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SOCIAL JUSTICE AND JOB DISTRIBUTION IN JAPAN: CLASS, MINORITY AND GENDER

KAORI H. OKANO

Abstract – Japanese schools have a mechanism for helping their students to find jobs, rather than leaving this function to market forces. The system embodies three principles. First, it tries to ensure that every graduating student within a school obtains a job. Second, it gives special assistance to students who are seen as “vulnerable” in the job market. Third, it takes into account individual merit (i.e. academic marks, school attendance and extra-curricular activities). The system recognises that a young person’s initial full-time employment is crucial in obtaining an adult identity; that high school graduates are still immature and vulnerable, needing professional adult assistance to find “suitable” employment, and that they have unequal access to such assistance in their families. A key role is played by the teachers, who strive to obtain what they consider to be the most suitable employment for all their graduating students.

Zusammenfassung – Japanische Schulen sind ihren Schülern durch bestimmte Massnahmen bei der Jobsuche behilflich anstatt dies dem Arbeitsmarkt zu überlassen. Das System umfasst drei Prinzipien. Erstens soll jeder Schulabsolvent einen Job finden. Zweitens soll Schülern, die für den Arbeitsmarkt als nicht so leicht vermittelbar eingestuft werden, besondere Hilfe zuteil werden. Drittens sollen individuelle Stärken berücksichtigt werden (d.h. akademische Noten, Schulbeteiligung und Aktivitäten außerhalb des Lehrplans). Das System erkennt, dass der erste Vollzeitjob eines jungen Menschen für seine Identität als Erwachsener von ganz besonderer Bedeutung ist, dass High School Absolventen noch unreif und verletzlich sind und professionelle Hilfe von Erwachsenen bei der Suche nach einer geeigneten Stelle benötigen und dass nicht jeder diese Hilfe in seiner Familie findet. Eine Schlüsselrolle haben hierbei die Lehrer, die für ihre Absolventen die nach ihrer Meinung geeignetste Stelle suchen.

Résumé – Les établissements d’enseignement supérieur japonais disposent d’un mécanisme pour aider leurs étudiants à trouver un emploi, évitant de laisser cette fonction aux seules forces en présence sur le marché. Ce système repose sur trois principes: premièrement, il s’efforce de veiller à ce que tout étudiant titulaire d’un diplôme obtienne un emploi. Deuxièmement il fournit une assistance spécifique aux étudiants considérés comme “vulnérables” sur le marché de l’emploi. Troisièmement il tient compte des mérites individuels (c’est-à-dire des notes académiques, de la présence aux cours et des activités hors-curriculum). Ce système reconnaît que le premier emploi à plein temps d’un jeune joue un rôle primordial dans la construction de son identité d’adulte; que les diplômés des établissements d’enseignement supérieur qui sont encore immatures et vulnérables ont besoin de l’assistance d’adultes qualifiés dans la recherche d’un emploi qui leur convienne et que le soutien dont ils disposent dans leur famille varie selon les cas. Un rôle majeur revient aux enseignants qui s’appliquent à l’obtention d’emplois considérés comme le mieux appropriés pour tous leurs étudiants diplômés.

Resumen – Las escuelas japonesas son más propensas a ofrecer un mecanismo de ayuda a sus estudiantes para encontrar trabajo que a dejar que esta función la asuman



las fuerzas del mercado. Este sistema responde a tres principios. En primer lugar, trata de asegurar que cada uno de los estudiantes graduados obtenga un lugar de trabajo. En segundo lugar, ofrece una asistencia especial a aquéllos estudiantes considerados como “vulnerables” en el mercado de trabajo. Y en tercer lugar, tiene en cuenta los méritos individuales de los graduados (tales como calificaciones, asistencia y actividades realizadas fuera del plan de estudios). Este sistema reconoce el hecho de que un empleo inicial de jornada completa es, para una persona joven, un aspecto crucial para que pueda adquirir una identidad de adulto; que los graduados de la segunda enseñanza aún son inmaduros y vulnerables y que necesitan un apoyo profesional de personas adultas para encontrar un empleo compatible, y que tienen un acceso desigual a esta clase de apoyo dentro de sus familias. Los docentes desempeñan en este sentido un papel clave, luchando por obtener lo que ellos consideran el empleo más adecuado para cada uno de sus estudiantes graduados.

