Pathways to Employment

A Qualitative Study on the University-to-Work Transition in Contemporary Japan

Thomas AM Kavadias (s1603574)

MA THESIS IN ASIAN STUDIES (JAPANESE 120EC) – LEIDEN UNIVERSITY

Universiteit Leiden
The Netherlands

Dr. A.E. Ezawa, Leiden University
Professor H. Takenoshita, Keio University

15/07/2020
16500 words

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Aya Ezawa, who, even before I entered Leiden University, tirelessly responded to my many, many messages, and provided me with invaluable support. Furthermore, I am indebted to my supervisor in Japan, professor Takenoshita Hirohisa, who assisted my research in innumerable ways. Much further gratitude goes out to all students who took the time to share their life-stories with me. I would also like to thank associate professor Honda Masataka for his kind help with my project, Yamada Sachiya for generously sharing his social capital, and Prof Dimokritos Kavadias for his countless tips. Finally, I do not think my stay in Japan would have been possible without the support of my family and my patient partner. The research was sponsored by Leiden University and the JASSO Scholarship.

Table of Contents

1. A Transition in Motion – Job-hunting in Japan

The school-to-work transition is arguably one of the most defining transformations in the lives of young adults. The transition is a well-documented topic in the sociology of stratification and mobility: class differences are crystallised and the value of education on occupation becomes clear (Shavit and Blossfeld 1993; Shavit and Müller 1998). At the same time, it is a meaningful boundary in the lifepath of adolescents as the first step towards adulthood, often directly succeeded by marriage and childbirth (Bertaux and Thompson 2007).

The transition and related actions are called *shūshoku katsudō* in Japanese, often shortened to *shūkatsu*, and commonly translated as 'job-hunting.' The activity is of a remarkably collective nature in Japan: most applications open the first few months after students start their fourth and final year at university, and campus atmosphere changes as seniors attend lectures in suits and hurry from one job interview to another. Preparations for *shūkatsu* may start up to a year or longer in advance, and it is not uncommon for students to apply to twenty or more companies to heighten their chances. Failure to attain work in this period leads to a year of being a *rōnin*; originally a masterless samurai, now a student who attempts *shūkatsu* a second time.

Job-hunting in Japan has not always been such a lengthy, individual search. Although these days a meritocratic hiring process is standard, students used to be guided to workplaces via a host of middlemen institutions that guaranteed a swift and smooth transition during the post-war economic boom (Brinton and Kariya 1998; Kariya 1998; Rosenbaum and Kariya 1998). The vast majority of male Japanese high school and university students found employment well before graduation. Women also found occupations quickly, but their roles were predominantly limited to part-time office positions and housework after marriage (Brinton 1993; Ochiai 1997; Ogasawara 1998).

The burst of the asset price bubble in the early nineties impacted these pathways, and the question of *shūshokunan,* or why some students failed to find employment, rose to prominence at the turn of the century (Brinton 2010; Genda 2006). Now, the situation seems to have stabilised. A degree

of higher education offers in most cases a viable entry to stable employment, and despite the crises long-term rates in relative social mobility have remained stable (Ishida 2010; Sakaguchi 2018). At the same time, considerable variances exist in the *shūshoku* processes and results of students from different universities, which is hypothesised to be indicative of larger divides in Japanese society (Borovoy 2010; Kariya 2010b). The present study is a qualitative exploration of how work in Japan can be attained, and an analysis of the factors that guide the process of transition from university to workplace.

2. Research Focus and Structure

The study takes an inductive and qualitative approach to explore the conditions that structure the school-to-work transition in contemporary Japan. How did seniors of the humanities [*bunkei*] faculty of universities in Tokyo in 2019 look for private employers [*minkan kigyō*]? First, I examine the ways in which *shūshoku katsudō* historically developed from an institutional transition to a personal search. With the aid of Bourdieu's (1979) ideas on class and capital I then ask how we may conceptualise the importance of background characteristics of students in relation to their different *shūkatsu* strategies. Finally, I explore how social background, educational institute, gender, and forms of capital shape the processes and outcomes of the transition via an analysis of the narratives of 24 students who engaged in job-hunting.

I show to begin with that job-hunting was an institutionally mediated practice, which transformed in the nineties into the more individual 'hunt' that it is today. At the same time, the amount of university students increased as tertiary education expanded (Ishida 2011). Universities became increasingly stratified, and data shows consistent patterns of class reproduction centred around relative university prestige (Fujihara and Ishida 2016; Hamanaka 2018; Ishida 2010; 2018). Students from prestigious universities find more prestigious employment, but their job-hunt is considerably longer than that of students from less prestigious universities. These students also often find stable employment, but they rely more on resources and forms of mediation offered by their universities (Kosugi 2007; 2010; Matsuoka 2018; Oshima 2010; Tobishima 2018; Toyonaga 2018).

The present study attempts to add to the above scholarship by addressing the issue of *how* these effects of class background and educational institute precisely function. It does so using 24 semi-structured interviews with Japanese students on their *shūkatsu*. I introduce four different narratives that represent the various pathways that can lead to stable employment in Japan today, and I argue that prestigious universities, next to pure credentials, also offer an environment in which students get access to the 'knowhow' of job-hunting as well as to valuable network resources. Students from less

prestigious universities lack many of these resources, but university support offices play a critical role in filling this gap. Gender also remains a prominent aspect. Women adapt their strategies dependent on the opportunities and limitations they perceive, but the nature of this adaptation was constructed by relative university prestige. I conclude that students from prestigious universities express more agency in relation to their job-hunt strategy, but access to prestigious employers asks for an investment of time and resources, and many of them are dependent on one or several key-network resources. Students from less prestigious universities also look for work individually, but they are often assisted by their universities, sometimes up to the point of direct brokering. Overall, therefore, some forms of mediation seem to remain present in the university-to-work transition. I suggest furthermore that many of the diverging processes reflect class differences that manifest at an early age, and that those become expressed in the transition to professional life.

I first introduce Japan's education system and labour market, followed by the history of *shūshoku katsudō* of high school and university students from 1960 until 2011. I then introduce the ideas of Bourdieu (1979) as a frame of reference, and discuss relevant data and studies from 2011 to 2019. The subsequent paragraphs clarify my research method, which is based on Strauss and Corbin's (1998) grounded theory-approach, and my interview technique and data analysis. I then present the findings and the conclusion.

3. Characteristics and History of the School-to-Work Transition

The belief that Japan was a middle class society was prevalent in academic and popular debates well up to the end of the 20th century (Chiavacci 2008). The economic crises of the nineties and beyond led to a shift in discourse: suddenly the media gave attention to the working poor and wonder arose over students ostensibly unwilling or unable to find regular employment. The truth of the matter is that, although the middle class grew rapidly in absolute numbers after the war, the relative social mobility and class rigidity of Japanese society remained surprisingly stable in the past six decades (Ishida 2018; Ishida and Miwa 2009). However, that does *not* mean that Japanese society did not change at all these years. On the contrary, it changed enormously, and *shūshoku katsudō* changed with it. From an institutional and regular affair, job-hunting became increasingly an individual matter. This change affected the length and intensity of the process. The question I explore is how this evolution affected the importance of class and capital in Japan, and which relevant factors remain visible today. First, a brief introduction to the Japanese education system and labour market is in order.

3.1 Aspects of Education and Labour in Japan

Müller and Shavit (1998) characterise Japan as an organisational society: skills are formed in the workplace and tend to be firm specific (Estevez-Abe, Iversen, and Soskice 2001). For this reason, companies preferred to hire new graduates [*shinsotsu*] and train them in-firm, and although this practice was most common in the 20th century, most enterprises still hire students in specific entry-level positions. An academic degree in organisational societies signifies relative trainability of prospective employees, rather than specific skills, and the value of degrees is determined via relative prestige (Thurow 1975). Tertiary education in Japan is, therefore, next to vertically, also horizontally stratified: apart from the divides between four-year universities, two-year colleges [*tanki*], and vocational schools [*senmongakkō*], differences inside each of these categories exist as well. At the top we find the large national and private universities, and entrance is mediated via competitive exams. A

credential of such an institute offers a chance to find employment at one of the large and prestigious firms [*daikigyō*] (Hirasawa 2005). Especially from the nineties a large number of newer private universities appeared, but they generally are less prestigious and tend to cater to students from a lower class background (Amano 1997; Kariya 2011). Primary education is public in Japan, and almost all students go to local schools that are hardly stratified, although neighbourhood effects cannot be ruled out (Slater 2010). Students advance to secondary education when they are about twelve years old, which consists of three years of middle school [*junior high*] and three years of high school [*senior high*]. Traditionally, secondary education was stratified from high school onwards, but in recent years divergence starts increasingly from middle school (Hamamoto 2018). Higher ranked schools give better, and in some cases even direct, access to top universities, but admittance is again restricted through exams. Shadow education [*juku*] is a widespread practice in preparation for these exams, and attendance starts in some cases as early as elementary school (Entrich 2017; Katase and Hirasawa 2008).

