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ABSTRACT

This article reviews the existing anthropological and sociological evidence on school choice and educational stratification in Japan. Traditional linear models developed in the West have given little insight into how stratification processes actually occur. There must be analysis of the institutional linkages and organizational cultures of schools to accurately understand both how educational decisions are made, and how stratification occurs. The data for the study comes from field notes, interviews with teachers, students, and administrators, and a two wave panel survey of both rural and urban third year students who would be the equivalent to 9th graders in the United States. Significant interaction was found among student's gender, parental educational levels, and students' aspirations and attainments during the transition period from middle school to high school. But such data proved insufficient in investigating how ascribed characteristics affect children's decisions. As a result of the field work, the study concluded that middle school teachers systematically have developed and instituted a three year program of motivation and aspiration control. Middle school teachers actively define how students should view their educational decisions and what correct aspirations are. Teachers use motivation techniques that focus children's attention on their family background and economic situation. Students retain a strong sense of autonomy because they accept they do not question the logic of the decision making process. Six diagrams summarizing survey findings by location and five tables of survey results are included. (DK)

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THE ASSERTIVE SELF:  
JAPANESE MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS AND THEIR EDUCATIONAL DECISIONS

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## ABSTRACT

In this article I review the existing anthropological and sociological evidence on school choice and educational stratification in Japan. I argue that traditional linear models developed in the West have given us little insight into how stratification processes actually occur. I argue that we must analyze the institutional linkages and organizational cultures of schools to accurately understand both how educational decisions are made, and how stratification occurs.

The data for this paper consists of three and a half years of field notes and over 40 hour-long interviews with teachers, students and administrators. In addition I distributed a two-wave panel survey to third-year students (equivalent to U.S. 9th graders, ages 14-15) in six rural and urban Japanese middle schools (N of population = 1075). Significant interaction was found between students' gender, parental educational levels and students' aspirations and attainments during the transition period from middle school to high school. However, such data proved insufficient in investigating how ascribed characteristics affect children's decisions.

Through my fieldwork I discovered that middle school teachers have systematically developed and instituted a three-year program of motivation and aspiration-"control." Middle school teachers actively define how students should view their educational decisions and what correct aspirations are. Teachers use a number of techniques to motivate students which focus children's attention on their family background and economic situation. I found that Japanese middle schoolers have their aspirations "pre-cooled" or "pre-formed" in the final year of middle school, a phenomenon analogous to "cooling out" processes in the U.S. However, students retain a strong sense of autonomy over their decisions because they do not question the logic of the decision-making process. Students accept the rationality of the linkages between high schools and middle schools and make their decisions within this framework.

## THE EGALITARIAN SOCIETY: EDUCATION AND FREE CHOICE

Our ideal of an egalitarian society is premised on several assumptions: that all citizens have equal rights and access to education; that individual achievement is to be acknowledged and rewarded; that innate ability will eventually show through; and that each individual be free to determine his or her own choices. In the educational realm we, as Americans, are extremely concerned with equal opportunity and freedom of choice. Our notion of a "democratic" educational system flows from an assumption that given equal access, resources, and the ability to freely choose, capable individuals will overcome the background characteristics that constrain them (Turner, 1960; Sewell and Hauser, 1976; Carnoy and Levin, 1985; Gilbert and Kahl, 1982; Bowles and Gintis, 1986).

It has then been the life-work of a whole generation of sociologists to prove that in spite of decades of educational innovation, civil rights legislation and the massive expansion of educational opportunity, ascribed characteristics still strongly affect educational attainment and social stratification (Jencks, 1972; Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Coleman and Rainwater, 1978; Brint and Karabel, 1989). Yet the models we have used constrain this body of research by depicting individuals as atomized social actors affected by various attributes. Family background, race or ethnicity, religion and other important attributes that constitute what an individual is have been treated as "factors" to be "plugged in" to linear or log-linear models: the resulting coefficients being taken as "hard data."

We have labored long and well with these models, and continue to debate the effects of "factors." The idea that it is not appropriate to use such "factors" as categorical equivalents (much less weighted linear equivalents) has not been well received in the mainstream literature. Yet there is a tradition of research that treats such "factors" as separate cultural spheres where decisions are handled in distinct ways. Although several fine studies have indicated that social class alone may denote separate systems of social values, i.e. distinct cultures, these studies remain in the province of qualitative or "soft" data (Collins, 1971; Sennet and Cobb, 1972; Willis, 1977; Cottle, 1977; McCleod, 1987).

While many sociologists have chosen to focus on correlational, linear-regression or path-model analysis of multiple-wave surveys, there is a striking, (and to this author's mind), chilling central assumption running through this vast body of research: if we measure all the "factors" then we will know what "drives" the system. In short, a highly functionalist and mechanistic view of society is presupposed by these analytic techniques. While we have greatly advanced our understanding of how organizations make decisions, of how institutional environments form our rationality, and how people of different cultures make decisions in different ways, we have failed to fully apply such insights to our theories and research into the processes of educational attainment and social stratification.

## EDUCATIONAL STRATIFICATION IN JAPAN

Our study of Japan has fared no better. Traditional sociological models were applied to Japan, large scale survey research carried out, and the coefficients duly generated (Bowman, 1981; Kariya, 1985; Kariya and Rosenbaum, 1987; Ishida, 1991). This literature also centers on the problem of reconciling the ideals of meritocracy with the reality of the effect that social class has on educational aspirations and attainments. The Japanese system has been portrayed in the literature as either highly rational and meritocratic or as traditional and heavily influenced by social standing.

In Diagram 1 I have summarized the major survey research findings generally cited in the literature. Despite rigorous attention to methodology by all scholars involved, the results are confused at best. Bowman found that SES significantly affects educational attainment (Bowman, 1981) and whether not a student went to college. Ishida even argues that the effect of father's education is more substantial in Japan than the U.S. (Ishida, 1992) On the other hand, Kariya and Rosenbaum as well as Seiyama and Noguchi found SES to have no significance on educational plans, and to have almost no effect on educational outcomes (Kariya and Rosenbaum, 1987; Seiyama and Noguchi, 1984).

[Diagram 1 about here]

Kariya and Rosenbaum argued that "educational selection in Japan closely resembles Young's (1958) model of a meritocracy" (Kariya and Rosenbaum, 1987:69). Kariya and Rosenbaum conceive of Japanese education as a tournament model where "students use their school

achievement to preselect themselves for different educational and occupational futures" (Kariya and Rosenbaum, 1987:178). They argue that parental background is not an important factor in influencing students' decisions and cite supporting research. In direct contrast, Abegglen has shown that there is considerable reproduction of elites in elite positions and that father's educational and occupational background is an important factor in son's attaining elite status. (Abegglen, 1960). Ishida notes "Contrary to the idea of Japan as an educational credential society, the relative property and wealth of a family appears to make a larger difference in educational outcomes of the sons in Japan than in [the U.S. or Britain]" (Ishida, 1991: 63). Fujita also provides strong evidence of the effects of family background, though he thinks that the effects are weakening (Fujita, 1980).

Even more unfortunate are the disagreements on how educational selection takes place and how students make decisions. Kariya and Rosenbaum as well as Bowman show that rather than being "cooled out" afterward, students in Japan tend to "select themselves" out of the competition. They suggest that the process of selection is "much clearer" in Japan than in the U.S., and hypothesize that due to this clarity, students select themselves out of the system, rather than being cooled out.<sup>1</sup> However, Tsukada (1991) convincingly demonstrates that preparatory schools (yobiko) do cool out masses of college-bound entrants (Tsukada, 1991). And Miyagi (1980) indicates that the process of selection is complex, arcane and very confusing for students.

In a system that appears to have a singular, universalistic criteria of selection -- where educational decisions are seemingly simple and clear-cut -- why do we find pervasive evidence that background factors matter so much? Why do we see such congruence between family background and high school status if indeed parental education and income have little or no affect on grades and educational plans? Are students cooled-out or aren't they? What is going on that we have failed to see, or are prevented from seeing?