Резюме - В японских школах существует определенный механизм, помогающий студентам находить работу, таким образом лишая рынок труда этой функции. Эта система основана на трех принципах. Во-первых, она стремится обеспечить, чтобы каждый выпускник школы получил работу. Во-вторых, она предоставляет специальную помощь студентам, которых считают «уязвимыми» на рынке труда. В-третьих, она учитывает индивидуальные заслуги (т.е. академические оценки, посещение школы и внешкольную деятельность). Система признает, что начальная полная занятость молодого человека крайне важна для достижения взрослости, что выпускники школ все еще незрелые, легко уязвимы и нуждаются в профессиональной помощи взрослых в поиске «подходящей» работы, и что они имеют неравную помощь в своих семьях. Ключевую роль играют здесь преподаватели, которые стремятся помочь найти «подходящую» работу для всех своих выпускников.

Discussions on social justice and education have for a long time typically centred on equality of educational opportunities, affirmative action and compensatory education programs. Critics (Lawton 1974; Connell 1993) have suggested that we shift our attention from the simple provision of educational opportunities to the *content* of schooling (i.e., curriculum), which had remained intact despite earlier attempts to redress inequality. Connell (1993) argued that the prevailing curriculum values the knowledge and experiences of middle class children while (quite inadvertently) marginalising those of working class children. He proposed the notion of “curricular justice” regarding the organisation of knowledge, while suggesting that the working class knowledge and their perspective be the focus of the mainstream curriculum. Corson (1993: 27–47), on the other hand, argued for a procedural justice which acknowledges the different needs and interests among various socio-cultural groups. Corson’s contention that different social groups have

differential needs and interests which are to be considered “as equals” is a point of departure of this paper.

Discussions on social justice in relation to the process whereby young people obtain employment have been scarce. In the Anglo-West, we take it for granted that our youth seek employment on their own, often through informal channels, with some assistance from family members and government job centres. It is more or less a “laissez faire” situation, where individuals are expected to find “appropriate” jobs. Young people also compete in the “free” labour market with experienced and mature workers, which makes them vulnerable to unemployment in period of economic downturn (Roberts 1984; Grubb and Lazerson 1982). This situation also applies to some developing countries (Gomes 1990). Such a “laissez faire” situation can benefit the advantaged, allowing them to utilise their resources to gain further advantages; and can protect the advantaged from sharing what they have with the disadvantaged (Corson 1993: 29). In contrast, contemporary Japan operates institutional mechanisms to distribute jobs to high school graduates while they are still at school.

My aim in this article is to identify and examine the justice principles involved in distributing jobs to high schoolers, the priorities of these principles, and the social assumptions behind them. My focus is social justice in relation to class, minority and gender. To be sure, the school to work transition process is not merely job distribution – it is a process of students’ deliberate decision making (Okano 1995a), and of differentiation among students (Okano, in 1995b).

The article contributes to discussions in two fields: youth’s entry into the work force and social justice in education. By examining the case of Japan, one of the few non-Western advanced capitalist democracies, the article encourages us to reflect upon taken-for granted assumptions about jobs, work and youth. Such understanding is likely to be, as Walzer (1983: 7) claims, an “inevitable product of historical and cultural particularism”. Indeed, studies have reported different understandings of justice and morality across societies and ethnic groups (Nader and Sursock 1986; Dien 1982) and gender (Gilligan 1982). This article will thus provide an interesting case for exploring the pluralist nature of justice.

To begin with, I will provide a brief overview of Japanese high schoolers, and examine the job distribution mechanisms and their essential features. My discussion will then turn to the guiding principles (distribution criteria) of job distribution and the assumptions which support such principles.

The Japanese high schoolers

Japanese children undergo a major differentiation when they enter high school (*kōtōgakkō* which is sometimes translated as senior high schools in American literature) through entrance examinations at age 15. Prior to this they spend

six years at primary schools (*shōgakkō*, elementary school) and three years at middle schools (*chūgakkō*, junior high school), both of which together constitute nine years of compulsory education. Almost all children proceed to high school of some kind from middle school. Post-high school destinations in 1995 were: 23.6% to four-year universities, 13.7% to two-year junior colleges, 30.4% to *senshūgakkō* (private specialist schools of a vocational nature),¹ and 24.9% to fulltime employment. The figures for individual school vary according to type (academic and vocational) of high schools (See Table 1). Relative ranking in the school hierarchy is also influential (Okano and Tsuchiya 1999: 68–70). In 1997 73.9% of high school students studied at academic high schools while 25.5% attended vocational high schools (Japan, Sōmuchō Tōkeikyoku 1999: 695). In the school hierarchy existing in most school zones, which is based on relative difficulty of entry, vocational courses generally have a lower status than academic courses (Rohlen 1983: 11).² Schools located at different ranks in the hierarchy provide distinctive life chances for their students after graduation. Those from the top academic high schools would proceed to prestigious universities, and then into professional and white collar occupations, while those from the middle range academic high schools would enter less difficult universities and then occupy middle range positions in the work force. Graduates from the lower ranked schools commonly enter the work force directly and settle on the lower mass strata of the occupational hierarchy.