Transfer to workplaces is customarily arranged the year before graduation[1], and perceived by students as a decisive moment (Kondo 2007). The reasons are that the first job remains relevant for future success, and the divide between regular and non-regular workers; the latter form up to one third of the workforce, but they lack many of the social securities offered to regular employees (Watanabe 2018). Although the majority of university students attains stable employment, failure to do so quickly could lead to a prolonged precarious situation, after which the transfer to stable work is complicated severely (Fukui 2015). Furthermore, although job-transfers have become increasingly common, most students I spoke to expect to work longer at the same employer. These characteristics contribute to the importance students adhere to *shūkatsu*, and it is usual to spend a long period in preparation, and to apply to multiple companies at the same time (Honda 2010; Kosugi 2007).

[1] Since the academic year in Japan starts in April, *shūkatsu* traditionally begins in spring. Some companies or industries, however, open and close their applications earlier. Examples are the media corporations (January), and *gaishi* [large foreign employers] (November, December).

3.2 How Work was Found – Background of *Shūshoku Katsudō*

I propose a periodisation in four categories, loosely based on Honda (2010, 29), to coherently display the history of the school-to-work transition until 2011. The pre-Bubble Era (1960-1980) and the Bubble Era (1980-1993) are characterised by relative stability. A host of middlemen institutions guided the transition of mostly male high school and university students in what were the heydays of lifetime employment, and firms were concerned with finding good matches. The burst of the bubble in the early nineties caused a rupture in these relations, and one of its immediate effects was a sharp rise in the number of young people in non-regular employment. This so-called Lost-Generation (1993-2004) saw monumental changes in Japanese society, and the hiring practices that ensued can be summarised as individual and competitive. The new practices became further ingrained in the subsequent post-Lost Generation Era (2004-2011), which also witnessed increased scholarly attention for *shūshoku katsudō* and new hypotheses on the relevance of class in Japanese society.

3.2.1 Pre-Bubble Era (1960-1980)

The sixties saw the continuation of the post-war economic boom that started in the early fifties. Lifetime employment and seniority wage became firmly established and attainable for a large part of the male population (Moriguchi and Ono 2006). Although the typical white-collar salaryman remained relatively rare and jobs at large companies were reserved for graduates from prestigious universities, this period offered employment security and social mobility to a large part of the non-elite male population active in small and medium enterprises. This means that blue-collar high school graduates shared many of the benefits of white-collar university graduates and consequently partook in the economic growth of the country (Brinton 2010). The class structure changed as the size of Japan's middle class grew in absolute terms (Ishida and Miwa 2009). Gender remained, however, a significant criterion; the role of women was limited chiefly to part-time positions and housework after marriage (Brinton 1993).

The school-to-work transition took place in a context of economic growth and scarcity of labour, and was strongly mediated for both high school and university students (Brinton 2010; Chiavacci 2005). The former were dependent on a system called *jisseki-kankei* (Kondo 2007, 382): institutional ties between high school placement offices and workplaces. Teachers had an important function in their recommendation of students based on personal knowledge and bonds to various employers (Brinton and Kariya 1998). Companies could rely on a steady supply of workers from target schools, which assured quality and inherent cohesion.

The university advancement rate rose in the sixties from below ten percent to roughly a quarter of the population by 1980, but most of these new students were men. A good thirty percent of all men attended university in the late seventies, versus only ten percent of all women. Most women instead continued to the less prestigious two-year colleges, which accounted for roughly two thirds of all women in higher education (e-Stat 2020). During this time male students of the most prestigious universities were in high demand, and large companies handled a system of target universities [*shitei kōsei*] from which they exclusively hired. Professor recommendations were meaningful in guiding students to companies, and after such a recommendation an interview was little more than a formality. Once a contract was signed a student was forbidden to apply to other companies.

Without any doubt, institutional ties were crucial in attaining employment for both high school and university students. The labour market for new graduates can be considered as 'highly mediated,' and most students found their workplace well before graduation. The institutions, represented via middlemen and target schools, assured a steady flow of new employees to companies, and the practices of entry-level recruitment and on-the-job training were commonplace. Although the oil crises of 1973 and 1978-9 caused initial unemployment, they eventually led to a strengthening of the existing legislation on labour security and lifetime employment (Moriguchi and Ono 2006, 164–65).

3.2.2 Bubble Era (1980-1993)

The high growth rates continued despite the oil shocks and a stark appreciation of the Yen versus the Dollar following the Plaza Accords of September 1985 (Moriguchi and Ono 2006). The currency appreciation fuelled a real estate bubble and Tokyo property prices skyrocketed. High school graduates experienced little change as *jisseki-kankei* continued much as before (Brinton 2010; Chiavacci 2005). Public disapproval vis-à-vis *shitei kōsei* in the late seventies, however, forced large companies to open their hiring practices. Furthermore, professors were no longer able to individually recommend the growing number of students to representatives from firms.

Prestigious employers sought a different solution to the question of recruitment, and many turned to alumni-connections [*OB*/*OG-hōmon*, literally: old boys/old girls visits]. From the start of the eighties large companies sent their young employees to their alma maters as talent scouts (Chiavacci 2005). Although applications to large companies had become opener and more competitive in theory, in practice these first meetings were invaluable for receiving an offer (Hirasawa 2010). On the one hand, these connections were a continuation of the institutional linkages that existed between companies and universities: formal ties were severed but continued in this new form. On the other hand, individual contacts became prominent; alumni could be found in classes or university clubs, and one's social network became an important access to job opportunities.

High school students remained dependent on institutional linkages, but for university students the nuance shifted to the personal sphere, where social capital, in the form of personal relations, could play a role. Another effect of the alumni networks was that job-hunting for humanity students started to diverge from job-hunting for science students (Chiavacci 2005; Hirasawa 2010). Science students could rely more clearly on acquired skills that their degree entailed, which made finding employment more independent of alumni possible. Humanity students remained dependent on on-the-job training, and alumni became crucial for establishing the first connection to a company.

3.2.3 Lost generation (1993-2004)

The direct cause for the economic recession that hit the country in December 1992 was the burst of the bubble economy, and the years that followed saw the end of many of the patters of stability that facilitated the late Shōwa way of life (Chiavacci 2008). Next to the recession the nineties were witness to other major societal shifts: more women entered university and joined the labour force, the economy transformed towards the service industry, and the internet enabled new forms of information exchange. An economic liberal wind took hold of the country's politics and the terms deregulation [*kiseikanwa*], diversification [*tayōka*], and liberalisation [*jiyūka*] rose to prominence (Kariya 2011, 74). This meant not only an abrupt end to the institutional pathways that facilitated the school-to-work transition for decades, but also considerable private educational expansion and a rapid growth of part-time workers.

A first direct result of the crisis was a sharp decline in the number of available jobs. At the same time the manufacturing sector shrunk as Japan turned its industry to a service sector one, which especially affected high schoolers, the group traditionally dominant in manufacturing (Honda 2005). The brunt of the economic burden was predominantly imposed on the younger generation that came of age during this period (Genda 2006). Companies remained loyal to their lifetime employment workers, and chose to instead no longer hire new graduates (Kondo 2007). High schools saw the longstanding connections that existed with workplaces evaporate in a span of mere years as companies became unable to invest heavily in new recruits (Brinton 2010). Male students who were previously guided to stable employment now left their high schools without a job or a clear prospect of a job. These young males formed the bulk of the Lost Generation of the nineties: youngsters seemingly unwilling but practically unable to trot the traditional pathways to stability.

University students were affected by the decline in jobs as well. Stable employment was no longer a given, and they increasingly came to compete over a limited number of workplaces. Firms shifted recruitment after the burst of the bubble from pre-selection through alumni networks to actual

selection at the gates, and the role of *OB* visibly shrunk from the mid-nineties onwards when eliminative rounds of tests and interviews took its place (Chiavacci 2005; Hirasawa 2010). Companies no longer had the resources and the will to invest in recruitment next to their usual activities (Borovoy 2010; Oyama 2010). Furthermore, a meritocratic mindset came to dominate businesses in this era: firms wanted the best people in order to remain competitive in the rapidly globalising business environment and ability at entrance became an influential emphasis. Enterprises overall became reluctant to invest resources in training, and stated that they sought autonomous people with appropriate competencies instead (Kariya 2010b).

A factor that contributed to competition at university level was the overall educational expansion. New legislation in 1985 liberalised education, which led to a rise of private universities and two year colleges in the nineties (Amano 1997). By 2000 almost half of all men continued to university, versus thirty percent of all women (e-Stat 2020). The motives for the liberalisation were the neoliberal belief in the market as the most competitive institution, and the coming of age of the second baby boom generation in the late eighties. The results were that education became more expensive: Amano (1997) shows how amount of household spending in education rose on par with liberalisation. Moreover, the gap between 'elite' and 'non-elite' universities grew, and some scholars discuss the inflation of credentials in the Japanese context (Fujihara and Ishida 2016; Kariya 2011); see below.