#### INSTITUTIONS AS MEDIATORS AND RATIONALIZERS

The nagging questions and inconsistencies of this research tradition have remained unresolved for decades. Frustrated with the results of traditional modes of inquiry, many researchers began to look more closely at how the decision-making process occurred and investigated exactly how various "factors," as well as organizational environments, shaped this process. It was Bowman herself who developed the idea of "key decision points" and "constrained choices" when confronted with the confusing data on Japanese student's educational decisions. In her analysis, she notes the difficulty of traditional path models in accounting for interactions of background characteristics and expectations. She concluded that aspirations, background factors, and perceptions of economic return from schooling may have varying influences at different stages in the decision-making process. Moreover, "...to each individual the effects of the actions of many other individuals will appear as a given set of constraints and opportunities conditioning his own choices and behavior." (Bowman, 1981: 41. "The important question for the individual making a



decision is which future options will be precluded... He needs only to be reasonably sure that the kinds of things he would most want to do later will remain open to him, and perhaps that he will be protected against the most unsatisfactory or painful eventualities." (Bowman, 1981: 44).

More recently, Brinton has begun to expand the lenses we use to investigate problems of educational stratification. She clearly demonstrates that the configuration of social institutions in Japan significantly constrain or frame the decisions individuals may make by defining critical decision times differently for men and women and providing different strategies for human capital investment (Brinton, 1988). Kariya and Rosenbaum as well as Okano have also begun to describe and analyze the institutional linkages that mediate the transition from school to work. Such theories and investigative studies clearly show that we must carefully review the theoretical and methodological assumptions of traditional survey research used to investigate educational stratification, and pay strict attention to how institutions "frame" or control key transition points.

The concepts of "meritocracy," "rational choice," "universalistic criteria" and "background factors" which have been the theoretical mainstay of educational sociology for so long must be carefully applied to Japan even though it is a highly industrialized democracy. The use of universalistic criteria for school selection does not ensure that the decision-making process students undergo is either clear or unaffected by ascribed social characteristics and organizational interests. Rather than falling back upon a simple dichotomy of

"conflict" and "contest" mobility (see Collins, 1971), we must take into account how schools themselves "stage" decisions in order to determine how ascribed characteristics influence a child's decisions. Within a given set of institutional frameworks what do parents, children and teachers consider in the process of a "rational" decision?

I submit that the major survey studies of educational attainment in Japan have failed to account for the complexity of the institutional environments relevant to an understanding of the educational decision process. If students are eliminating themselves at certain "key decision" points (Bowman) is this due purely to their grades, or are these decisions influenced by a host of institution-specific factors? Japanese children not only revise their aspirations after each step (Kariya and Rosenbaum) in the educational attainment process, I argue that they are constrained in their options prior to each decision. Each decision a child makes is "rational" only within the institutional environment that he or she inhabits. The "finality" of the decisions (Kariya and Rosenbaum) is itself a social construct which is rational only within the social setting of the schools.

There are two major organizational constrictions in the Japanese educational process: high school entrance and college entrance. Most western and Japanese scholarship has focused on that of college entrance. Works by Rohlen (1983), Amano (1990), and a host of others have provided the academic community with a wealth of information on this transition to post-secondary education. However, we know very little about high school entrance, a link in the educational stratification process which affects virtually all Japanese citizens.

Some research has been done on educational decisions and notions of educational success at the elementary level (Sato, 1987; Hamilton et al. 1989; Holloway, 1990) However, we know virtually nothing about the institution of the middle school itself, its linkages with high school, and the nature of the decision-making process during these years.<sup>2</sup>

#### THE MIDDLE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

The Japanese word for middle school is written with two Chinese ideographs one for "central" or "middle" and one for "school". I wish to emphasize the image of centrality which the first character conveys, for the middle school is the pivot point in the educational balance between elementary and secondary schooling. Unlike the U.S. -- where middle schools have only recently come into their own -- the Japanese educational system was created with the middle school as an integral element and the middle school was firmly established in the educational system by the 1870's (LeTendre, 1992).

Middle school in Japan corresponds to U.S. grades seven to nine and comprises the last years of free, compulsory education. Although high school attendance is neither free nor compulsory under Japanese law, 95.4% of Japanese go on to high school from middle school (Ministry of Education, 1991: 28). And, despite American media hype over kindergartens with competitive enrollments and cram schools at the elementary level, only .007% of Japanese students attend private elementary schools and 4.1% attend private middle schools (Ministry of Education, 1991:39,43). The bulk of Japanese children pass through the great institution of the public middle school making a transition from

free, compulsory education to expensive, non-compulsory schooling. The public middle schools are a central institution in the educational pathway; have a curriculum distinct from elementary and high schools; and are administered by separate divisions in the prefectural boards of education.

Life in Japanese middle schools is considerably different from that of either elementary or high schools. The nurturing and "child-centered" elementary education described by Peak (1989), Sato, (1991), Boocock (1989) and others is replaced by a very formal and strict atmosphere. Discipline, including minute details about dress style and hair length, becomes intense. Club activities, which are compulsory, are heavily imbued with a sense of senior-junior (sempai/kohai) relations and play a major role in the curriculum (LeTendre, forthcoming). The style of teaching also changes from a discovery approach to a lecture format similar to high school (Fukuzawa, 1989). Teachers spend a great part of their time in non-academic counseling, much of which is geared toward high school entrance in the last year (Yang, forthcoming). This "career and placement counseling" (shinro-shido) is a central part of the curriculum of the Japanese middle school (LeTendre, forthcoming).

## CAREER AND PLACEMENT COUNSELING

Career and placement counseling (shinro-shido) is not just the class guidance that occurs in events outside of class, it occurs in all school events. In all school events, students exert themselves and produce service that necessarily contributes to developing the student's sense of the preciousness and meaning of effort. It is necessary for students to realize a sense of joy in working and producing, to bring out a spirit of service to society and to have activities where students can acquire experiences that enlighten them about work and future life choices. (Nanao, 1991:2)

The process of career and placement counseling begins for most Japanese students somewhere in the first year of middle school. Career and placement activities increase in the second year and become a driving force as students enter their third year. While the primary activity of career and placement counseling is getting a child into a good school, most teachers will emphasize the fact that they hope to get children to think about what kind of life they want to lead in the future.

The Ministry of Education has defined career and placement counseling as a process where "...students choose their future path and make plans accordingly; developing their abilities in an appropriate manner as teachers systematically guide and advise students." (Ministry of Education, undated) Teachers describe this process as one of motivating students: of building and directing student aspirations. Teachers bear the brunt of teaching accelerated exam-prep classes as well as counsel students on their choices.

The choice of high school or college in Japan is one that has repercussions throughout the student's life. Concern over "school advancement" (shingaku) is a popular topic in the daily newspapers. In

the large cities, where extensive chains of cram schools (juku) are available, much of the counseling may be done by cram school teachers. In smaller cities and rural areas, 9th grade teachers provide this counseling.

Kariya (1985) demonstrates that children's aspirations undergo major changes in middle school. The percentage of students undecided about their educational future drops dramatically upon entrance to middle school and again after the first year of middle school is completed. Students also exhibit a major shift in aspirations between the first and second semesters of their third year. Many students abandon (dannen) their aspirations for college when they decide to enter a non-academic high school.

Senzaki (1977) shows that the process of career and placement guidance has changed little in the last decade and a half. At one school he worked with, teachers created detailed notes based on a series of four interviews during the final year of middle school. These notes list students preferences, weak points, "safety schools," (suberidome) and odds of getting into their first choice. Such charts provided teachers with a summary of the individual strategies that each student was using.

Diagram 2 replicates the yearly schedule for a large urban school in Nagoya and is nearly identical to plans used in other major metropolitan areas.<sup>3</sup> Note the extensive use of essays at all levels. Also, consider how the essays and activities intermingle issues of family, local industry and the students' hopes and desires. Students are asked to focus on their background as well as on their future. The

homeroom teacher is responsible for "checking" the student's personality to see if the student's desires and family circumstances are in balance. If these two are not smoothly aligned, the teachers feel it will be very difficult to adequately motivate the students during the final year of study.

[Diagram 2 about here]

The first experience a child in Japanese school often has with career and placement counseling is an essay on his or her parents' occupation or on local businesses. Many of the children I interviewed had only vague ideas of where their fathers or mothers worked and only a few had any idea of what rank their parents held in a company or office. The career and placement essays ask students to reflect on "where they came from," and sensitize students to their own backgrounds. As a result, students begin to become conscious of social status differences. Teachers accentuate this consciousness by asking students to consider what their family expects of them in the upcoming "exam hell," and what consequences the family would suffer should the student fail.