The high school hierarchy also reflects the students' family backgrounds. Students of the top ranking schools tend to have well resourced families, while those in the lower rank schools, such as vocational high schools, are likely to come from poorly resourced and minority families (ethnic Koreans and *buraku* people)³ (Rohlen 1983; Okano 1993: 68–69, 75). Once students are attending a particular school, differences in each school's culture reinforce family differences, and legitimate the divergent outcomes of such schooling.

This article focuses on job distribution among high school graduates. It

Table 1. Post-school destinations of 1995 graduates of academic high schools and vocational high schools (day schools).

	Academic high-school graduates	Vocational-high school graduates	All high school graduates
4-year university	29.7%	4.3%	23.6%
2-year junior college	16.2	6.6	13.7
<i>Senshūgakkō</i> (private specialist school)	33.5	22.5	30.4
Full-time employment	13.4	59.7	24.9
Others	7.2	6.9	7.1

Source: Japan, Monbushō (Ministry of Education) (1995) *Gakkō Kihon Chōsa Hōkokusho: Shotō Chūtō Kikan, Senshūgakkō, Kakushugakkō*. Tokyo: Monbushō, pp. 602–603, 608–609.

derives from a year's participant observation fieldwork at two government vocationally oriented high schools (Okano 1993). The majority of the students entered the work force directly from high school, and were relatively low achievers in academic terms, most of whom had already decided not to pursue tertiary education when they entered high school. They were likely to come from relatively less resourced families, including minority and single-parent families. The types of jobs that high school graduates obtain are more limited than for university graduates. In 1995 almost 40 percent of high school graduates proceeding to employment obtained factory and construction jobs, 17.4 percent clerical positions, 10 percent service jobs, and 15.8 percent sales positions (See Table 2).

Job distribution mechanisms

High schoolers' entry into the work force occurs within the framework of a standard set of employment practices followed by many companies. All new employees commence work on 1st April, the beginning of the fiscal year. Ten months prior to that, employers start recruiting activities to secure new graduates, which in the case of high school graduates are guided by the particular institutional mechanisms that this article focuses on. Fresh graduates are recruited through each company's own recruitment examinations (written and interviews) and are given initial training upon entry. Male employees of large corporations are able to secure life-time employment, although this is changing. School qualifications (degree, high school diploma) determine the starting salary and subsequent annual increments. Lack of relevant work skills is not very disadvantageous since employers expect little in the way of specific work knowledge or skills from new recruits.

A highly organised institutional job referral process is run by three main

Table 2. The types of jobs that new high school graduates obtained in 1995.

Type of job	The proportion of the 1995 high school graduates who entered employment
Professional and technical jobs	4.7%
Clerical jobs	17.4%
Sales jobs	15.8%
Service jobs	16.0%
Factory and manual jobs in manufacturing and construction industries.	39.2%
Others	6.9%

Source: Japan, Monbushō (Ministry of Education) (1995) *Gakkō Kihon Chōsa Hōkokusho: Shotō Chūtō Kikan, Senshūgakkō, Kakushugakkō*. Tokyo: Monbushō, p. 633.

parties in collaboration: employers, schools and the Public Employment Security Office (henceforth called the PESO). The practice endeavours to ensure that all students have employment when leaving school. The crucial agents are the teachers, and the most important site is the individual school. The Department of Guidance for Life After School (henceforth the Department) at each school, which consists of several teachers, is the major body managing vocational guidance and job referral.

Institutional agreements amongst the three parties set the external framework: (1) the specific dates when employers can start sending recruitment cards to schools and can conduct recruitment exams; (2) a principle of “one company for one student at a time”; (3) a proviso that employers not meet individual students until the recruitment exams; and (4) a rule requiring recruitment cards to be approved by PESO before being sent to schools. These agreements represent restrictions on employers, in terms of their free access to prospective recruits, and in that respect do not seem to suit their interests. These provisions were proposed by the schools, negotiated with employers and the PESO, and reluctantly agreed to by the employers. Why do schools want such rigid requirements?

First, by having specific dates for when employers send recruitment cards and conduct recruitment examinations, schools are able to plan an annual schedule of schooling, organise vocational guidance, and prepare students for the recruitment examinations more effectively. Schools want to have recruitment examinations as late as possible, since they fear that school routines may be disrupted if employers are free to conduct recruitment earlier. Second, the informal “one company for one student at a time” agreement forces students to reach a final decision before submitting their application to employers, and avoids the confusion that might result if a student is offered more than one position. Furthermore, in the absence of such a provision, weaker students may not receive any job offer while stronger students may get several job offers, a point taken up later. Third, employers are precluded from meeting students before the recruitment examinations because the school wants to prevent employers from exerting unfair influence on the decision-making of “their” vulnerable students. Fourth, all recruitment cards sent to high schools need approval from the PESO regarding working conditions, since schools do not want sub-standard jobs for their students. Where a job bears the PESO’s stamp of approval the Department can force the PESO to take action if the conditions given in the recruitment card are not observed by the employer.