The trend of educational expansion positively affected the amount of female university students, and the number of women that joined the labour force as full-time workers, and that stayed there after marriage, increased (Kariya 2011; Tsutsui 2010). On the one hand, this development reflects actual changes regarding the status of women in Japanese society and the opportunities available to them; the 1985 Equal Employment Opportunity Law officially forbade exclusion on the basis of gender and companies hired more female employees (Honda 2005). On the other hand, gender discrimination remained present. Companies often only hired men in their career tracks [*sōgōshoku*]

and kept women as office fillers [*ippanshoku*], and although the amount of women in career tracks was rising, they remained a marginal phenomenon (Hirasawa 2010).

A final process that deserves attention is the growing share of non-regular workers. Many of the Lost Generation who were unable to find stable employment remained stuck in part-time positions. To work part-time means less on-the-job training, and less of the financial securities that full-time employment offers (Brinton 2010). The labour market got liberalised further by the Koizumi government in the early and mid-2000s in an effort to increase the competitiveness of Japanese companies, and it became easier for companies to keep part of their staff as non-regular (Tohyama 2013; Watanabe 2018). One of the consequences was that the share of precarious workers rose, while lifetime employment and seniority wage declined. This development raised the stakes for young people: failure to succeed job-hunting could severely impact ones further career (Kondo 2007).

To summarise, the burst of the bubble led to the dissolution of the institutional pathways that guided the school-to-work transition. High school students experienced a devaluation of their degrees, and many of them continued to tertiary education, supported by the increasing amount of especially less prestigious universities. University students encountered competition for jobs in earnest, and although prestigious universities remained the most stable route to prestigious employment, this became no longer self-evident, especially at the height of the crisis. At the same time, the introduction of a meritocratic ethos allowed more chances for women, while the internet made alumni connections less relevant and job transfers more common (Chiavacci 2005). The next era sees a crystallisation of these trends and increased scholarly attention for *shūshoku katsudō*.

3.2.3 Post-Lost Generation (2004-2011)

The years that followed the crisis are sometimes referred to as the 'Second Lost Decade' because the Japanese economy showed little signs of reaching pre-bubble growth rates (Kariya 2010a). The 2008 Lehman Shock further impacted the slowly recovering economy; the withdrawal of offers [*naitei kiri*]

from companies at the height of the crisis led to public outcry, and some scholars dubbed those affected as the 'Second Lost Generation' (Honda 2010). It became clear that the transformation of the school-to-work transition was here to stay, and researchers became interested in the effects of this transformation on society and class formation.

The first large-scale survey on the school-to-work transition in Japan, the *shūshokuken*, stems from 1993, and predominantly focussed on the smoothness of the process and the role of institutions (Brinton and Kariya 1998; Hamanaka 2010; Ishida 1998). From the 21st century onwards, however, a large body of research tried to explain why a rising number of students was suddenly unable to find employment (Ishida and Slater 2011; Kariya and Honda 2010; Kosugi 2007; 2010). Many of the analyses point out that the prestige of universities is a significant variable in explaining success: students from prestigious institutions find more often stable employment than students from less prestigious universities. As a consequence, several scholars reiterated the importance of class in Japanese society (Borovoy 2010; Kariya 2010b).

On the surface this variation on the level of the university comes hardly as a surprise: a better credential can be understood to signify a higher degree of trainability and better overall intellectual capacity, which leads to superior results in the meritocratic hiring practices. Although this may be true to some extent, the variation in the *process* of job-hunting over university level is remarkable, and is, according to predominantly Borovoy (2010) and Kariya (2010b), evidence of deeper divides in Japanese society. Firstly, research shows that job-hunting changed considerably for all students since its de-institutionalisation in the 90s (Honda 2010; Kosugi 2007; Oshima 2010). From a search relying on institutions that lasted a few months, *shūkatsu* became a process that in total, with moments of varying intensity, may last up to one year or more. Students now commonly start from their third year with various orientation activities, and from the start of their fourth year spend considerable effort on the application procedures for many companies at the same time. Alumni connections might occasionally still have meaning for an application, but they seem to have shifted in nature as well: their

current function is predominantly limited to provide detailed information about a workplace (Hirasawa 2010; Nakamura 2010). Students seem aware that much of the responsibility for success lies now with them, and they are concerned with finding good initial employment due to the weight still attributed to first job.

Secondly, the role of universities changed. Although universities formally lost their mediation function in the late seventies, after the period of *shūshokunan* in the nineties many of them opened support offices [*shūshoku-bu*; *kyariā-sentā*] in order to assist students with their job-hunt (Oshima 2010). These centres, among other things, host company information sessions [*setsumeikai*], give classes on *shūkatsu*, and hold mock interviews. In some cases these offices act as a type of 'broker': they directly mediate between students and employers, but predominantly for students who initially do not succeed their job-hunt (Ishida 2011; Oshima 2010). This so-called *assen* reminds us of the institutional linkages that existed between high schools and workplaces before, albeit in a new form.

The main divergence between universities is that students from prestigious universities apply to more companies, spend longer on their job-hunt and preparation, have more support from alumni and peers, and make less use of the official support offices. Students from less prestigious universities spend considerably less time and effort on finding employment, and lean more on the support offices of their universities (Kosugi 2007). Although they also apply to less prestigious companies, and therefore have a less demanding application, they are overall less successful in securing regular employment, and they have a higher propensity to exit university without finding a workplace at all. These disparities have led to the hypothesis that class and forms of capital in times of meritocratic hiring create a divide between students with the resources and knowhow required to succeed, and students without these capacities (Borovoy 2010; Kariya 2010b; Slater 2010). Both Borovoy and Kariya propose that the notion of trainability could shift to 'individual adaptability' and 'skills' instead of pure credentials and mediation, and it is around these aspects that differences between students would express themselves most explicit. The analysis below focusses on how students sought to signal their

trainability and how they pass the applications based on the resources available to them. I first conceptualise these 'resources' via Bourdieu's (1979) ideas on capital.

4. The Importance of Class and Capital in Japan

Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1979; Bourdieu and Passeron 1964; 1970; Lane 2000) wrote extensively on social reproduction and education in France. The concept of *habitus*: a person's lifestyle, gender, behaviour, and socialised knowledge of reality, is often used in analyses of social mobility, also in Japan (Yamamoto and Brinton 2010). Actors are thought to possess different forms of capital, and we can distinguish financial, cultural, and social capital. Financial capital stands for money; cultural capital exists in subjective form when it denotes knowledge of society (e.g. 'taste'), and in objective form in the shape of possessions (e.g. piano) or proofs (e.g. diploma); and social capital relates to the available network resources. In this respect we may note Granovetter's (1977) concept of weak ties: people in your network you do not know very well, but who have access to valuable resources and who are willing to provide assistance.

Class expresses itself in the possession and reproduction of these forms of capital. Parents need to make the right choices for children if they wish for them to inherit similar positions in society, and the children themselves need to make the right choices as well. Bourdieu and Passeron (1964, 36) call these choices 'forms of knowing': "*savoir-faire et savoir-dire*" ['knowhow' of doing and saying]. They classify these choices as types of cultural capital, ingrained in the habitus, that determine to a large degree the decision-making of a person. The pathways that emerge indicate class background (Bertaux 2010). Concretely, it is more common for children from a high-class background to belief that education has value, and to utilise this value effectively. Even more so, Bourdieu and Passeron (Ibid.) argue that the educational environment is a continuation of the values they have been raised with; often their parents read to them, stimulated their learning, brought them to museums, and so on, and they are more used to the 'adult rules' of the intellectual environment. It is in this socialisation that the disposition, or habitus, of a person is formed. Generally, this means that it is less common for children from a lower-class background to attend prestigious universities, but this does not mean at

all that it is impossible. Rather, habitus and socialisation serve as propensities that propel people to one direction or another, but that are never definitive.

Class reproduction in education is further discussed in *La Reproduction* (Bourdieu and Passeron 1970) and in chapter two of *La Distinction* (Bourdieu 1979). The segments on educational expansion have relevance for the Japanese context. French students from lower class backgrounds could for the first time attend universities, but they still failed to achieve the same prestigious positions as their high-class peers. Bourdieu predicted that, in an environment with increased competition for educational capital (the credential), advantaged classes aim to maintain their relative difference through the selection of more valuable majors or universities. This form of knowing is called "*le sens du placement*" [sense of positioning] (Bourdieu 1979, 187), and it is dependent on subjective cultural capital. Students without the right resources are more often confronted with inflated credentials and difficulties in labour market entry.

The situation in Japan is not one-on-one comparable to France in the sixties. The ever-present value of credentials in labour market returns, however, indicates that prestigious universities still offer advantages in a process that, ideally, is meritocratic (Fujihara and Ishida 2016; Kosugi 2007; Oyama 2010). Class remains an important mediator for access to prestigious universities, and the strongest indicator for academic performance (Ishida 2018; Nishimaru 2018). Furthermore, the school to work transition shows strong variation over gender (Tsutsui 2010), and in some cases alumni connections or university assistance seem crucial (Nakamura 2010; Oshima 2010). At prestigious universities there seems to exist an environment that fosters the knowhow and social capital necessary to make job-hunting a success, but this asks for the student to have sufficient access to these resources. At less prestigious universities these resources are less abundant, and the university office can act as a support that addresses these gaps in capital. The narratives displayed after the discussion of the Current Era show how forms of knowing and capital play an import part in the transition, and how personal strategy is formulated in the context of structural factors.