The family is woven into every aspect of the career and placement process. What parents do, how much education they have, where siblings went to school, are all considered valid and crucial elements by teachers when helping children decide where to go to school. While preliminary test-scores impose certain limits, there is great room for teachers to maneuver students into alternative routes into high school through the use of "recommended admissions (suisen nyuugakkou)."

Perhaps the most significant reform in high school admissions in the past decade has been the dramatic increase in the number of students admitted via such recommendations. While calls for the revision of the entrance tests have met with little success, high schools themselves have increasingly relied on these sponsored admissions as a way of admitting certain types of students that they desire. The school staff at both high school and middle school have reservations about the effectiveness of the entrance exam and continue to develop selection mechanisms they feel more adequately distribute students.

Recommended admissions have a long history in terms of sports. Schools with particularly strong baseball teams might reserve up to 15 spots per year for baseball alone, but the overall percentage of sports admissions has probably been low. Recently though, high schools have begun opening up such spots for other activities. Many high schools in the district I worked in have admissions for chorus, brass band and other cultural and athletic clubs which are essential to the school's reputation. Moreover, in order to secure bright students early on in the competition, high-level academic high schools and private high schools are opening up spots for recommended admissions to academically talented students. Thus, it is essential for teachers to know as much as they can about students' hobbies and interests if they are to effectively utilize such alternative admissions channels.

Diagram 3 gives us some indication of what aspects of the child's life teachers feel are important to motivating and guiding the child's decision. Diagram 3 records the contents of a "canvas" or portfolio students are asked to put together as part of the career and placement



counseling at one school. Of course, the portfolio begins with family -- the child as an infant -- and incorporates the family again in portrayal of the child's life. A child's friends, hobbies and activities also give teachers important clues about what will motivate students. "Does this child play volleyball well or have friends on the volleyball team?" If so, it might be possible to motivate her to try for a sponsored admission as a volleyball player.

[Diagram 3 about here]

Health is a major concern as teachers, parents and children believe that even extremely able students cannot succeed without tremendous effort. Signs of ill health, frequent complaints or moodiness clue the teachers to that fact that the child may either be at the limits of their endurance or currently on a track that they are unhappy with. The emphasis on health is also part of a larger emphasis on consistency which is central to the middle school curriculum. Students are to attend school regularly and do their best to keep from catching colds or other infectious diseases. Such performance is highly valued by prospective high schools when considering children as a recommended admissions candidate.

The child's dreams, in such a portfolio, are deeply imbedded in a collage of family images, health records, books read and clubs participated in. The "factors" children consider are far more complex and emotionally involved than simple practice test scores. Also imbedded in these essays and records are clues or suggestions for teachers on what will motivate children to study, and what family expectations are. All of these essays and activities assume that

children will be most satisfied and motivated if their aspirations are solidly based in a nexus of family expectations and aspirations.

Awareness of family expectations are developed over the course of the middle school years through specific activities, which vary from school to school. Most first or second-year students are asked by the school to spend a day at their parents' place of business or in a local industry. Students then complete essays on their "day at work." In one such essay a girl wrote about her experience working with her mother and the staff at "MaMaCook" a local restaurant. The student wrote up a one-page report (complete with a picture of her mother stirring miso), and the mother also wrote and submitted her review of the experience. Well over 90% of both parents and students surveyed by the school were very positive about this activity. The parents felt this exercise increased a child's appreciation for work in general, and his family's sacrifice in particular.

Such exercises are crucial in that they are part of the system of defining a child's aspirations. The implicit understanding is that children who follow in their parents career's are making good and sound choices about their futures. There is no American rhetoric of being better off than your parents were, nor that parental position should not play a role in determining aspirations. Parental background is accepted as a valid (perhaps the term "crucial" is more appropriate) part of the decision-making process, and teachers specifically and repeatedly emphasize this point.

The middle school teachers I worked with were overwhelmingly concerned with motivation. Again and again teachers repeated that

without proper motivation, it would be impossible for any of the student's to succeed in the fierce competition for high school places. Teachers consider the activities sketched in Diagram 2 major tools to mold and increase aspirations. Teachers see a major component of their job to be the task of raising student's motivation levels and inspiring children with "correct" aspirations, i.e. aspirations in line with those of their family, community and school. Thus, the girl whose family owned "MaMaCook" or a boy whose father had a gasoline delivery service would be correct in aspiring to a middle-level academic high school unless their test performance was extremely poor or extremely good. Teachers do not deter students with exemplary ability merely because they come from poor or non-educated backgrounds, rather teachers take account of parental standing and desires as a significant source of motivation and support.

For example, two children with middling test scores and similar interests will receive much different counseling if one is the daughter of a principal and the other the daughter of a factory line worker. Teachers understand that a principal has and is likely to use family resources to assure his daughter the ability to enter a two-year private college by paying for three years at a private, and expensive, girl's school. Unless the daughter of the factory-worker or the family themselves make a determined stand, teachers are unlikely to counsel the family to invest in an expensive private school. More than likely, the teacher will suggest a respectable, but lower-status track such as Nursing or Commerce (See Diagram 4 in next section).

The intensity with which teachers begin molding student aspirations depends heavily on the resources of the community. In large urban areas with large cram school chains, (and where parents are largely college-educated), even first-year students receive much input about their future study plans from parents and cram school teachers. In smaller cities and rural areas, the process is almost entirely managed by the school and intensifies at the second-year summer break. Thus, for medium and small cities or rural areas the yearly schema of career and placement counseling may be considerably more dense after the first year than the one displayed in Diagram 2.

The degree to which teachers are concerned with motivation is clearly shown in the attention to second-year students. Teachers call students at this stage "naka-darumi" a word which roughly means "lost in the middle." Students are seen as having little motivation as they are still far away from the exam tests, and have not achieved any sort of senior status within the school in terms of sports or team competitions. It is common then for schools to sponsor a motivational retreat in the summer months where students are asked talk about their plans for school while they enjoy camping or hiking.

In one such ceremony, teachers secretly asked parents to write a letter to their children explaining all the work the parents had done in raising the child. The teachers took the letter with them on an overnight trip to a local camping facility. After dark, the teachers gave the students the letter and told the students to go off by themselves and read the letter alone by flashlight. Soon, I was told, the facility was filled with the sounds of weeping as students read how

their parents had sacrificed so much for them.

In Hokuriku District schools -- a prefecture north of Kyoto-- second-year students engage in a ceremony variously called "youth ceremony" (seinen-shiki) or "willpower ceremony" (rishishiki). At these ceremonies, second-year students sit in the center of the gym surrounded by their seniors and juniors, a dramatic rearrangement given that classes are invariably arranged from third to first. Various local dignitaries are invited in to speak to the students, and student representatives are asked to present the "resolutions" their class has "decided" on.

The following excerpt is typical of student "pledges" at these ceremonies. Seiichi Ogihara is the son of a local middle school teacher and the grandson of a principal. Note how he simultaneously focuses his attention on the debt he owes his parents, and how much emphasis he puts on his personal responsibility. Seiichi will, like his brother, soon be forced to choose what high school he will try for, and through the counseling of his teachers he has come to see his decision as an important one in terms of his family. The emphasis he puts on keeping his parents from worry is consistent with the emphasis of many counseling and placement activities: given what your parents expect and have done, what would you like to do?

21

Of my many resolutions, the one which has become most important is to become a person who takes responsibility for his actions. I'd like to make my mom and dad happy and not bother them [meiwaku wo kakezu]. However, up until now I have been a big bother to them. I was often sick in elementary school, and I got into fights with other children. My parents were very kind to me then, and I would like to keep from seeing their sad faces.

Also, my father always said that a person of great spirit (ookii kokoro) is a person of strong spirit (tsuyoi kokoro). Now I'm under a lot of pressure. High school is my main concern. I have to deal with this situation, and even though I lack the ability, I cannot give up. I want to be a person with a strong nature, not a person who quits, but a person who wins.

It is perfectly "logical" for Seiichi to connect his parents' sacrifice with his current struggle to enter high school. The counseling and placement activities he and his fellow students have taken part in emphasize this point again and again. Indeed, Seiichi's speech, the many posters of slogans displayed on the hall, and the daily comments in the student diaries have been reviewed by teachers in order to assure that they reflect such sentiments. This does not mean that teachers will use direct force to make students say things they do not want to. Rather, the student will find his teacher returning his paper, speech or diary with comments like: "Is this what you really mean?" or "Have you thought about your parent's sacrifice?"