Schools start job referral planning for their upcoming graduates at the beginning of the academic year (in April). Employers have recruitment cards approved by the PESO, and commence sending them to schools on 1st July. The Department at each school processes the data on the recruitment cards and provides this information to all students in the form of compiled handouts. Students then consider their preferences based on this information. Each student submits a list of preferred positions to the school in late July. Their

preferences are discussed by Department teachers and the students' homeroom teachers in the internal selection meeting. Sometimes an appealing position attracts a number of students, in which case the meeting decides on a school candidate, based on consideration of the applicants and the information relating to the position. The applicants are contacted and the situation is explained. In some cases students are asked to discuss the matter amongst themselves and to reach a compromise. The internal selection meeting finally decides on a position for every student about to graduate. The goal is to minimise failure in the recruitment exam held by individual employers, by selecting the most "appropriate" applicants for each position, or by selecting the most "appropriate position" for each student. In September almost all students obtain a job which is to commence in April the following year.

It is significant that each school controls its network of contacts with employers. This formalises the use of informal employment practices (i.e., based on "who you know"), and allows each school to provide "market contacts" to all its students through their network. This has profound consequences. First, employment openings are given equally to all students regardless of their family backgrounds (including minority status), enabling those who cannot resort to a family social network to utilise the school's network instead. Second, along with other regulations, it provides the school relative autonomy in distributing jobs to its students, a point that I take up below.

Another key feature is that job allocation is conducted as a part of schooling processes. This differs from the "vocationalism" often adopted in Anglo-Western societies (Lee et al. 1990; Dale et al. 1990; Holt 1987), which emphasises the acquisition of specific vocational skills. While students at Japanese vocational high schools do learn technical skills in vocational subjects, the school's most important contribution to their students' entry into the world of work is the employment network, with the specific job information and guidance it provides. In this case job allocation is not only an economic activity, but also an "educational activity" (Kariya 1991); and educational imperatives are allowed to direct job allocation. This is possible because of the school's relative autonomy from external market forces, which in turn is due to the school's control of its network with employers and the various regulatory mechanisms that I have discussed above.

By contrast, such a systematic regulatory mechanism of school-based job allocation is not offered in secondary schools in the United States and Britain. Youth are largely left to search for a job on their own. Most students seek employment through informal channels, such as personal and family networks (grapevines); through government job centres; and through job vacancy advertisements on the noticeboard of the school career office. It is largely a market-driven practice whereby high school graduates compete with older and experienced workers. Studies in Britain and the United States have shown that recruitment through "grapevines" or personal networks is widely observed across all categories of jobs (Moore 1991: 289–290; Peterson and Rabe 1986: 60; Roberts 1984: 51–52; West and Newton 1982: 66), and that the practice

discriminates against those who lack access to network membership, often members of stereotyped minority groups (Moore 1991: 291; Peterson and Rabe 1986: 60; Roberts 1984: 52). While the school career office notice-board initially offers points of contact for the students, job application is made individually without the school's regulatory process, on a first-come first-served basis.

The process of job distribution to high schoolers and the transition from school to work are not problematic when jobs are plentiful for young school leavers. However, when youth unemployment becomes a social issue, as in many Western countries in the 1980s, the transition from school to work becomes a widely debated issue. As a result, various forms of "vocational education" program have been introduced. These programs are conducted within secondary schools, and post-secondary institutions, or in the general community. They take a variety of formats: for mainstream students or students at risk; as a separate course or across the curriculum; as a short-term unit or throughout the year. Vocational education places emphasis on three areas: social skills, technical skills and the "world of work"; as well as encouraging the schools' links with the real world. Examples in the UK have included the Industry Project (Jamieson and Lightfoot 1982: 58), the Technical Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) (Dale 1985: 44), the New Training Initiatives (NTI) and the Youth Training Scheme (YTS) in the early 1980s (Farley 1985), and the Training Credits Programme in 1991 (Hodkinson et al. 1996). These programs have not resulted in the sort of regulatory system of school-based job allocation that we see in Japan. With the economic recovery, youth unemployment has been ameliorated to a degree.

The regulatory system of school-based job distribution at Japanese high schools involves the justice principles which are based on educational imperatives, that is, on what the school believes is just and educational. I now examine what these principles are.