5. Job-hunting in the Current Era (2011-2019)

The impact of the Lehman Shock waned from 2012, and from 2013 onwards the number of entry-level jobs again started to rise (Recruit Works 2019). The jobs-to-student ratio has not yet reached the comfortable 2.14 of before 2008, but it did peak to 1.88 in 2019, partly owing to the small economic growth from 2015, and the then-planned 2020 Olympics. I showcase some statistics and studies based on the 2015 National Survey of Social Stratification and Social Mobility (SSM, standard survey on social mobility, conducted every ten years).

A first relevant observation is that educational expansion has been continuing in both absolute and relative terms despite a shrinking population. Japan had in 2019 786 universities, and 607 of those are private (MEXT 2019b, 1), with a majority of them ranking as 'less prestigious' (Fujihara and Ishida 2016). 82.8% of all Japanese continued to tertiary education, and over half of those (53.7%) chose four year universities over two year colleges (4.4%) or vocational schools (23.8%) (MEXT 2019a, 5–6). In absolute terms, 2,609,148 students went to university, and the share of female students amounted to 44.3%. Despite the expansion, Yoshida (2018) shows that university remains a dependent pathway to stable employment, which in part explains its constant popularity. Nakazawa (2018), however, tested the *Effectively Maintained Inequality* hypothesis, a method to show inflation of credentials, and demonstrates that all cohorts exhibit qualitative differences of horizontal educational attainment based on social class. In other words, class background remains relevant to university prestige, especially because middle schools are increasingly stratified and because the use of shadow education is on the rise (Entrich 2017; Hamamoto 2018; Matsuoka 2018; Nishimaru 2018).

The school-to-work transition has been researched as well. In 2019 75.3% of all students succeeded in attaining full-time employment (MEXT 2019b, 14). If we exclude students that advance to graduate school or that go abroad, we find that 6.7% of all students graduates without plans, and that 4.2% ends up in precarious employment. In sum, 10.9% 'fails' their *shūkatsu*, which is lower than the 22% peak of the early 2000s, but still higher that the pre-Lost Decade rate of 5% (Kosugi 2007, 2).

The question is which students fail and which students do not. For women, it is clear that four-year university students are more successful than two-year college graduates, but university prestige seems to matter little for entry-job and further career (Hamamoto 2018; Toyonaga 2018). Lower educated women have the highest chance to end in precarious employment (Sakaguchi 2018). For men, and especially for the youngest cohort, the disparity is on the contrary most pronounced according to university prestige. Why this gender variation persists is speculation, but we may hypothesise that the 'male core employee' remains a cultural standard. Finally, Ogawa's (2018) study is noteworthy because it indicates, in accordance with earlier findings by Ishida (2011) and Oshima (2010), that the support offices of less prestigious universities can act as a safety net for students who initially fail their job-hunting.

The numbers signify that, although failure is less prevalent than before, it is still a factor of significance. Furthermore, the divides according to gender and university are remarkable. The discussion of the interviews, after the methodology, aims to demonstrate how these differences function.

6. Methodology

In order to explore how different students experience the school-to-work transition differently the current study employs a grounded, inductive design, founded on a phenomenological perspective of reality. The method is derived from the interpretation of the *grounded theory* approach by among others Strauss and Corbin (1998) and Charmaz (2006). Grounded theory, originally developed by Glaser and Strauss in 1979 (2009), belongs to the most inductive approaches of qualitative research, and aims to uncover concepts from rich, qualitative data through a simultaneous process of data collection and analysis (Bryman 2012, 567).

6.1 Phenomenological Epistemology and Ontology

Phenomenology, the branch of philosophy that deals with the constitution of belief systems, rests on an interpretivist epistemology: social action has meaning for actors, and actors act as 'knowledgeable informants' to the researcher, who is interested in their natural positioning [*natürlichen Einstellung*] in their life-worlds (Husserl 2009, 56). It follows that its ontology is constructivist: social structures are not fixed entities, but phenomena constantly produced and reproduced by actors. Schütz (1971, 68–69) argues, therefore, that observations of social reality should be founded upon the answers of those engaged in that social reality in order to adequately represent the world *such as they experience it*. Phenomenology so offers a framework for the collection and presentation of qualitative data that I find especially valuable in a different cultural and linguistic context, such as Japan.

6.2 Research Design

The collection and analysis of data merit specification because the application of grounded theory varies considerably per study (Tan 2010). Strauss and Corbin (1998) and Charmaz (2006) stress an approach in which this abstraction ideally takes the form of a categorisation that coherently sorts and

addresses the lived experiences of respondents. It follows that data collection is important, because where and how the data was accessed guides to a large degree this process of abstraction, and because it determines to what extend the findings can be generalised beyond the scope of the observations (Payne and Williams 2005).

6.2.1 Data Collection

Data was collected following the life-history approach [*le récit de vie*], which is a semi-structured interview technique in accordance with grounded theory (Bertaux 2010; Bertaux and Thompson 2007; Thompson and Bornat 2017). The technique stems from oral history approaches, and shares its focus on the chronological narrative or *lifepath* of respondents in order to explore the *why* and *how* of actions over time. The goal is to explain the, what Bertaux (2010, 27) calls, "*différentialité*" [degree of difference] of actors: how is it possible that people engaged in the same activity, *shūkatsu*, perceive and handle this process completely different? Through an understanding of the subjective side of social life the approach aims to explain larger socio-structural relationships (Bertaux 1990).

The purpose of the research was to gain insight in the processes that shape the school-to-work transition of senior Japanese students. Literature study led me to hypothesise variation over relative university prestige and gender, and my intention was to interview students from various universities in order to address the possible relevance of variation in circumstances (Flyvbjerg 2006, 307). The first university I had access to was the university where I studied as an exchange student. This university is seen as one of the most prestigious private universities in Japan, and it is commonly understood that students 'do well' in *shūkatsu*. As mentioned before, I limited myself to 'non-science' students. I accessed most of my first respondents in the classes I attended. A noteworthy fact is that many of these students were in sociology or social science classes, which may have had influence on their knowledge of stratification, gender, or other elements of importance. The second university I could enter was a mid-size university based in western Tokyo. I was introduced by my professor as a guest

researcher and attended a seminar for five months, during which I conducted several interviews. Generally, the university can be considered as 'less prestigious,' but this term is somewhat ambiguous in the particular case. The institute, for example, stems from the sixties, and it is therefore older than many of the 'new' universities from the eighties and nineties. Also, the education faculty of this university is rather well-seen. Furthermore, the baseball sport team ranks as one of the highest in Tokyo, which tends to add to university prestige. I decided to categorise this university in my research as 'less prestigious,' however, because its perceived status was significantly lower than that of some of the other large 'known' institutes where I conducted interviews. I here also predominantly interviewed students who took a sociology seminar. The third and final method of access to respondents was through network connections. This group of respondents shows most variation, and includes students from different majors, as well as students from various prestigious and less prestigious institutes.

In total, I conducted 21 interviews between May 14, 2019, and January 10, 2020, that lasted on average 36 minutes. The total amount of students I interviewed is, due to one double and one triple interview, 24. Of these, seven were women, and the rest men. Twelve students went to three top ranked Tokyo universities, with nine of them to the university where I studied, three to mid ranked ones, and eight to the aforementioned lower ranked one, with one final student attending another relatively less prestigious university. Two students were graduate students instead of undergraduates, and one of those was a science student, while the other was aiming to work as a government employee, instead of at a private company. These two can therefore be considered somewhat atypical. I stress that all these students engaged in job-hunting *before* the covid-19 crisis, and their search took place in a relatively good economic climate. The aforementioned life-history method made that the semi-structured interviews were organised in two parts: first, I asked students extensively about their job-hunt process in chronological order; then, I queried students about their background and educational lifepath, which is the part of their narratives I found most relevant for my research. The topic list can

be found in appendix A. All interviews were conducted in Japanese and, except for one, recorded and transcribed.

The sampling-method was, as specified in grounded theory and the life-history method, based on theoretical sampling (Bertaux 1990; Glaser and Strauss 2009). Theoretical sampling rests on an iterative technique: data sampling and analysis happen simultaneously until new data is found to add little additional insights to the analysis, which is a state called theoretical saturation. I predominantly compared field notes to new data, and believed to reach some saturation around interview fifteen or sixteen. Interview seventeen to twenty, however, added new understanding, specifically on the role of the university as a broker, which led me to continue to do interviews until I had 24 respondents. At this point most narratives tended to reproduce similar findings, which led me to assume a degree of theoretical saturation.