While teachers employ a variety of events or techniques to shape students expectations and motivate them to study, a student's responsibility to his or her family is a common reoccurring theme. Lest career and placement counseling sound like some draconian big brother scenario, remember that the teacher is in some way responsible for the learner's success and failure. To simply let students fumble along without motivation or guidance would seem gross negligence to the teachers (see LeTendre and Yang, forthcoming). A student failing to

enter high school (and thus being forced to spend a year in limbo waiting for next year's exam) is a sign that teachers and the school have failed. The students, as learners, are dependant on the school, and the school is to provide the correct guidance.

#### THE TRANSITION TO HIGH SCHOOL

Although the attention of Western scholars has focused primarily on the problem of college entrance in Japan, and particularly on the formation of future elites, the time of high school entrance represents an even more crucial juncture in the total process of educational stratification.

Thomas Rohlen, Japan's High Schools (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983):121

The transition from middle school to high school is prefaced by a period of tremendous pressure on students. The higher incidence of unrest and rebellion in middle schools suggests powerful transitions and pressures. This is a time of immense concern to parents who often feel the need to make great sacrifices for their child's education. In this atmosphere of change and uncertainty, students are asked to make up their "minds" and choose a high school. Because children are sorted into rigid high school tracks where there is virtually no mobility between tracks -- and where different tracks lead to educational and occupational opportunities of varying status -- this decision will have life-long repercussions.

Japanese high schools display both inter- and intra-school tracking: distinctions in rank between schools and distinctions in rank between different lanes within a school. The public high school system is divided into 1) academic high schools of varying rank; 2) commercial, technical and agricultural high schools; 3) high schools for differently-abled students; and 4) night schools (primarily for

those students unable to enter any other high school), and 5) correspondence schools. Private high schools also offer a wide-range: Nada, a Kobe high school, is the nation's top feeder school to elite national universities while Hokuriku Girls High School, is a small regional private school whose graduates usually enter the workforce upon graduation or and marry soon after. In 1990, 26% of Japanese high school students were enrolled in non-academic tracks.

[Diagram 4 about here]

Within each school there are usually several lanes, which the student must pick before they enter the school. Diagram 4 shows these lanes for a school district of about 200,000 people in the Hokuriku District. For example, at Kotani Industrial High School, students may enter the Civil Construction, Electrical, Chemical or Architecture lane. Students compete for the lanes, and once admitted to a lane they cannot change. Finally, academic schools may also offer a non-academic lane -- Kawada High School (a mid-ranked academic school) offers a Nursing Lane in addition to its academic studies.

Within the academic high schools, students are further tracked as they progress through their three year career. Academic schools usually split students into three courses of study: a liberal arts course, science course and general studies course. Liberal arts courses generally prepare students for entrance to college divisions of law, economics, education or other humanities or social sciences; science courses offer extra math and physics preparing students for science and engineering schools; general studies provide a less-rigorous course of study for students who do not expect to attend a



four-year college.

While attendance at a given type of high school does not preclude any student from later taking the entrance test for an elite college, students from the commercial, technical, agricultural or night schools rarely take these tests. These lower-tier schools generally send their graduates into small to medium-sized companies, junior colleges or technical colleges. Table 1 shows where students from various non-academic schools are going. Most students are being tracked into the labor force or into lower-tiered colleges, not into the four-year schooling system.

[Table 1 about here]

How then are students admitted to high schools? It is commonly assumed that entrance to high schools is solely determined by a prefectural examination similar in form to the entrance exams given by colleges. While such examinations are used on a nation-wide basis in Japan, the findings of several ethnographies discussed below show that researchers must be very cautious in assuming that educational selection is standardized throughout the nation. In order to clarify just how students move from middle school to high school in Diagram 5 I have summarized the process as reported in major ethnographic studies.

[Diagram 5 about here]

Anthropologists have noted the effect of family background consistently in their studies. Moreover, the anthropological literature shows a tremendous range of school systems: from essentially "one-line" rural models, to "multiple-line" urban models. Some districts seem to rely exclusively on tests, others not. In some

areas, the entrance exam is the sole method of admitting students, but in others up to 50% of the decision is based on the school report (naishinsho). This is particularly true for Hyogo prefecture. Not indicated in the diagram is the recent increase in recommended admissions across the country.

While, most researchers did not look specifically at the middle school to high school transition process, Shimizu and Tokuda did investigate these issues. In the Hyogo school they investigated, teachers survey students about their high school choices in the beginning of the third-year. Throughout the year, teachers schedule meetings with parents to discuss the child's choices and to consider the family's background and circumstances.

For students, this is a period of intense review of personal and family goals. Teachers try to "deflect" students with high aspirations but mediocre test scores into lower-ranked schools. Tokuda and Shimizu noted that the teachers at this school paid particular attention to those students whose trajectory into high school is in question. For the purposes of counseling, teachers divide students into three main groups: those on the borderline, those with little hope of passing; and those who seem to have neither the desire nor the academic strength to pass. Counseling efforts are then concentrated on "adjusting" these children's aspirations for high school entrance. Of 21 boys in one class, 19 changed their high school plans in the six months preceding the examination. Shimizu and Tokuda clearly show that most students do not have a clear idea of what high school they wish to attend at the start of their final year in middle school. They

also note that teachers take into consideration a student's gender and family background as well as grades when counseling students about which high school to attend.

Students can face a bewildering range of choices in making their decisions (Miyagi, 1980). In the smaller cities and rural areas, public school teachers try to decrease this uncertainty by mediating the exam system through the use of practice exams (gyosha tesuto). Students take a number of exams during the course of the third year. Their score is compared with the scores of previous year's entrants arranged as a distribution (hensachi). Those students whose scores are on the bottom of the distribution usually reconsider and lower their aspirations. The widespread use of these tests has recently received heavy criticism from the Ministry.<sup>4</sup>

Third-year teachers in rural areas and small cities face a tremendous responsibility. They must provide systematic guidance and academic preparation for their students without the support of a well-developed system of cram schools. Teachers in these conditions generally respond by instituting before-school practice sessions (20 minutes early) around May. After school classes (one hour) can begin at the same time, and extra classes will be scheduled during summer break. In the area I worked in, teachers gave 9th graders a practice test each month in addition to the two major practice exams sponsored by a local newspaper.

## MECHANISMS OF DEFLECTION: THE DISTRIBUTION SCORES

Diagram 6 contains an exact replication of the distribution tables (hensachi) used by teachers in the Hokuriku District. The table is considered "secret" (himitsu/maruhi) and is generally not shown to anyone except the teaching staff. By use of these calculations, teachers are able to judge which school a student is eligible for, and can counsel them accordingly. The scores are computed from practice (gyosha) tests given by local businesses or cram schools some months before the exam itself. The scores show the student where other students are applying and what scores they received.

[Diagram 6 about here]

In the Hokuriku District there are 7 public high schools, a branch high school, a national technical high school, night school and two private schools (co-ed) and a private girls high school (See Diagram 4). As in all other parts of Japan, students may apply to only one of the public high schools, although they may apply to as many private high schools as they wish. The entrance examination for each public school is given at that school, but all exams are given on the same day. There are no retests, even if students have medical excuses or are involved in accidents en route. If a student misses or fails the test for the school of his or her choice the only option is to wait for next year's tests.

Hokuriku District Technical High School (HT) is the only non-private school to which students may submit simultaneous applications. Competition is stiff as this is a five year high school, guaranteeing the student at least 2 years of college level technical work.

Facilities at the school are high and include a "clean room" for research on micro-chip research. Students will often apply to Hokuriku District Tech with another application at a "safety school" (suberidome). Private schools in Hokuriku District, as in most of the nation except Tokyo, are lower-level academic schools.

Diagram 6 contains many subtleties which a casual glance will not reveal. Sakae High School has a very wide distribution because one class of the entering grade is tracked into a special high-academic pattern, children who live near this school and have high test marks may opt for this school with the hopes of being placed in that class. Kotani Industrial's Electrical lane, as well as Kotani Commercial's Business lane, are examples of non-academic lanes which have entrance score distributions similar to low-level academic schools. Compare thier distributions with Minamiyama -- the academic school with the lowest reputation.