Justice principles for job distribution

The school to work transition process can be conceived as a social exchange or as job allocation. Social exchange is a mutually beneficial two-way transfer of valued resources, while allocation is a one way distribution of resources to a group of individuals (Eckhoff 1974: 3–10). Seen in the social exchange perspective, students offer their services (based on their qualifications and talents) in exchange for a job – this exchange between a student and an employer is reciprocal, involving a mutually beneficial transfer of the resources in question. When the exchanged resources are considered equivalent in value, the exchange is claimed to be "equitable". As a simplistic example, when a student who has achieved better than another student in a modern language subject obtains a better paid job specifically because of that modern language proficiency, one may claim that some "equity" existed in

that exchange. Then, questions arise as to how much better the higher paid student should be to justify the differential in rewards, the appropriate level of that differential, and so forth. In fact, many social exchanges in the real world involve multiple criteria for assessing exchanges and are so complex that it is often difficult to make a strict judgement as to whether the exchange is “equitable”.

Seen from the allocation perspective, on the other hand, each school distributes jobs (which are provided by employers to respective schools) to students within the school. “Allocation” and “exchange” views are not mutually exclusive. “Exchange” is a special class of “allocation”, which involves a mutually beneficial transfer of resources (Cook and Hegtvædt 1983: 220). That is to say, equitable exchange is only one of the multiple justice principles (or distributive rules). It is one of the guiding principles for job distribution to youth, but not the most important one.

Below I will be arguing that three distributive justice principles simultaneously guide job distribution to high schoolers. I will identify these principles and discuss the social assumptions behind each of them. The guiding principles, in order of priority given by the schools, are these: “simple equality”, “protecting the vulnerable”, and merit.

“Simple equality”: jobs for all high schoolers

The first guiding principle is that a particular resource is equally distributed to every individual in a specified group. This is variously referred to as “simple equality” (Walzer 1983: 13–17), “objective equality” (Eckhoff 1974: 35) and “equality principle” (Schwinger 1980: 99–100). When this is applied to members of the human race, citizens are entitled to certain types and amounts of resources, such as a right to primary education and a minimum level of welfare. In terms of this paper’s discussion, the “simple equality” principle is applied to fresh high school graduates, with respect to their first full-time jobs. Schools ensure that every student will have somewhere to go after graduation – further education, work places, or preparatory schools for those who decide to retry for university places in the following year. Although not all students landed on their first preferred positions, every student at least had a starting place in the work force.

The adoption of this principle as the first priority is rooted in the society’s particular understanding of what is being distributed (Walzer 1983: 6) – in this case, a first permanent job. The meaning of work and of having a job have varied across different cultures and social groups at different times in history (Corson 1985). One’s first full-time job has a special significance in Japanese society, which uses the term *shakai-jin* (literally “society person”, meaning “fully fledged adult”) to describe somebody who has completed his or her schooling and who has a full-time job. A *shakai-jin* is no longer sheltered from external forces by the school, and is expected to stand on his or

her own feet. By definition, university students, many of whom are older than new high school graduates are not considered *shakai-jin* even though they work part time. It is this imperative that youth be initiated into a full-time job for their development to adulthood, that at least partially drives high schools to provide a job for every graduating student who is not progressing on to a tertiary institution. Just as every child needs an education as a future citizen (Walzer 1983: 203), every youth needs a full-time job to acquire adult citizenship in Japanese society. High schools view it as their responsibility to initiate their students in the work force by providing what they minimally need for that purpose.

The adoption of this principle is also related to a particular view of the recipients – in this case, 18 year old high schoolers. The Japanese consider that high school students lack the maturity and experience necessary to secure suitable employment, and need protection and assistance from adults (in this case, teachers, family, and government agencies). Teachers also typically hold a suspicion that the “real world” may be unnecessarily ruthless towards, and exploitative of, “their” students. Those used to the “do it yourself” approach and who view increased individual independence and initiative as “development”, might see the practice as stifling. However, the concept of “youth” – like adolescence and maturity – differs across societies and sub-cultures, and defies universal definition (Fortuijin et al. 1987: 11; Mitterauer 1992). The accepted length of youth dependency, accordingly, also varies between cultures (both ethnic and sub-cultural) – in Japan this period is generally longer than in the Anglo-West.

