure these choices through government programs, economic incentives, and moral suasion. The newest policy initiatives have included attempts to tackle the most frequently identified cause of declining fertility rates - delayed marriage. Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare policymakers have been instituting incentives and programs to return the age of first marriage to more "normal" levels. To encourage citizens to marry and start families at a younger age, there are policies to provide meeting places for young men and women, put junior and senior high school students in contact with babies to "demystify" the magic of life, and boost the economic self-sufficiency of young people, who might otherwise be NEET ("Not in Employment, Education, or Training") or "parasite singles," leeching off their parents' assets instead of building their own - or more importantly, society's. The framework for these policies was first developed as part of the "Plus One Plan" in 2002 and have been extended by two laws passed in 2003, the Basic Law and the Law for Measures to Support the Development of the Next Generation.

There is, of course, nothing wrong with removing social obstacles contributing to the declining birth rate and, as Frances Rosenbluth, Matthew Light, and Claudia Schrag (2002) suggest, fertility rates may actually be a good proxy measure of women's ability to balance family and career. Yet as we see in the case of Japanese policies to boost the declining birth rate, the removal of social obstacles need not entail institutionalized individualism in accordance with global life course norms. Rather, the state plays a large role in guiding individuals to make socially optimal choices, with policymakers frequently invoking the "national interest" or "greater good." The risk management frame, then, is what makes it possible to reconcile the global norms and national interests.

The Japanese government's framing of policies to boost the birthrate as risk management also has implications for Ronald Inglehart's (1997) theory of post-materialist value change. Inglehart argues that post-materialist concerns about identity claims, the environment, and lifestyle issues are replacing traditional political conflict over the distribution of resources. Certain societies, in other words, have



graduated from a lower rung of Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs to higher rungs, based on self-fulfillment. The risk management frame subverts this logic, however. It's not that Japanese society is "graduating" from a lower rung of Maslow's hierarchy, but rather the rungs are all collapsing together as the achievement of "self-realization" is said to become a necessary precondition for achieving economic and national security, by facilitating population growth.

This is the "full circle" of security in a late modern society. The framing of *shōshika taisaku* as risk management seems to confirm the work of Ulrich Beck (1992), who suggests that in a risk society, individualization is the highest form of being integrated in society — that individuals are all part of a network with obligations to others, and must plan their lives accordingly. So the trend toward individualization is not necessarily derived solely from parochial interests or centrifugal forces. In the case of Japanese policies to boost the birth rate, however, the debate about plural lifestyles and families remains tethered to a national narrative; that is, the debate is fundamentally about maintaining Japan's position in the world and achieving the collective national good.

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### What is Political about 'Winter Sonata'? – On Women's Emotions, Everyday Life, and Political Potential

**Hayashi Kaori**

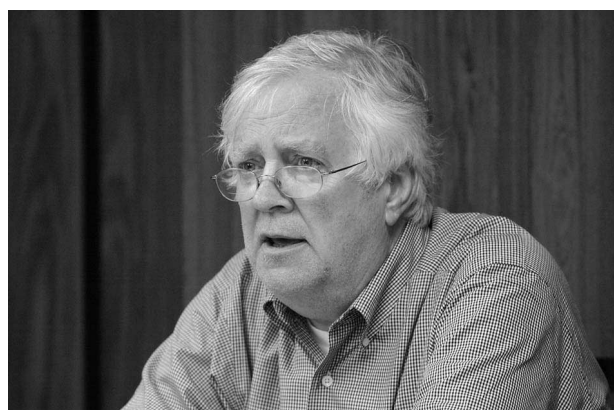
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The popularity of "Winter Sonata," a South Korean soap opera, became something of a national phenomenon in Japan in 2004. This Korean drama series captured the hearts of Japanese women, many of them in their 40s, 50s and 60s, a demographic usually considered outside of the social boom-making process.

In this talk, Professor Hayashi examined this phenomenon from the following three points of view. First, from the perspectives of gender and the sociology of emotions, what was it about "Winter Sonata" that captivated so many women in Japan? Second, what actions did the audience take after they saw the drama, and how did these actions affect relations between Japan and Korea? Third, how did the national (Japanese) media observe the fans of "Winter Sonata"?

Professor Hayashi argued that although "Winter Sonata" itself has little to do with Korean culture or politics, it has contributed to the formation of a public (mainly female) that is more sensitive to the theme of "Asia," and, in the long run, it may play an important role in the formation of a working concept of the public sphere in East Asia.



### How Policies Change Redux: The Government and the Aging Society since 1990

**John Creighton Campbell**  
*Professor of Political Science*  
*University of Michigan*

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Professor Campbell's 1992 book, "How Policies Change: The Japanese Government and the Aging Society

(Princeton) traced the interplay of energy and ideas in the development of policy toward the elderly from the mid-1950s on, winding up with the "Gold Plan" of 1990. The fifteen years hence have produced at least two major policy changes: the enactment of long-term-care insurance in 1997 and a series of efforts to reform public pensions. In his talk, Professor Campbell used the recent policy revisions to examine continuities and changes in Japanese patterns of decision making, and to reassess old conclusions.

## **Foreign Aid and the Spread of HIV/AIDS to Women in Asia: Japanese ODA in Comparative Perspective**

**Katya Burns**

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HIV/AIDS has come to Asia. The most populous Asian countries, China and India, now stand on the brink of a generalized epidemic: one in which infection spreads from narrow high-risk groups to the population at large. In some regions of Asia, the epidemic has already generalized. As the epidemic generalizes, female infection rates outstrip those of men. Foreign aid can address the infection of these young women and spare Asia the fate which now afflicts Africa, yet female infection rates in Asia continue to climb. In this talk, Professor Burns explored the forces driving the generalization of Asian epidemics, drawing examples from recent field interviews in India, China, and Vietnam, and the efforts of international donors, including Japan, to address the crisis.