Students juggle both schools and lanes in their decision. Once they have entered a given lane, change is virtually impossible. Thus students who choose the Science lane at Kotani High School will find themselves being prepared heavily in the "hard" sciences while those taking the International lane at Kotani East will spend nearly three times the average study-time on English preparatory courses. Lanes within a school have as distinctive a reputation as the school itself.

Gender plays a considerable role. As you can see, the Nursing course is not even considered by this cohort of boys, though it has a spread (among the girls) similar to a low-level academic high school. For girls, Kotani East's International Course has a higher spread than

the regular course, reflecting the fact that more girls than boys are confident in their English abilities. Only three girls are applying to Kotani's Science course and only 27 to Kotani Industrial, virtually all of them in the Chemistry Course.

When teachers use this distribution table to counsel students they do not sit down and say "Well your score puts you here, so you should go here." Rather the teacher usually lets the students see the table, and then waits for them to comment. Students finding themselves in the low-tail of the distribution generally become nervous. For example, boys with a score of 350 could easily be edged out of their spot at Kotani if the 350+ scorers from Kotani East decide to apply to Kotani. There is a tremendous reshuffling of applications during the second semester of the third year as each new practice test redefines where students stand the best chance to get in.

Finally, teachers collaborate within the district to make sure that schools are not over applied for. In very secret (and possible illegal) meetings, teachers in charge of the career and placement process, along with the principal and vice-principal, stay late at the school the night before the final deadline for applications. As a group they map out all the practice test scores of all applicants and compare them with the distribution scores of last year's entrants. Through phone calls to other middle schools (whose staff are also engaged in similar activities) they quickly pinpoint which schools are being over applied to, and can assess which students are least suited (i.e. are in the low end of the tail) to apply to that school. The next day they assiduously try to get students to apply to another

school.

I witnessed one case where a student of mine wanted to apply to Kotani Industrial but had very low scores on the practice test. During the day of the deadline for filing applications, his homeroom teacher and the principal met with him to ask him to change his application. Throughout the morning he remained adamant. Around lunch-time his mother was called to the school and all four sat for two hours in the principal's office discussing the matter. Finally, with less than half-an hour to go, the boy consented to change his application, and the home-room teacher drove him over to make the changes.

Strong links between schools create an arrangement where middle school teachers "guide" students to only make safe choices and "deflect" other students to lower-ranked schools. In return, high schools try to admit all applicants. During my last year of my field-work (1989) I was speaking with the vice-principal of a local high school at the end of the deadline day for applications. He remarked that since the school had received only as many applicants as there were open spaces, the school would be severely criticized by parents and middle school teachers if it did not admit all of the applicants regardless of how they scored on the entrance test.

The distribution table, then, acts as an effective tool to pre-cool students aspirations. I say pre-cool, because students are still free to apply to any school they want, and might get in if left to their own devices. Rather than providing a "clear, meritocratic" picture of chances, the distribution table is used to show "safe" choices. Combined with the heavy emphasis on responsibility to

parents, students see "safe" choices as the desirable ones. The distribution table, along with sponsored admissions, allows teachers to direct virtually all students into some spot in high school. The emphasis being on making sure all students get a spot, not maximizing each individual's potential.

#### STUDENT ATTITUDES AND RESPONSES

Some idea of student attitudes can be gained through survey work. I surveyed all students in Kotani city twice during their final year in middle school. Students clearly want to go to high school. Only .7% of respondents indicated that they did not wish to attend high school and only 1.7% indicated that they were uncertain about this decision. Students were less confident about their chances to get into their first choice of high school with over 90% indicating they thought their chances average or poor. This may reflect student's natural reticence to display confidence in their scholastic abilities but undoubtedly reflects some uncertainty about whether or not they can attend the school they have set their hopes on.

In the first wave of the survey, students were asked to list their first, second and third choice of high school. Students were then asked a number of questions about this decision including: "Who most influenced you in your first choice of high school?" (See Table 2) Over 61% of students indicated that they saw themselves as the most important influence. Parents (with 18%) were a close second. Interestingly, teacher were not perceived to be a very significant source of influence. Males and females differed slightly with more females indicating siblings and friends as influential while boys



tended to pick themselves more.

[Table 2 about here]

In a second set of measures, students were asked to agree or to disagree with a series of 12 statements regarding how they viewed their decision about high school. These statements were included in both the first and second wave of the survey. Students readily agreed with the statement "I'll pick the school I want to go to by myself." And the statement "Even if my parents and homeroom teacher are against it, I'll go to the school I want to go to." Students responses are summarized in Table 3.

[Table 3 about here]

At the start of their third year both boys and girls overwhelmingly agreed with the idea that they would "choose their own school." They were less likely to agree when the statement included information that parents and teachers opposed the student's decision. Still, at least half of the respondents were in agreement with such statements. By the end of the third year well over 85% of both boys and girls agreed that they would choose the school they wanted even in the face of parental and teacher opposition. This finding is quite remarkable given the emphasis on family considerations.

By the beginning of their third and final year in junior high school, males and females already display some differences in preferences. Males are over-represented in the commercial/technical schools with respect to females, and females have higher percentages in the mid-ranked academic schools. Students' preferences for certain high school types are displayed in the upper half of Table 4.

[Table 4 about here]

In Table 4 we also see the breakdowns by gender for rank of high school entered. We see that (in accordance with their preferences) greater percentages of boys are entering commercial/technical and high academic tracks, while higher percentages of girls are found in the low- and mid-level tracks.

Students made significant changes in their plans during their final year in junior high school. Over 57% of boys and over 61% of the girls changed their choice of high school in the final year of middle school. However, both boys and girls seem equally undecided as there was no significant association between gender and change in plans. 58% of males and 61% of females changed their plans between the start and the end of the third year.

Not all of this change is between different ranks of high school. There were two schools in each of the low-academic, mid-academic and commercial/technical school types in this area. While about half the students change to a school of equivalent rank (perhaps due to distance, sibling ties, etc.) 36% of boys and 34% of girls chose a lower-ranked school in the second wave as compared to the first. In contrast only 12% of boys and 16% of girls raised the level of choice. This data indicates that only about half of the students could accurately assess their chances for high school by the end of two years of middle school.

When we compare the change in percentage distribution between first choice of high school and high school entered, for both boys and girls the percentages at high- and mid-ranked high schools drop while

percentages at the low-level academic category increase (See Table 5). Percentage shift out of the commercial category is greater for girls. Among girls there appears less of a shift out of the highest-ranked academic category, while more shift from the middle-ranked schools. It should be noted here that Japanese middle schools have very low-transiency rates during the final year. While I have no way of estimating the actual percentages, school records for two of the largest schools indicated that only 3 or 4 students moved into or left the schools. Thus we can assume that virtually all of the movement represented in Table 5 represents movement between categories not movement into and out of the local school system itself.

[Table 5 about here]

While there are some overall gender differences in Table 5, most of the movement for both sexes appears to be in the academic track. There appears to be relatively little change in the technical/commercial school category. While these rates do not indicate how individual students moved, I would hypothesize that by the start of the third-year some children are convinced that they are destined for non-academic tracks. Those students who see some possibility of entering an academic high school aspire to high- or mid-level high schools. Table 5 would lead to the conclusion that students have some rough knowledge of where they will end up in the high school tracks, but that among those who aspire to an academic high school, there is a leveling of initial aspirations during the last year of middle school.

The survey results support my fieldwork findings that as student's become more confident with a decision, they see it as their own. Students are not critical of the range of choices or factors they are given to consider. Throughout their three years in middle school, teachers have structured an elaborate process of activities that define what factors are important and what choices are rational. Many of the "reflections" students have been asked to do center on the family: parental financial constraints and hopes, but remember that teachers emphasize that it is the student's decision.

The students perceive that they themselves are making the choices, and they are confident in the choices they make. Thus, it is not surprising that they indicate that they would choose a school even if their parents opposed it. This is really a non-question for most students. Family expectations and parental background have been woven into the fabric of the decision-making process yet the individual is highlighted as the sole decision-maker. Similarly, teachers will rarely talk about gender openly, but a student's gender will always be a major part of the essays and reflections that students produce. Students are encouraged to be resolute -- and this resolution will only be challenged when the child's decision's are grossly out of line with what teachers and parents think best.