Critics of such culturalist explanations may claim that the protection of youth derives from the purposive development of economic institutions which benefit employers: for example, a seniority-based wage structure makes youth labour cheap and attractive. Teachers however do not share this view. Neither is it supported by examination of the initial post-war development of job referral. Under the 1947 Employment Security Act (which prescribed the post-war system of vocational guidance and job referral), PESOs and schools were to cooperate closely, but only PESOs were permitted to conduct job referral. The schools were to provide vocational guidance and to refer their students to the PESO, to which the schools forwarded relevant information on each student. However, teachers were dissatisfied with the PESOs’ lack of knowledge of individual students; and argued that the teachers, having a three-year acquaintance with their students, were better equipped to offer job referral (Kariya 1991: 56; Fujimoto 1991: 70). This led to the revision of the Act in 1949, whereby individual schools were allowed to conduct job referral.

Protecting the vulnerable: class, minority and gender

Schools acknowledge differences and inequality in their students, and consider their “special needs” when allocating jobs. This line of approach is variously

termed “subjective equality” (Eckhoff 1974: 36), “humanitarian norms” (Schwartz 1975: 112), and “needs rule” (Deutsch 1975: 146). Rawls’s (1972: 75) difference principle addresses the same issue: that the inequalities can be justified only when it advantages the least advantaged. Arguing for a similar position, Goodin (1985) develops the principle of “protecting the vulnerable”.

The principle of “protecting the vulnerable” is linked with the first principle discussed above (simple equality) and the third principle (merit) which is yet to be covered. Without protection of the vulnerable, not all students may obtain a job. Merit-based job distribution cannot be said to be achieved for all, when certain groups of students cannot convert their school qualifications into employment in the same ways as the others can due to external constraints (e.g., discrimination in the job market). These constraints not only prevent these students from obtaining their preferred jobs; but also, more importantly, influence their preferred options, often discouraging them from aiming at what they see as impossible.

In distributing jobs the schools try to “protect” groups of students whom the schools collectively consider “vulnerable” in the labour market. The problem here is that the definition of who constitutes the “vulnerable” is an arbitrary decision. Currently considered as such are those from disadvantaged families in general, students with low academic marks and other “unfavourable” dispositions, and minority students (Okano 1994; Okano 1997; Okano and Tsuchiya 1999). Let me examine each of these groups in turn.

First, students from relatively disadvantaged families within the school (e.g., solo-parent families, low income families) obtain benefits from the school’s provision of job openings and related information to all its students, since they do not have well informed and resourced families to whom they can resort when seeking employment. Given that the majority of non-university bound students come from relatively disadvantaged families (compared with society as a whole), the school-based job referral system enables schools to compensate for a lack of family resources by offering contacts with employers.

Second, other “weaker” students (who must compete against the more “attractive” students within the school) are also protected. Of particular significance is the “one company for one student at a time” agreement; which alleviates free standing competition among the students within a school, by distributing job opportunities widely among both “weak” and “strong” students. It prevents the possibility of a situation where some students receive several job offers whilst others, considered less promising by employers, may receive none. Although this is a restriction or compromise for ambitious and promising students who may want to apply for several companies simultaneously, the “one company for one student at a time” policy is considered to better serve the interests of the students as a whole. To minimise the disadvantages pertaining to individual students, the schools provide extra assistance so that they obtain appropriate jobs.

Third, minority students receive the school's systematic protection. Korean residents (now third generation) and *buraku* people are the two long-term minority groups who still face discrimination in the employment market (Rohlen 1981: 182–222; Shimahara 1984). Although the situation has improved considerably, the proportion of self-employed among Koreans is relatively large, and they are more likely to obtain jobs through Korean social networks (Nakajima 1994: 33). Teachers encourage these students to aim for “mainstream” employment from which Koreans had often been excluded. In addition, the Departments at the two schools provided practical assistance by exercising affirmative action in line with their goal to ensure that minority students succeed in the first round recruitment examinations. To achieve this, the Departments conducted detailed investigations of, and negotiations with, individual companies before sending any of these students to take the company recruitment examinations (For the details, see Okano 1994, 1997).

The Departments developed, as a result of past experience, and also from exchanging information with other schools, a list of companies which (1) provide a comfortable working environment for minority students, or (2) take minority students but where these recruits have found it uncomfortable to work, or (3) simply do not take minority students. First, the Department tries to persuade minority students to apply for the first category of employers, although they are few in number. Second, before sending a student application form to the first or second category companies, the Department contacts the company in question and confirms that minority students would be accepted. If the Department does not receive a definite positive answer they encourage the student to apply for another company. Third, when a minority student wants to try for a specific company which is not already part of the school's network, the school investigates the company and approaches them to see if they would be willing to accept a recruit with a minority background. Again, if the Department receives a negative reply, or is otherwise not convinced that a minority student could be successfully placed with the company in question, the student is encouraged to apply for a position at another, familiar and “safer”, company. In countries like the United States and Britain, where there is no such regulatory system of job distribution and high school graduates are expected to seek employment on their own, minority youth do not receive the sort and level of protection their Japanese counterparts do.