6.2.2 Analysis

The first global analysis started with the comparison of field notes and the transcription of the interviews, which made me pursue variation over relative university prestige and gender, in accordance with the literature. The second round of analysis started after the transcription of all the interviews through a process of *coding*: a form of categorisation in which values are added to parts of text to summarise and account for the data (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña 2020). For coding I used ATLAS.ti (8.0), a common coding software. I found that coding was helpful to sort and compare the 'job-hunting' segment of interviews, but that it had little application for the 'education history' segments. For these parts I wrote a short narrative for each student.

In accordance with Strauss and Corbin (1998) and Charmaz (2006) I coded the data twice. First, I employed a round of open coding in which the data was analysed line-by-line. The purpose was to get lost in the data and to highlight all parts that could be of interest. Slowly patterns started to emerge, and after coding all the interviews I ended up with 211 codes sorted in 17 categories. I then abstracted

36 *focussed codes* from the 211 original codes, that I sorted around the categories 'attitude,' 'preparation,' 'support,' 'process,' and 'outcome.' With these focussed codes I coded the data again, but in larger segments, and I specified relations between the codes. Finally, I clustered all the narratives around four broad *themes* that share similarities over important factors: 'classical,' 'professional,' '*bukatsu*,' and 'broker.' I stress that this abstraction is predominantly employed to sort and account for the data, and individual variation between narratives from a similar theme exists *and* is relevant. I centre my argument however around these four clusters.

7. Pathways to Employment

Before I introduce the narratives of four students, I wish to make the reader familiar with *shūshoku katsudō* in Japan. The next section is a summary of how students generally experience *shūkatsu*.

7.1 The Nature of Job-Hunting in 2019

Shūshoku katsudō carries the connotation of a transformation to adulthood: from a *gakusei* [student], one becomes a *shakaijin* [society-person]. In many interviews, students experienced this moment as the first time to 'become serious,' and to 'stop playing.' First job is seen as important, and although job-transfer was not regarded a taboo, it was also not considered to be especially desirable by most. The significance of the transition, combined with the long and intense nature of *shūkatsu*, contributed to the notion that job-hunting was something of a 'conclusion' to university life.

Most students made a distinction between '*shūkatsu*' and 'preparations.' The former is the actual application process, and the general structure is as follows: after the creation of a profile at a company website a student is asked to write an 'entry-sheet.' The entry-sheet is a type of resume that includes several questions, and that acts as a first barrier to entrance. Often, university name is not required, but some students hinted at the existence of target schools. Next is a small test, generally in a standard form called 'SPI,' that consists of Japanese, English, and mathematics. In the third stage students participate to rounds of interviews. Some large companies may hold six or seven, which can include case studies or presentations, while other smaller companies have just one or two rounds. The content varies, but I understood that just a small part of the attention is given to education. Motivation and team-spirit seem equally relevant components. The processes are perceived to be meritocratic, and firms appear to look for trainability, but students do struggle with how to handle this selection best (Oyama 2010). Students may therefore apply to many companies at the same time to practice and to heighten their chances.

Preparation can start up to a year or more before the first application. Generally, it consists of gathering information on companies or industries, and students simultaneously decide about where they would like to work. Sometimes this introspective process was referred to by students as '*jiko-bunseki*' [self-analysis], a relatively standard term also popularised through classes and self-help books (Kagawa 2010). Short internships in the summer or winter before *shūkatsu* starts are very common; they last one to five days, and their purpose is not to gather work experience, but to see a company up close. These internships were a vital part of orientation, and most of the students I interviewed participated in one or two, regardless of their university backgrounds. Internship opportunities, and companies in general, are accessed via websites and apps. Sites like *rikunabi* list all companies with entry-level positions, and students utilise these resources to navigate various industries. Large career events play a function in orientation as well: hundreds of companies gather in convention centres to introduce themselves to students, and students can attend *setsumeikai* [information session], or apply directly. *Setsumeikai* are also held by companies individually, and universities also invite companies to hold sessions. Finally, alumni networks are a common resource for detailed information about a certain workplace. It is accepted for students to contact alumni they do not know personally to receive assistance, but, as I show below, the value and availability of alumni varies per individual and university. Support in general is common for students: from parents who provide transportation fees to *senpai* [seniors] that introduce strategies and companies, next to the official support offices (career-centre) of universities.

7.2 Narratives

Below I introduce four pathways[2] that showcase how employment in Japan may be attained. The 'classical' pathway of Ayame was found to be most common: considerable effort is put in job-hunting, and through trial-and-error success is negotiated. The pathway of Erika I called 'professional': a company was selected well before application, and *shūkatsu* costs considerable resources. Yoshio's '*bukatsu*' pathway shows the value of social capital. Takehiro's pathway, finally, is a search that was ultimately 'brokered' by the university.

I compare the stories of these four students with others from their respective themes to show the roles of variation and contingency. A first concern is the discrepancy in forms of capital, and how those related to educational institute and class background. A second concern is gender, which is addressed directly, and present in the differences between the stories of the female and male students. The contrast between students from more and less prestigious universities is an important topic; Ayame and Takehiro come from the less prestigious university in western Tokyo, while Erika and Yoshio studied at a large and famous private institute. University was found to influence the attitude of students, the meanings *shūkatsu* possessed, and the forms of capital students could access.

7.2.1 Negotiating Success – The Classical Pathway of Ayame

The *shūkatsu* of Ayame I found to be in many ways exemplary of job-hunting in contemporary Japan. Ayame's search differs from that of students from prestigious institutes, and I address those differences below, but the many similarities in structure led me to analyse her case as 'classical,' and I take Ayame as an example to illustrate how *shūkatsu* may often function. In fact, nine out of the 24 respondents had narratives similar to Ayame's. The characteristics these stories share is that for all students *shūkatsu* was the first time they concretely thought about their futures in the labour market, and that during orientation and application they slowly formed their wishes and negotiated their

[2] The names are anonymised.

success based on their experiences. Job-hunting started with broad ideas that were initially pursued, but the reality of the process could lead them to adapt their wishes. The atmosphere of an interview, for example, may suddenly change the aspiration of a respondent. It was common for these students to fail once or even several times, but many of them ended up in companies they were eventually happy with.

The variation between these 'classical' narratives is found mostly over university prestige and gender. Students from prestigious universities tended to have a higher-class background, and they applied to prestigious large companies, which made their process more intense. During the process they often relied on private network resources. Students from less prestigious universities, like Ayame, applied to smaller firms, and relied more on the career-centres of their universities. Furthermore, female students from prestigious universities expressed more often an awareness to their gender in terms of an adaption of strategy. Through the story of Ayame I show these processes in action.

I met Ayame in the seminar I attended as a guest researcher. Ayame struck me as a serious person, and in the discussion of the theses of students her dissertation on small festivals in Japanese villages stood out. Her father graduated a less prestigious university and worked at a city office in Tokyo, while her mother went to a vocational school. She quit her job after marriage to focus on housework. Ayame had one older brother who studied to be a physiotherapist. In terms of class, Ayame would fit the picture of 'middle,' and her disposition can be thought to share similarities with middle-class students all over Japan who now often continue to university.

Ayame attended neighbourhood elementary and middle schools, which is common, because most students still actively enter stratification from high schools onwards (Slater 2010). Ayame stated that her first conception of having to work for an exam was for the high school *juken* [entrance examination]. She passed the exam for a school run by the municipality, which is generally seen as mid-range in terms of prestige. Although the first two years of her high school were again "relaxed," and Ayame said she spent most time on her manga-club activities, the pace picked up again from the

final year. This time Ayame had to study for the university entrance examinations. Her parents sent her to shadow education to prepare, and most of her third year Ayame went up to three times a week for several hours after her regular classes to a local cram-school in order to study for the tests of various universities. Ayame expressed gratitude to her parents because the cram-schools are a considerable investment next to regular education.

The university where we met was, she confessed, not her first choice, but she was not at all unhappy. She passed the test, and she enjoyed that she could write a thesis in sociology on a topic of her interest. At the same time, she kept busy with her *circle* [student group] activities, for which she was a volunteer in the campus café. I found that it was less common for students from Ayame's university to enjoy an active student life than for students from the large prestigious universities, and generally a warmed bond to student life resulted in a more active approach to job-hunting. A possible explanation is that job-hunting is more tangible when you are part of campus life and when you see your peers start as well. At prestigious universities, campus life was omnipresent: the name of these universities is actively branded, statues are abundant, and baseball and football matches are huge events.

Ayame had been busy with a chairmanship of her circle until November, and she started her *shūkatsu* in earnest late autumn. She did try one internship in summer at her father's municipality because she was interested in his work, but she abandoned the idea after this experience. This 'trial-and-error' is a prime example of how internships are often used. Because Ayame felt she was already a bit late in November, she hurriedly applied to *setsumeikai* of various companies. Rather than looking for a specific industry or function, Ayame centred her search around where she wanted to work, which is the area where she lived with her parents. Companies were mostly found online, and she decided to apply to firms that had a "not too strict" atmosphere.