#### THE DECISION PROCESS: INSTITUTIONAL REALITIES

Traditional survey research has failed to show how family circumstances and gender trigger certain patterns of decision-making within the middle school process of career and placement counseling. While we can gain good data of how student's feel about the process

through surveys, we cannot gain much data about the particulars of the process, as students are unaware of the scope and structure of the counseling activities. The process of career and placement counseling is deeply imbedded in the meaning of school -- it is virtually synonymous with what school's are supposed to do.

Secondly, teacher responses to surveys will not shed light on the process for two reasons. Teachers themselves are also deeply enmeshed in the process -- they see their job as helping the child to make their own decision, yet their implicit understanding of the child's own decision is one that is well-aligned with parental expectations. Furthermore, the use of practice tests and the distribution scores are "public secrets." Everyone in school knows they exist, but they have a semi-legal status and thus teachers will not talk about them readily. For the even more questionable practice of balancing the applicants the night before the deadline, teachers will deny any knowledge of it, even though they may be active participants in it.

I would describe the career and placement counseling process as a "pre-cooling" process where a student's ardor and aspiration are cooled and deflected prior to the important decision. In this regard, the Japanese system is fundamentally different from the American where "cooling out" procedures have long been recognized to occur after key decisions. If we understand that the intensive third year counseling is a form of cooling out, we can reconcile the seeming contradictions between the survey and ethnographic data. Decisions made by students in middle school are conducted within an institutional setting where this "pre-cooling" leads children see their decisions as highly

individualistic ones. However, the very nature of the counseling provides an avenue for homeroom teachers to strengthen the influence of family background or gender significant in influencing the child's aspirations and motivation.

The guidance which occurs during the final year in school exhibits all of the five major elements of the cooling out process first described by Clark (1960) in his essay on cooling out. I list Clark's elements below and give examples of how they manifest themselves in the counseling system used by middle school teachers.

Clark defines five elements of the cooling out process:

1) "Substitute avenues for achievements are made to appear not too different from what is given up, particularly as to status."

Teachers present non-academic high school options as secure and desirable to students whose scores or family situation place them at risk for entrance into an academic school.

2) "By a gradual series of steps, movement to a goal may be stalled, self-assessment encouraged, and evidence produced of performance."

Homeroom teachers give students exercises where students reflect on their "dream," their family circumstance and their last practice test score, considering what their "options" and "responsibilities" are.

3) "Objective denial -- A record of poor performance helps to detach the organization and its agents from the emotional aspects of the cooling-out work."

Teachers use the student's own test performance compared with local and regional means (hensachi) as an indicator of performance. This implies that the student's lack of effort or ability (rather than the arbitrariness of the criteria selected by test makers) are the cause of the failure.

4) "Counselors are available who are patient with the overambitious and who work to change their intentions."

Homeroom teachers spend tremendous amounts of time listening to and sympathizing with students as they consider and re-consider their choices.

5) "A cooling-out process avoids appealing to standards that are ambiguous to begin with. While a 'hard' attitude toward failure generally allows a single set of criteria, a 'soft' set of criteria assumes that many kinds of ability are valuable, each in its place."

Homeroom teachers emphasize that non-academic high school options are more suited to certain student's abilities. Indeed, teachers may point out that attending a technical school may be well in keeping with the educational and occupational trajectory already established by the student's father or siblings.

Finally Clark notes that "Proper classification and placement are then paramount, while standards become relative." Getting a "proper" fit between a student's achievement, family and gender is paramount in the minds of the homeroom teacher. Teachers believe that if students can be made to "understand" the importance of this fit, they will readily elect (of their own will) to apply to the high school which their teacher and parents had already hoped they would pick.

In the schools I worked in, teachers try to keep students from taking risks, as failing to enter high school would have serious consequences for the student and would reflect poorly on the reputation of the school and the homeroom teacher. Teachers used the distribution curves of practice test scores (hensachi) as their main tool in guiding students. Teachers did not attempt to inform children directly as to which school they should attend, but rather suggested that students take those options that were most secure, i.e. where the student's test scores would fall in the middle of the bell of the curve for the entrance scores for that school. Teachers were also aware of family financial constraints, gender differences and of the position of first-born sons, who (as in Singleton's study) might be expected to take over the family property.

The institutionalized process of career and placement counseling not only discourages risk-taking, it accentuates the role of the family in planning an education. From a western liberal view of individual autonomy, children are being too much encouraged to be like their parents. There is no ideology of "rise above." From the values of the mainstream Japanese culture, this emphasis on family position is crucial. The family, not the individual, is still thought of as the crucial unit of society. Children's aspirations are best supported when they are in line with the family's position.

For the average child, the second-year of middle school is an especially poignant time. The practice tests and long hours of study are only a year away. While their juniors seem like boisterous little children fresh from the playground, their seniors have become quiet and serious with the increasing realization of the important decision that lies ahead. It is at this age (12-14) that children first taste the bitterness of the competition that they will have to endure for the rest of their lives in school. At the end of their middle-school days, students are ushered into educational tracks that will have repercussions throughout their lives.

#### ASSERTIVE SELVES AND ASCRIBED CHARACTERISTICS

The reason why we see students as assertive and self-determined yet seemingly heavily influenced by family is due to the way that institutions shape our reality. Japanese students are in the midst of institutions whose story-lines are predicated on family, self-sacrifice and hard-work. American sociologists are working with schools predicated on ideas of individual autonomy, background factors, and



"free choice." Japanese students are taught that they must take responsibility for their high school decision while simultaneously acknowledging those people (the family) who made the decision possible. Individual autonomy and freedom of choice are not conceived of in a social vacuum but rest on the child's position in a known social system.

The application of traditional linear or path analysis models must assume that schools are ranked on a continuum from best to worst. Even at the grossest level we see this to be an invalid application as different lanes within schools have different average scores--averaging across a school blurs important distinctions. But beyond that, school choices are categories -- each category of school implies a different life course, and a substantially different set of possible future alternatives. Thus students will have several sets of possible strategies to act on, depending on what categories of school they apply to. Thus analysis of school choice must be careful to distinguish the category of lane as well as school to which children are applying.

The ethnographic literature shows that criterion used to evaluate students in different prefectures not only varies, but that both middle and high school teachers are major actors in mediating the process of high school placement. Middle school and high school teachers appear to have created linkages which serve to mediate the sharp selection forces caused by limited numbers of positions in high-status schools. These institutional linkages play a large role in defining and mediating the selection process. The "factors" we see as influencing the "individual" are treated as major differences in characteristics

which substantially alter how decisions should be made. The activities of career and placement counseling provide students with the values they use to weigh their decisions.

Teachers attempt to even out the number of students applying to various schools, deflecting students whose chances for entry are not guaranteed into lower-level choices. In playing their role as mediator of the selection process, homeroom teachers give considerable weight to family background, gender, academic achievement as well as other mitigating circumstances when guiding students. However, teachers never portray themselves as the arbitrator -- it is always the student's decision. Students appear to be significantly influenced by the counseling of their homeroom teachers, and parents tend to act in accordance with the homeroom teacher's suggestions. Yet in the end, all agree it "is the child's decision." By carefully counseling students over the course of the last year, middle school teachers are able to assure that all students get some place in the high school system, because all students will want to make a "safe" choice.

Such institutional mechanisms are common not only in the transition between middle school and high school, but also exist between high schools and companies. Kaori Okano has documented these links in detail in her study of the school-to-work transition process (Okano, 1991). Rosenbaum and Kariya have also noted institutional linkages between school and companies (Rosenbaum and Kariya, 1989:65). They surmise that schools compete among themselves to supply a "dependable quality" of student to employers and that such institutional linkages tend to deter teachers from recommending

students with low achievement and high SES.

A careful examination of the institutional environments reveals that Japanese students shape their strategies according to what they perceive as rational courses. We do not need to retreat to theories of Japanese "groupism" or laboriously attempt to adapt theories of cultural capital to understand the decision process. Students are assiduously urged to assert their individual preference and to literally "fight" for their goals. That these goals are carefully, and often quite consciously, constructed by teachers is neither manipulative nor repressive in the context of the Japanese middle school. Our own assumptions about "free choice" and our models based on atomized individuals fail to provide us with ways of seeing how a student can be "assertive" and yet be exceptionally open to following the suggestions of his or her teachers. After all, it is rational to follow the teacher's suggestions as they best know the past record of high school entrance and are most equipped to determine where a student can safely gain access. The decisions made by millions of children in the Japanese school system are carefully considered choices that make eminent sense within the context of those schools.