It was the Buraku Liberation League (BLL), the nation-wide *buraku* organisation, in the 1970s that effectively forced schools to adopt the principle of protecting the vulnerable in the job referral process. The organisation brought into the limelight the injustices in their children's schooling experiences through active denunciations of individual schools and teachers. Teachers' unions took up the issue seriously, first in relation to *buraku* students but later also on behalf of the other minority and disadvantaged students mentioned above. One effect of this has been the incorporation of minority rights issues in the curriculum (Hawkins 1983), a development that had a profound impact on job referral practice. The notion of “a guarantee of life after school” (*shinro*

hoshō), which called on schools to ensure that all students (particularly, minority, handicapped, or disadvantaged students) had a “fair” start upon leaving school, began to prevail in the 1970s.

An important exception is girls as a group. Girls are not collectively considered by schools as being “vulnerable” or “disadvantaged” in obtaining employment in the high schoolers’ job market; and do not enjoy systematic assistance to overcome restrictions. This is despite the fact that girls face external constraints in the labour market: they cannot convert their school qualifications and achievement into employment in the same way as boys can. Traditionally, on the recruitment cards employers specified the sex they required for each job. Although in recent years employers have been pressured by the PESO to abandon this practice, the prevailing views regarding gender-specific jobs remain strong, and merit-based selection takes place only amongst girls for “girls’ jobs”.

At school level, many teachers are not conscious of the inequalities experienced by girls; and even those who are tend to show less sympathy to girls than to other minority students, a tendency also observed in the UK (Lees 1986: 147). The situation is not helped by the relative scarcity of female teachers at Japanese high schools (Across both schools there was only one female teacher on the Department staff). In 1997 only 25 percent of high school teachers were female (Japan, Sōmuchō Tōkeikyoku 1999: 688). Few girls questioned the status quo. Those who were dissatisfied with the limited range of jobs available to girls innocently attributed this to employers’ ignorance of the relatively recent entry of girls into technical high schools, saying “They don’t know that we are here”.

I suspect that the absence of discussion regarding disadvantages faced by girls derives from several factors. First, the prevailing expectation of gender-specific occupations for high school graduates (e.g., clerical and sales positions) and of family-related roles are shared by girls’ parents and the general public, as well as by most girls themselves. It should be noted that tertiary educated young women do question the gender-specific restrictions in the job market (Yoshihara 1995: 117–120). Second, the relative abundance of “girls’ jobs” for high school graduates, in comparison to the diminishing job opportunities in the manufacturing sector, as well as the received view that boys will be breadwinners, tend to divert attention from girls’ inequality to the boys’ problems. Third, no effective lobbying group has successfully brought girls’ disadvantages into the public discussion. Girls do not have the equivalent of the BLL, which championed the causes of *buraku* children in the 1970s. Fourth, girls themselves are ambivalent about what they want. They are unsure if they want what boys are given: the kind of work which requires total devotion at the expense of personal and family lives.

Job referral as practised by Japanese high schools assists the groups of students that schools consider “vulnerable”, by providing early interventions and affirmative actions in allocating jobs within the school. The system has potential to provide effective intervention for girls as well, through the school’s

systematic mechanisms which have brought benefits to *buraku* and Korean students. The kind of intervention which widens girls' horizons of choice (Blackstone 1985; Cockburn 1987) may be also possible. Studies suggest that examples exist whereby encouragement by some conscientious individual teachers and institutions did promote gender-contrary options in the UK (Cockburn 1987; Millman 1985).

Merit-based allocation

Job distribution is also guided by individuals' merit. Merit in this case includes academic marks, a good school attendance record, extra-curricular activities, and other dispositions that employers and teachers consider important. This line of approach is variously called "contribution rule", "performance principle" (Schwinger 1980: 105), "desert" (Walzer 1983: 24), and "equity" (Deutsch 1975: 143).

After each student submits a list of his/her preferred positions (selected from those available at the school) to the Department, the school's internal selection meeting discusses and selects the most "appropriate" school-backed candidate for each position among those applying for the particular position. This is because each student can apply for only one position at a time. The internal selection is an attempt to maximise the applicants' success in the recruitment examinations set by employers, and is based on "merit"; but at the same time the relative "vulnerability" of students is also considered. For instance, when a Korean student is one of a number of students applying for a position at a Korean-friendly company (whose number is small), the former is likely to be selected as the school's candidate.