From the first step of the actual elimination process, the entry-sheet, Ayame received considerable support from her university career-centre. From checking entry-sheet questions to

practicing mock interviews and the introduction of companies, the career-centre at this university played a vital role as a first point of contact for students with questions about their *shūkatsu*. In Ayame's case the centre's function was predominantly supportive: they assisted Ayame with different steps of her application. A factor that may contribute to this supportive role of universities is Japan's declining birth rate: universities struggle to attract students, and by showing that their education guides people to stable employment, universities seek to heighten their appeal.

The support office at prestigious universities was in contrast hardly, if at all, relevant. Its predominant function was to host events where students could meet companies and alumni. Students I interviewed from these universities stated that they never went to the centre individually with concrete questions about their entry-sheets or interviews. The aforementioned events, however, although not attended by everyone, could lead to valuable contacts; one student met an alumni at such an event, and she indicated that he eventually became her *senpai* [senior] throughout the application process: he helped her extensively with her orientation and preparation. Ayame, in contrast, relied directly on the centre for detailed information about her *shūkatsu*. I illustrate the function of social capital at prestigious universities in more detail below, but Ayame also had private contacts who assisted her *shūkatsu*. She stated that some friends and one *senpai* from her circle helped her, but relatively they seemed less meaningful than the university career-centre.

The following passage from Ayame's interview serves to further illustrate the point that variation in support varies over university level:

> At start, I was at loss with how to prepare, so for the first [applications], the university career centre helped me. […] Also, they hold mock interviews for you, if you wish.

For Ayame, and for other students from her university, the career-centre was the logical place to attains these gaps in her knowledge, and she said that it is "better to borrow some strength, if available." Students from prestigious universities on the other hand never expressed that they went to their career-centres for knowhow on their applications. The availability of this knowledge,

independent from official sources, is part of the cultural capital that prestigious universities convey in larger volume to their students, or that students can access easier via their networks. In fact, this self-reliance of these prestigious university students indicates an attitude to engage *shūkatsu* as a personal project, in which they themselves are responsible for their own success. The university environment nurtured this attitude because their relatively valuable credential made prestigious employers attainable, and because capital and network resources could be accessed. The narratives below further clarify how class background can serve to amplify this attitude.

Ayame concluded her job-hunt in July, which was roughly three months after she started her first applications. Out of the ten or so companies where she applied, she received an offer [*naitei*] from an IT company, which was a, to her, unexpected industry. She chose this company, however, because of its atmosphere and because the staff treated her respectfully throughout the application. Ayame indicated that she had little to no computer experience, which shows that on-the-job training for graduates is still standard at some small to medium enterprises. The interviews seem predominantly designed to facilitate a good 'match,' rather than to select those with the highest skills at the outset. Although Ayame was happy with the offer, about half of the students who fit in this theme said that they were not fully pleased with the results. Often, they negotiated their status further: they said they would acquire skills and look for transfers, or that they would try their best, but maybe quit if they would not like their job. Overall, however, a job was better than no job, because a year as a *rōnin* was not seen as a desirable alternative.

Two aspects in Ayame's narrative have further relevance. The first is Ayame's use of *OB*: she was introduced to an employee of the IT firm by the career-centre *after* she received an offer. Since most alumni connections at prestigious universities happened before applications, this is remarkable. Partly, it reflects a wish on the side of the career-centre to support the students in their effort beyond simple acceptance. Next, it is an example of the role of *OB* as a, what Nakamura (2010, 56) calls, "*anshin no monogatari*," or, a reassurance of choice, rather than a pathway to employment. More

broadly, it seems to indicate that the career-centre aims to forge some connections between companies and schools. These connections are not as strict as they were during the pre-Bubble and Bubble eras, but they can act as a first bridge and a form of support.

A second factor is Ayame's notion of gender. Ayame did not indicate that her gender directly hindered her application, and answered to my question on her experience as a woman as follows:

> Well, lately, because you are a woman… Hmmm. It's not that I was refused at some place, or that they did not want me or something. They did tell me that in my company, because it's IT, there would be a lot of men. At least twice as much as women. That's something I got told, yes.

I found that women from less prestigious universities often reflected on their gender in a similar way. It was a 'matter of fact,' and it existed, but it was not perceived to be a large barrier, and they mentioned that they hardly adapted their actions. One woman remarked, for example, that, "make-up [was] annoying and expensive," which led her to believe that there existed "different standards," but she did not address the question further. Female students from prestigious universities, however, were quick to reply that they adjusted their strategies according to their wishes to have careers. Two of them chose industries and companies they perceives as more friendly [*yasashii*] to women after initial negative experiences. Furthermore, a woman from another prestigious university expressed in detail how sexism remains very real in Japan, and how she felt she had to work harder than men. Erika, directly below, reflected in this respect less on her gender, but also heard of negative effects. I can carefully state that a higher education seems to give increased awareness of and leverage over issues that might arise from gender. For Ayame, the status quo may be less pertinent and harder to avoid. In this respect, my small sample contradicts Hamanaka (2018), who in the SSM data saw little variation over the importance of university prestige for first job attainment for female university graduates. Men never expressed gender as a constricting influence, but they may experience more pressure to attain a prestigious position if they wish to adhere to a breadwinner ideal.

To summarise, Ayame's narrative is indicative of how many students I interviewed found regular employment. At first, job is an almost abstract concept, but broad orientation via internships and *setsumeikai* serves to make the transition more real. Then, after applications in several directions, what is the desired workplace becomes clear as the application progresses, and the degree of success is negotiated on how this progress ultimately develops. The largest divide between students was observed over educational institute, and this was in turn often related to class background. The following two narratives of students from prestigious universities shows how the process is considerably more intensive at a different level, and how forms of capital play a decisive role.

7.2.2 A Professional Approach – How Erika's Hard Work Payed Off

I met Erika at an informal event at my university. Initially, she was reluctant to meet, because she was afraid my questions would be like another job interview. During the course of the interview Erika relaxed, and her case proved exemplary of what I called a 'professional' take on *shūkatsu*; students from prestigious universities (next to Erika three others) who had a clear goal in mind before they applied, and who were willing to invest considerable time and resources in order to achieve this goal. The result was an intense job-hunt which could lead to high rewards.

Erika was born in the Kanagawa countryside, close to the greater Tokyo urban area. Her parents divorced when she was born, and she was not much in touch with her biological father, who was a university graduate. Erika lived now with her mother, a two-year college graduate, and her stepfather, to whom her mother married two years prior to the interview. Although Erika said she was the first of her family to enter such a prestigious university, she mentioned that this was not always obvious. As a child who was, in her own words, "okay at learning," she managed to enter a very prestigious middle school. From middle up until high school, however, she was idle, so much so that her teacher at some point had "given up" on her [*sensei ga watashi no koto wo yameta kara*].

The change in Erika's attitude occurred when she decided to study in the US for two semesters between her second and third year at high school. Suddenly, she became interested in school again, and she wanted to improve her English, so she worked hard to make this year into a success. Upon her return to Japan she prolonged this attitude towards her university entrance exams, and she attended shadow education for six months in preparation. Erika was reluctant to share much about her background, but she did indicate that her high school in Tokyo was considered "rather good," and most students either continued to prestigious private universities or to institutes abroad. Fees were provided by her grandmother, and although her mother was busy with work, she did find time to make Erika's lunch *bentō*, and she supported her studies. The shift in attitude Erika displayed is noteworthy, but I heard a similar story from another female student from a high-class background. Despite initial inactivity, both she and Erika clearly possessed the knowhow and resources for good education from the outset. For personal reasons, however, both took longer to concentrate on their future. The story of Yoshio below shows how 'usually' education is settled from middle or high school onwards.

University provided Erika with the opportunity to again, as she said with a smile, "not study at all." Of course, it is not true that one can graduate without writing reports and cramming for tests, but it is not entirely uncommon for students from these large private institutes to spend considerable time on student club activities, sport groups [*bukatsu*], part-time jobs, or anything else beside their studies. Or, as I often heard in reference to the competitive entrance exam and relaxed student life: "it is hard to enter Japanese university, but easy to graduate." Erika predominantly put effort in long internships at companies, a kind of part-time jobs in clerical positions at offices throughout Tokyo. Erika stressed that this was done purely out of interest, and not to gain experience or to boost her resume. She did say, however, that the time spent did come in handy when she had to find employment because she felt she understood company atmospheres better.

Erika spoke clearly and with a certain drive about her *shūkatsu*. When I asked her what she considered to be the most important, she answered the following:

> I really thought long about what I wanted to do. If you don't do that, if you don't decide on where you want to go, in which direction, for those kind of people *shūkatsu* is very difficult. […] When I entered this university, I had to write an essay about what I wanted in life, and I got interviewed about my future. So, since then, I have been thinking about what I want to achieve. For people without this drive, this chance to think about what they like, yeah, it can be tough.