**DIAGRAM 1**  
**SUMMARY OF SURVEY FINDINGS ON**  
**SCHOOL TRANSITIONS AND EDUCATIONAL STRATIFICATION**

**Abegglen**

Year: 1960

Sample: 396 men from the elite strata of business, politics and education

Survey Focus: Social background and attainment of elite status

Analysis Used: Tabular

Major Findings: Compared to the U.S., far fewer sons of lower-class background achieved elite status. Rates of mobility from white-collar groups seemed similar in the two nations.

**Bowman**

Year: 1966

Sample: Random national sample of males in high school, N = 7,000

Survey Focus: Educational and occupational stratification; decision making

Analysis Used: Linear and Path Analysis

Major Findings: Father's education significantly affects son's education and labor market outcomes. Students are constrained in their choices of educational pathways at key decision points. Parental economic status affects the strategies that families employ in investing in the education of their children.

**Naoi/Fujita**

Year: 1975

Sample: Males ages 30-59 in Tokyo, N = 734 (66.7% response rate)

Survey Focus: Occupational attainment

Analysis Used: Linear and Path analysis

Major Findings: Respondents' educational attainment was influenced by father's occupation (.247) and education (.347). The authors found that the following variables played a significant role in the educational attainment process: cognitive ability at 6th grade, extra-school investments such as cram schools (juku) and tutors. parental expectation, educational aspirations, and family economic condition.

**Ishida**

Year: 1975

Sample: Social Stratification and National Mobility Surveys

Survey Focus: International comparison of social stratification, U.S. Japan and Britain

**Analysis Used:** Logistic Regression

**Major Findings:** "The effect of economic capital on educational success, particularly at the higher levels, seems to be stronger in Japan than in the United States and Britain" (p. 78).

**Seiyama/Noguchi**

**Year:** 1982

**Sample:** 470 boys and 443 girls in their third year of middle school in Sapporo city, (35.3% response rate)

**Survey Focus:** Educational attainment

**Analysis Used:** Linear and Path analysis

**Major Findings:** "For both male and female students, there is no causal chain from parental socio-economic status to the senior high school ranking through extra-school investment [i.e. tutors and cram schools]. Parental background factors affected grades only slightly during the first year (.178 for males). However, "there are strong effects of parental socio-economic status on senior high school ranking..."

**Kariya/Rosenbaum**

**Year:** 1984

**Sample:** Public middle school students in Tokyo, N = 1,091; High school and Beyond Surveys

**Survey Focus:** Educational decisions, school achievements and effect of background factors

**Analysis Used:** Linear Regression and Logit

**Major Findings:** Students use their school achievement to preselect themselves for different educational occupational futures. "...the Japanese system has no cooling out processes..." (p. 178) "...the greater clarity of the Japanese system encourages youths to examine how they are doing and adapt their plans accordingly." (p. 177)

**Other Pertinent Studies:**

Hidenori Fujita. "The Career Placement Mechanism," in Yamamura and Amano (eds.) Career Selection and Youth (Seinenki no Shinro Sentaku). Yuhikaku, 1980: 105-129.

Mamoru Tsukada. Yobiko Life: A Study of the Legitimation Process of Social Stratification in Japan. Center for Japanese Studies: University of California, Berkeley, 1991.

Takehiko Kariya. "The Mechanisms of Educational Selection through the Hierarchical Structure of High School- A Study of the Cooling-Out Process of the Educational Aspiration." ("Kotogakko no Kaiso Kozo to Kyoiku Sentaku no Mekanizumu"), Bulletin of the Institute for Higher Education No. 4, 1985: 11-28.

Kazunori Miyagi. "The High School Selection Process in Middle Schools," ("Chugakko ni Okeru Koko Shingakushido no Mondai Ten"), Issues in Modern Japanese Sociology (Gendai Nihon Shakairon). Tsukuba University, March, 1988: 29-47.

Takeshi Senzaki. "Problems and Tasks of Career Guidance in Junior and Senior High Schools." ("Shinroshido no Jittai to Kadai") The Journal of Educational Sociology (Kyoikushido no Shakaigaku). #32, 1977:31-50

**DIAGRAM 2  
YEARLY CAREER AND PLACEMENT COUNSELING SCHEDULE  
URBAN MIDDLE SCHOOL**

Grade	7th	8th	9th
Goals	To increase individual awareness of future plans and choices.	To increase student's desire for academic achievement and clarify their choices.	To check student's personality and goals and to decide on their future course.
First Semester	Write essays "My Dream" and "My Future Career and My School Life."	Write a plan for their future; study about different kinds of work.	Write out a plan for the coming year of study; have them check their plans from last year; begin setting up plans for summer study. [First survey of future work or school choices.]
Second Semester	Trip or explanation of local industries; assignments on things I'm good at; have students contact seniors and former graduates for advice.	Examine the different types of high schools available; essay on "The Kind of Life I Want to Lead;" seek out seniors and asks their future plans. [Survey of Skills and Interests]	Counsel students around the upcoming decision; explain the processes needed to apply to either a school or job; decide what their future choice will be. [Second survey of future work or school choices; Third survey of future work or school choices.]
Third Semester	Have students pick the kind of work they want to do; talk with students about their family and make future plans accordingly.	Explain the entrance exam system for high schools; have students think about the ramifications of the choices they will make next year; essay "Me, Ten Years From Now."	Have students prepare study plans -- watch out for signs of stress; Explain how to take the exam or to sit for the formal interviews; essay "Determination and Graduation."

DIAGRAM 3  
THIRD-YEAR COUNSELING AND PLACEMENT PROJECT  
"MY CANVAS" -- CONTENTS OF STUDENT'S PROJECT

- I. My Baby Photos
- II. My Hobbies, Likes, and Club Activities
- III. A Look at My Character
- IV. My Friends
- V. My Role [in Life]
- VI. What I See in Myself
- VII. My Family Life
- VIII. Points to Revise in My Study Habits
- IX. My Dream for the Future. The Job I Want or My High School Plans
- X. Physical Education Test Results
- XI. Health Records, Absences
- XII. Health and Activities
- XIII. Times I Visited the Nurses Office [Record of Illnesses]
- XIV. Books I've Read
- XV. My Footprints [Contributions to School -- Student or Club Offices]
- XVI. My Summer Study Projects
- XVII. Letters to Me [From Parents, Seniors]
- XVIII. Materials from Surveys

Source: Sakai-gun, Sabae Middle School Guidance and Placement Outline. 1990.

**DIAGRAM 4  
PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS LANES  
FOR THE HOKURIKU DISTRICT**

**ACADEMIC SCHOOLS**

Kotani High School  
     I -- Regular  
     II -- Science  
     Branch  
     [Night School]

Kotani East H.S.  
     I -- Regular  
     International

Kawada H.S.  
     I -- Regular  
     Nursing

Minamiyama  
     I -- Regular

Sakae  
     I -- Regular

**NON-ACADEMIC SCHOOLS**

Kotani Industrial  
     I -- Electrical  
     II -- Architecture  
     III -- Civil Construction  
     IV -- Chemistry

Kotani Commercial  
     I -- Business  
     II -- Accounting  
     III -- Computing

Note: Each high school is composed of several lanes to which students must apply directly. For example, Kotani East H.S. has a regular lane as well as an international lane. Occasionally, as is the case with Kawada H.S., an academic school will also have a non-academic lane such as Nursing.

Schools also have affiliated branch or night schools. These schools are usually of far lower reputation and status. Indeed, night school is the lowest possible level in the educational track.



**DIAGRAM 5**  
**SUMMARY OF ETHNOGRAPHIC FINDINGS ON**  
**MIDDLE SCHOOL TO HIGH SCHOOL TRANSITIONS**

Singleton (1966)

Area: Rural/Small City

Range of Choices: Limited: approximately 8 high schools including technical and private girl's school.

Selection Process: District-Based Entrance Examination [Public]

Counseling Procedures: Unclear.

Gender and Family Influences: Of 1,123 students attending top academic school, only 72 were female. "Most girls with outstanding academic records in their middle school work deliberately choose Niko [a second-rank academic school] over First High School because they are not planning to try for admission to the top-ranking national universities" (p. 20). Boys who were first-born sons -- and who must remain in the locality in order to inherit the family property -- or boys who were "unable economically to plan for college or university education" applied to Industrial High School (Singleton, p. 21)

Transition to College: Top-rank First High School sending over 50% of its graduates to college. The Industrial High School sent few if any students on to higher education.