School-based job referral promotes merit-based selection for positions in the work force. Both Rosenbaum and Kariya's study (1989) and my own (Okano 1993) argued that in Japan school-based job referral increases the importance of academic grades in the acquisition of first jobs after high school. Under the "grapevine" system where school-based achievement receives less emphasis, those who have strived to perform well at school but who lack an effective social network are not able to utilise such achievements.

Merit-based selection operates for distribution of places in higher education in most modern societies. This is often justified by a rationale that scarce opportunities for further study should be granted to those who demonstrate the potential to utilise such opportunities most effectively; and that rewards commensurate with individuals' merits would promote their motivation for excellence. For those who proceed to higher education, the merits (mainly, academic performance) are more clearly presented than in the case of the selection of students for jobs. The school-based job referral system enables the school to set out the criteria of the job distribution process and promotes merit-based selection, which motivates students to better performance throughout the schooling process.

Conclusion

Japan's school-based job referral process systematically regulates job distribution for high school graduates: each school controls its extensive network with employers, makes specific job openings and information relating to these positions available to all students through their network, and guides students to make informed and rational decisions. This practice creates a distinctive labour market for high schoolers, which is virtually separate from the larger adult labour market. As such, the system allows schools to exercise a high degree of autonomy from market forces. I argued that the schools' relative independence enables the schools to conduct job distribution (for their own students) as a part of schooling processes; that the job distribution process itself constitutes an important "educational" activity in the last year of high schooling; and that "educational" imperatives guide job distribution within the school.

Three job distribution principles that I identified form a part of those educational imperatives that the schools believe to be "just". The three principles simultaneously guide job distribution within a school. First is the principle of "simple equality" which tries to ensure that every graduating student within a school obtains a job. Although not every student lands his or her preferred position, he or she acquires a starting place in the work force. Second is the principle of "protecting the vulnerable", which considers different needs deriving from the differences (and inequalities) in students' family and individual resources. This also assists in pursuing the first and third principles. The vulnerable groups identified by the schools are: students from disadvantaged families in general, minority students and students with other "unfavourable" dispositions. Girls, although they cannot convert their educational achievement into employment like the other "vulnerable" groups, are not identified as "the vulnerable", and do not receive similar systematic assistance available to these other groups. I have suggested the reasons behind this practice, while acknowledging the promising potential of school-based job referral for girls. Third is individual students' merits. What constitutes a merit is defined by the school and includes academic marks, school attendance and extra-curricular activities. The merit-based distribution helps to maintain students' motivation to perform well academically and as members of the school community. Taken together, these three principles protect high school graduates from the forces existing in the larger adult labour market, and alleviate the effects of the disadvantages which some students possess, thus ensuring that all high schoolers obtain jobs upon graduation.

An underlying assumption behind these principles is that high schoolers are still immature and vulnerable, needing professional adult assistance to find "suitable" employment; and that students have unequal access to such assistance in their families. Further, it is assumed that a young person's initial full-time employment is a crucial factor in obtaining an adult identity, that of *shakai-jin*; but that teenagers, by themselves, are typically ill equipped to make

an optimal decision at such a crucial juncture in their lives. The driving force behind this practice is the teachers who strive in a maternalistic way to deliver what *they* consider the best employment outcomes for their students, in a manner that *they* believe to be just to every student within the school.

There is a downside to this as well. The case of girls exemplifies this problem. When excluded in the school's collective definition of the "vulnerable", students are not only barred from enjoying the benefits, but also are guided (quite inadvertently) into the employment patterns that already exists – girls are still guided into gender-specific jobs. Whether and how long this will continue remains open to debate.

Foregoing discussion suggests that a post-industrial capitalist society can offer some kind of regulatory mechanism to allocate jobs for youths, rather than simply leaving this function to market forces. It also suggests that the justice principles involved in such regulatory mechanisms, derive, at least partially, from a particular social understanding of what is distributed (first full-time jobs) and of the recipients (high schoolers, including those considered "vulnerable"); and that as such justice principles are fluid and contextual. When the social understanding of girls alters in the future, school-based job referral promises to fully offer the same benefits for girls.

Notes

1. Most *senshūgakkō* are private post-secondary institutions which collectively offer a diversity of courses such as book-keeping, languages and computer programming. Unlike universities and 2-year junior colleges, most do not impose entrance examinations.
2. Further ranking within academic or vocational courses is in part affected by whether the school is a government or private institution. As a general rule, public senior high schools (mostly run by prefectural education boards) rank higher than private schools, except in the case of a small number of elite private schools.
3. The *buraku* people are descended from the outcastes of the feudal class system. Although the institutional class system was abandoned in the late 19th century, prejudice and discrimination remain strong in employment and marriage. There are approximately 3 million *buraku* people living in 6000 communities throughout Japan (Takagi 1991: 286).

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