Erika's 'purpose-driven attitude' became clearer when I asked her at what point she decided that she wanted to work for one of the large advertising companies. She already came to this realisation when she was in the final year of middle school, and she even wrote it in her yearbook at the time. Although Erika's case is extreme, I found a similar 'long-term' thinking in the attitude of other students at prestigious universities. They often stated that their choices in life had led them to this moment at this prestigious institute, and that their future career would ideally be a continuation of their life so far. Success for these students was often limited to large or prestigious employers, and *shūkatsu* was the moment to "create the rest of one's life." This attitude could also cause considerable stress and anxiety, because the stakes are high, and because failure becomes the student's own responsibility. Ayame, on the contrary, stated that it was to find a workplace that she could enjoy, or, in her own words: "[*shūkatsu*] is to find your own job" [*jibun no shigoto wo sagasu to iu koto da to omoimasu*]. In other cases, it was just a simple hunt for a salary, and these students overall described their lifepaths as less purpose-driven, and more based on convenience or accessibility. This different attitude of and meaning attributed to *shūkatsu* was one of the most striking divides over university prestige.

Erika started her concrete preparations eleven months before her season started, so in May 2018, when she was a third-year student. She began with internships in other industries that she could find interesting, and one internship overseas specifically designed for self-analysis. Furthermore, she attended the prestigious Boston Career Forum in the US in November. Erika said that, although she was sure of advertising, she wanted to explore other options. Also, all these prestigious internships

and events had their own applications and rounds of interviews, and she stated that these hands-on experiences helped her to develop the skill to judge what companies wanted. Concretely, these preparations indicate a considerable investment of time and resources, and willingness to invest in her own job-hunting. Moreover, Erika clearly possessed the cultural capital needed to operate in these circles, and she knew when and how to invest.

Next to all preparations Erika did herself, she also received assistance from several crucial sources. Alumni connections were a first. According to Erika they were somewhat helpful to "show her face," but they were often little more than lunch dates. Instead, she stressed the importance of *kone*, an abbreviation of the English 'connection': people she knew personally in the companies she applied for, and that were willing to help her:

> I don't know about *OB*, but I did have some *kone*. I really knew some people. […] At middle school, during some project, I met some people from that company, and I saw them again for the first time in a long while, and we talked about my applications. […] You know, some others, they really get in via connection through actual employees. That happens. […] But for me, they did not do anything substantial like that.

Erika's divide between *OB* and her own network is relevant, because it hints at a declining function of 'formal' alumni networks, and at an increasing value of weak ties in one's social network (Granovetter 1977). Erika did not use her university's career-centre at all. Instead, she had access to contacts through her university and personal networks. Other students used the word *senpai* in this case, and not *kone*, but the relevance was similar: people who are not particularly close, but who are willing to help, and who have valuable information. For Erika, they checked her entry-sheets and helped her with some interview questions. She stressed, however, that she mostly prepared by herself. The narrative of Yoshio below is an example of more substantial assistance.

Applications started in April, and because she had a clear goal in mind, she only applied to three companies. This focus of attention is a fact she had in common with the other 'professional'

students. Erika studied for several hours a day between February and the end of May, and although this was indeed "busy," it made her feel prepared, and she was not very anxious. Erika received an offer from all three companies, which can be considered an extraordinary achievement. When I asked Erika if she, as a woman, was aware of any discrimination, she answered as follows:

> Hmmm, that really depends on the industry. But for me, well… A friend of mine, it went not so good at her group discussion, and she told me that they told her that they already had too many women, and that it could be difficult for her. But I don't suppose they bother the share of men. […] My company has no special policies or anything for women, and I did not really pay attention to it.

Erika stated that she wanted to keep working after marriage, but said that she personally did not experience her gender as a barrier. In the end, I found it difficult to tell if Erika prepared so much because she felt additional competition versus men, and if she chose her industry for related reasons. Nevertheless, she spent a lot of effort to convince her possible employers, and this hard work payed off. Another female respondent with a 'professional' narrative similar to Erika's expressed that she did feel that she had to work harder:

> Many Japanese women stay in the non-career track [*ippanshoku*], but I want to work in the career track [*sōgōshoku*], do things. […] So, you need some guarantee that you can keep working when you have large live events, like marriage, a family… I believe such policies are called 'sustain' policies? […] There are very little women that want to do what I do, and many transfer quickly, so that's, I guess, a tough job-hunt [*nanka, sugoi, sō shūkatsu suru no ha, shitsurai, no kana?*]

I found it difficult to infer Erika's background precisely because she was short in her answers on her home situation. The prestige of her middle and high school and the year abroad in the US, however, led me to hypothesise that she had access to considerable financial and cultural capital.

Erika's background, despite what could be considered as a hinder in family structure, allowed her to develop social capital in middle school and university, and cultural capital throughout her education. This culminated in a long and demanding job-hunt that she executed successfully. I found Erika's story therefore an example of how prestigious employment is in reach for students from prestigious universities. At the same time, the availability of the aforementioned forms of capital may differ considerably for different students of these universities, and students who are less willing or able to fully commit may be less successful. In my sample, all students from prestigious universities expressed that their job-hunt was a success, and most of them found jobs at prestigious employers. One student, however, was a *rōnin* when I interviewed him, and he briefly compared his successful *shūkatsu* with that of the year before. He was reluctant to share much information, but, according to him, it all came down to time and resources. This year he studied harder, put more effort in reaching out to alumni, and prepared better for the interviews. Overall, we can expect more students from these universities to not be able to access a workplace in a way similar to Erika, and incidentally this *rōnin* was from a lower-class background. The reach of my interviews, however, makes it difficult to discuss this topic further.

7.2.3 Club Connections – The Value of *Bukatsu* Capital for Yoshio

Six of the men I interviewed were proud members of the official sport teams of their university, and therefore engaged in what is commonly called *bukatsu*. All these men were generally far too busy to study; it is common for *bukatsu* members to train four hours a day six days a week. Nevertheless, they were all very successful in their *shūkatsu*. A first reason for this success is the 'culture' of *shūkatsu* they enter via their clubs: each year a cohort starts their job-hunt at a set time in set fashion, and when it is students their own turn they follow the examples set by these *senpai*, which makes for effective actions. Second, members combine their efforts. They look for companies together, help each other with their entry-sheets, and make digital tests with the entire team. Third, *bukatsu* seems to provide

members with the cultural capital necessary to succeed at Japanese companies. Members are used to hard work and teamwork, or, as one member put it, “we have been taught adult responsibility in the team, so I am not really afraid for responsibilities at work.” *Bukatsu* is a valued trait, and during interviews members are queried predominantly about their sport achievements. Finally, *bukatsu* gives access to a specific form of social capital: alumni who may act as a type of recruiters, and who are willing to help their former teammates extensively. The story of Yoshio is an example of how a *bukatsu senpai* can introduce opportunities otherwise missed.

Yoshio, a funny and social guy, was initially surprised that I wanted to interview him. He had, after all, finished his *shūkatsu* already in January, and under a month, so he was afraid that there was little he could tell me. In the end we did finish our interview in less than thirty minutes, but during this time he provided valuable insights on the role of *bukatsu*. Yoshio was born in Yokohama and still lived in a well-off neighbourhood of the city with his parents. His father graduated from the same university as Yoshio, but for “such a graduate” Yoshio remarked that his salary was “not very high.” His mother was a *tanki* graduate that quit her job to raise Yoshio after marriage.

Yoshio felt that, as an only child, his parents had the resources necessary to invest in his education. Supposedly, they also knew when and how to invest. Like most Japanese children, Yoshio attended the neighbourhood elementary school, but he also already went to shadow-education two years before he would continue to middle school. Yoshio commented that he had to study “extremely hard” to enter the prestigious middle school of the university where we held our interview, but ultimately, he was happy he studied when he did. Because, since then, he could ride what is commonly referred to in Japanese as ‘the escalator’: once a middle or high school affiliated with a prestigious university is entered, other entrance exams are no longer necessary. Yoshio could, instead of *juku*, focus on sports. His parents supported his activities, and although they guided Yoshio to this specific school, he commented that “any prestigious one would have been fine.”

Yoshio answered the following when I asked him about his initial motivation to study:

> In elementary school, that was really, because, of my parents? My parents told me to study, so I did. And when I got good results, my mother would be happy. So, you know, that was nice. And for the school after that, well, I wanted to be more than somebody who only studies. So, rather than Tokyo University, I thought that one of the large private ones could be good. And that's when I started thinking about these types of things, from [elementary school] onwards.

Although elementary schools are public and rarely stratified, one in four students in Yoshio's class went to one of the famous private schools in Tokyo, which hints at a neighbourhood effect. Yoshio undoubtedly had the intellectual capacities for his education, but what is crucial is that his environment nurtured these capacities. Parental choices structure the pathway in a system that stratifies from an early age to a large degree. Beyond raw capacity, a student needs to embody the knowhow of working hard at the right point in time.

Yoshio developed a keen interest for sport in middle and high school, and continued this passion at university, where he joined the handball *bukatsu*. He practiced for four hours every day and taught at a cram school as a part-time job, which meant that he had little time for his studies. In fact, when I asked him what exactly he majored in at university, he laughed and said that this was "the hardest question of the interview." The answer was something in the field of social sciences. *Bukatsu*, however, as mentioned before, supplies students with other advantages, and we will see that in Yoshio's case social capital played an especially significant role.