Rohlen (1977)

Area: Urban -- Kobe City

Range of Choices: Extensive Private [City-wide] and 6 Public in District. "Each district has a "best" public high school at the top and a night high school at the bottom" (p. 122). 8,917 entrants to public high schools, 2,579 students entered lower-track non-academic high schools. (Rohlen, 125)

Selection Process: District-Based Entrance Examination [Public].

Counseling Procedures: "They [supervising middle school teachers] arbitrate the application process, sending forward to the better public high schools only the names of those students virtually certain to gain admittance. Controlling the risks of "one-shot" application means coordinating rather closely with the admissions officers of the top public high schools. Only a city-wide informal system of such cooperation explains why almost exactly the right number of names are sent for the entrance examination of top public schools as will finally be accepted. This coordination links some twenty junior high schools in each large district with the district's four public high schools." (Rohlen, 126)

Gender and Family Influences: Class background is largely replicated in the ranking of the schools. "...females tend to be over-represented in the middle and lower middle areas" (Rohlen, 125) He also found that girls were enrolling in private schools in higher proportion than boys; parents seemed anxious to keep daughters in school, rather than have them take low-status jobs.

Transition to College: Nada, the top-ranked school, dominates entrance to elite universities while graduates from the lower-level schools have difficulty entering college.

**Miyagi (1988)**

**Area:** Urban (pop. 400,000) Bedroom Community Near Tokyo.

**Range of Choices:** Extensive Public and Private. 11 Public and 140 private high schools within commuting distance (20 kilometers).

**Selection Process:** District-Based Entrance Examination and School Record [Public]. However, examination scores are not the sole criterion used in Chiba. The school report (naishin-sho/chosa-sho) -- which details students grades in the five major subjects as well as ratings in areas such as "leadership" -- is used by some schools to evaluate entrants.

**Counseling Procedures:** High school representatives regularly appear at middle schools to discuss their school and offer information to prospective students. These visits also serve as a time for teachers from both sides (high school and middle school) to exchange information about the number of prospective applicants.

**Gender and Family Influences:** Unclear, but notes the existence of many private girl's schools in the mid-academic range.

**Transition to College:** Not specified.

**Tokuda and Shimizu (1989)**

**Area:** Urban Hyogo Prefecture

**Range of Choices:** Extensive Public and Private

**Selection Process:** District-Based Entrance Exam and School Record [Public]. Entrance exam scores and the grades from the naishinshou count for 50% each in determining whether students will gain entrance to a given high school.

**Counseling Procedures:** Students participate in a year-long series of intensive counseling events structured to bring the child's view into line with the course of action deemed best by homeroom teacher and parents. In "deflecting" a child to another school than the one aspired to. In counseling students, teachers rely on entrance distribution scores (hensachi) and exercises in "considerations" (hansei) for the shame to the family should the child "fail" the entrance exam.

**Gender and Family Influences:** Teachers appeared to focus more time and effort on boys' plans than on girls.

**Transition to College:** Not applicable

**TABLE 1**  
**HIGH SCHOOL TYPE BY MATRICULATION TO POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION**  
**PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS ENTERING WORKFORCE OR FURTHER SCHOOLING**  
**RATES FOR 1990**

Of those going on to higher education

<u>School Type</u>	% to Higher Ed.	% to Workforce	% going to		
			4-Year College	2-Year College	Technical Schools
Industrial	20	79	14	12	74
Commercial	26	72	13	38	49
Agricultural	27	73	11	29	60
Fishery	9	91	--	--	--
Nursing	64	36	0	40	60
Home Economics	33	61	0	48	52

Source: Fukui Prefectural Counseling and Placement Research Council Meeting of May 31, 1991. Fukui, Prefectural Youth Center.

TABLE 2  
 PERCEIVED SOURCES OF INFLUENCE ON FIRST CHOICE OF HIGH SCHOOL  
 FOR MALES AND FEMALES<sup>+</sup>

GENDER		SOURCE OF INFLUENCE					TOTAL
		Parents	Teacher	Friends	Siblings	Respondent	
Male	N	87	48	27	16	328	506
	%	17.1	9.5	5.3	3.2	64.8	100.0
Female	N	99	47	42	33	306	527
	%	18.8	8.9	8.0	6.3	58.0	100.0
Male	N	186	95	69	49	634	1033
Female	%	18.01	9.20	6.68	4.74	61.37	100.00

<sup>+</sup>Students were asked to respond to the following question: "Who most influenced you in picking your first choice of high school?"

**TABLE 3**  
**PERCEIVED SELF-DETERMINATION OF EDUCATIONAL DECISIONS FOR**  
**MALES AND FEMALES FOR**  
**TWO WAVES OF THE SURVEY**

Statement: "Even if my parents and homeroom teacher are against it, I'll go to the school I want to go to."

GENDER	TIME 1			TIME 2		
	Disagree	Agree	TOTAL	Disagree	Agree	TOTAL
Male	N 230	241	471	71	401	472
	% 48.8	51.2	100.0	15.0	85.0	100.0
Female	N 249	238	487	54	443	497
	% 51.1	48.9	100.0	10.9	89.1	100.0
Male	N 479	479	958	125	844	969
Female	% 50.0	50.0	100.0	12.9	87.1	100.0

Statement: "I'll choose my own school myself."

GENDER	TIME 1			TIME 2		
	Disagree	Agree	TOTAL	Disagree	Agree	TOTAL
Male	N 71	401	472	30	462	492
	% 15.0	85.0	100.0	6.1	93.9	100.0
Female	N 54	443	497	25	492	517
	% 10.9	89.1	100.0	4.8	95.2	100.0
TOTAL	125	844	969	55	954	1009
	12.9	87.1	100.0	5.5	94.5	100.0

**TABLE 4**  
**GENDER OF RESPONDENT AND TYPE OF HIGH SCHOOL<sup>†</sup>**

GENDER		FIRST-CHOICE OF HIGH SCHOOL				TOTAL
		Commercial/ Technical	Low-Level Academic	Mid-Level Academic	High Academic	
Male	N	141	32	153	139	465
	%	30.32	6.88	32.90	29.89	100.00
Female	N	124	40	205	115	484
	%	25.62	8.26	42.36	23.76	100.00
TOTAL		265	72	358	254	949
		27.92	7.59	37.72	26.77	100.00

D.F. = 3       $X^2=11.42$       Prob. = .010

GENDER		TYPE OF HIGH SCHOOL ACTUALLY ENTERED					TOTAL
		Night School	Commercial/ Technical	Low-Level Academic	Mid-Level Academic	High Academic	
Male	N	17	148	116	112	97	490
	%	3.47	30.20	23.67	22.86	19.80	100.00
Female	N	13	116	158	144	84	515
	%	2.52	22.52	30.68	27.96	16.31	100.00
TOTAL		30	264	274	256	181	1005
		2.99	26.27	27.26	25.47	18.01	100.00

D.F. = 4       $X^2=15.17$       Prob. = .004

<sup>†</sup>For this table, the high schools have been divided into five basic categories based on their relative ranks. As night school is a very low status option, no student picked night school as a first choice.

TABLE 5  
 CHANGES IN PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF TYPE OF HIGH SCHOOL  
 BETWEEN FIRST CHOICE OF HIGH SCHOOL AND HIGH SCHOOL ENTERED  
 FOR MALE AND FEMALES<sup>†</sup>

GENDER		Night School	Commercial/ Technical	Low-Level Academic	Mid-Level Academic	High Academic
Male	%	+3.47	-0.12	+16.79	-10.04	-10.09
Female	%	+2.52	-3.10	+22.42	-14.40	- 7.45

<sup>†</sup>This table represents the change in percentage distributions from Table 4.





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#### ENDNOTES

1. For a definition of cooling out see Burton Clark, "The 'Cooling-Out' Function in Higher Education" in The American Journal of Sociology 65 (May 1960):569-576.
2. John Singleton's (1967) ethnography briefly touches on the topic of middle school to high school transition.
3. See Yamada (1990: 14-16)
4. "Teachers Blamed for Reliance on Testing Firms." The Daily Yomiuri. 11/30/92 p. 2