Yoshio mentioned that he wanted to work for one of the prestigious companies. He defined job-hunting as follows:

> It is not really about finding a company, it is about how you want to live, what kind of person you want to be, and how you want to realise that. It is the most decisive moment in your life. […] Your first career is so important, and I'm afraid that, if you fail

> now, even if you have the skills, you will fail in the future as well. That's why you got to give it your all, so that you can succeed.

Despite Yoshio's strong goal-oriented attitude, which was rather typical from students of his university, he expressed with some regret that, due to his busy sport activities, he did not have time for internships, and was only able to start in November. Because university life was spent with his teammates, so was their job-hunt, and they started with visits to club alumni [*bukatsu ha bukatsu. Minna de au. […] Minna de OB ni iku toki ha, issho ni iku kara*].

Yoshio still expressed some amazement at the fact that he was able to receive an offer the following January. Most people who apply to large broadcasting corporations start their process in summer with internships that act as de facto first rounds of eliminations. Yoshio, however, was barely in time to hand in the entry-sheets for three firms. Because the application started in December, Yoshio felt quite relaxed. If he were to fail, he could still apply to other industries in April. The initial idea to apply to these companies came from a *bukatsu senpai* who already worked at the company where Yoshio would eventually be hired. This person also helped him with all his preparations:

> First, this [*senpai*] looked at my entry-sheet again and again. […] And he told me, at this company, they find this kind of things important, you should present your experiences so and so, etc. He really gave me a lot of advice.

Because of the help from this *senpai* Yoshio was able to pass the seven rounds of tests and interviews. Nevertheless, January, the month of the actual application, was extremely busy. Yoshio spend a lot of time cramming interview questions and television guides (because, apparently, one of the tests included knowing which shows are broadcasted on, say, Wednesday evenings). He could not afford to skip his *bukatsu* training, but he did not make it to regular classes often. With respect to the industry, Yoshio finally remarked that he was the kind of person who "rarely watches television, if ever," but he was provided the opportunity to work in the sports department after entrance.

Yoshio stated that he had been very lucky. Without his *senpai* he would not have known about this offer in the first place, and it would have been impossible to achieve such a result in such a short amount of time. Alumni relations did not offer Yoshio direct entrance to the firm; he still had to pass a selective process. At the same time, his *bukatsu senpai* did help tremendously, and we may expect the company to know who they are hiring. Moreover, hard work was not at all alien to Yoshio. From an early age he knew he had to peak at the right moment, and his *bukatsu* taught him the value of huge amounts of efforts for results. Therefore, next to only social capital, it is these forms of cultural capital that allowed Yoshio to succeed. Overall, he remarked that the interviews went fine because he "from an early age knew how to talk to adults." This highlights an awareness of the necessary social interaction.

Bukatsu remains a positive influence on job-hunting because of the social and cultural capital it offers, and because of the values it conveys to employers. Some variation over university level exists; students from a less prestigious university noted that they less often applied directly to companies were former teammates were working. Students engaged in baseball *bukatsu* in the university in western Tokyo did lean heavily on their *senpai*, and one even found work directly through his baseball capacities. *OB* connections overall seem to exist, and although it is hard to argue that *senpai* act as direct recruiters like they did in the eighties, they do offer opportunities and give valuable information. An investment in sport at university, rather than studies, still seems to pay off for many male students.

Female *bukatsu* students do exist, but I only interviewed one, a woman who did cheerleading at the same university as Yoshio. Although she mentioned that it was a prominent topic in her interviews, and that she felt it had been valuable experience, she did not indicate that an abundance of alumni helped her with her *shūkatsu*. For women, therefore, the returns may be less direct. Moreover, this respondent guessed that companies saw the values *bukatsu* conveyed as masculine rather than feminine: muscularity and hard work suited, according to her, a male ideal, and not a female one. The value of *bukatsu* is therefore positional and seemingly dependent on gender.

7.2.4 A Reluctant Search – Takehiro's Brokered *Shūkatsu*

Takehiro was one of the last students who I interviewed at the same university as Ayame, and his narrative provided insight on how the career-centre can act as a safety-net for students whose *shūkatsu* is at start unsuccessful. Three other students from this university, one man and two women, have similar stories, and they indicated how the university can arrange employment. Initially, they were not particularly excited to start *shūkatsu*, and they expressed mixed feelings about working in general. They felt, however, 'forced' to start, either by their surroundings or directly by a parent or teacher, and then did so rather chaotic, sometimes without a clear plan, and all without any notable source of support. This led to failure, after which these students withdrew from *shūkatsu*. Two students, including Takehiro, were saved by university mediation. One other student found a recruiter that brokered his job-hunt. The final student did not receive any assistance, and she had not yet found employment in October. I argue, therefore, that for some students official support remains a crucial factor.

Takehiro's family moved to Kanagawa from Nagoya when he was four. The act that set Takehiro apart from the other students was that he was Christian. In Japan, religion hardly seems a fact of importance for most young people, but Takehiro mentioned his father was a priest, and he and his family lived next to the church and practiced their religion actively. His father also taught at a local school, and Takehiro stated that he was busy to provide for the family. Takehiro's mother was a graduate from a less prestigious university, and she worked as a cook at a facility for the elderly.

Takehiro's educational trajectory was 'classic' up until his high school: he attended local public elementary and middle schools and did not deal with any entrance examinations. This changed when Takehiro had to prepare for high school tests; his parents sent him to *juku* the last two years of middle school, and he attempted to enter the public high school. To his regret, he failed to pass the exam, and instead he went to a private school in the western outskirts of Tokyo. From high school onwards,

Takehiro's parents advised him to take out a student loan. Although they were able to pay for his cram school, they could not provide higher education for their three children without additional resources. The combination of school tuition and *juku* is expensive, especially when multiple children are involved.

Takehiro expressed content for his high school, and he was grateful for the help his parents offered him. Despite a demanding daily routine, they were able to provide for three children, and his mother prepared his school lunches and conscientiously supported his school club activities. When the end of high school approached, Takehiro decided that he wanted to continue to university. He did not see much in vocational school and working after high school hardly seemed an option. Also, he mentioned an interest in social issues, and wanted to study those further. Again, he went to shadow education, this time to prepare for the university exams, but he mainly decided on the present university because access from his high school was "convenient."

Takehiro said that he studied at university, but not particularly much. Part of the reason was that he had to work three, four times a week next to his studies. Neither did he join any circle, but he went to some Christian student groups the first two years at university. Such a more withdrawn attitude from student life was, as mentioned above, more common for students from this university. Takehiro said he did put effort in English, and he visited the US for several weeks on a short exchange program.

Takehiro's answer on how he started *shūkatsu* expressed his reluctance to engage in the process:

> I began *shūkatsu* when I was a third-year student, but until then never even thought about *shūkatsu*. Actually, I could not envision myself doing job-hunting. […] I went to *setsumeikai*, but I still did not see myself as 'working in society.'

Nevertheless, Takehiro started quite on time, in the summer of his third year. During that period, he visited a large career event, went to *setsumeikai*, and did no less than six different internships. Takehiro

kept busy, but his process lacked a structured approach, and although he had an idea, he seemed not very motivated to fully pursue it. He wanted to work as a system engineer, and even though his shortage in formal training did not have to be a real barrier, he was surprised when he found out during his internships that the job would entail considerable programming and mathematics, and that he would have to work hard to acquire the necessary skills. Takehiro nevertheless persisted and applied to an odd-ten companies but failed most of those in the entry-sheet or test rounds. The three companies he did manage to secure interviews with he failed in the first round, because, in his words, he was "unable to adequately express why he wanted to work there" [*jibun no shibō dōki ga hakkiri ienakute, sono koto de nanka otosareta ne*].

The start of Takehiro's *shūkatsu* and the structure of his search are noteworthy because they hint at the existence of a, what he called, university 'atmosphere' [*fun'iki*]:

> In the end, the university atmosphere, it became 'that' atmosphere? The other students, my friends as well, they all became absorbed in this *shūshoku katsudō* atmosphere. I did not really have that feeling, but when I experienced that atmosphere at school, and with my friends, I told myself, "well, I guess I have to start too." […] I was really influenced by [that atmosphere]. And, like I said before, I really did not have an image of myself working in society. It just did not come up. So, to create that image, I started visiting *setsumeikai*.

The reason for this change in atmosphere can in part be attributed to university courses on job-hunting, and *setsumeikai* hosted by the career-centre. From the third year onwards, therefore, the university tries to encourage students to start their *shūkatsu*. Takehiro stated that this was the reason that he began *shūkatsu* in the first place. His friends, however, seemed more eager to start, and according to Takehiro they had a clearer sense of direction

What set Takehiro and the other students who failed their initial *shūkatsu* apart was not predominantly their less-focussed process, or even their lack of direction. Other students expressed

similar emotions at the start of their job-hunt, but they were able to mediate these difficulties as their *shūkatsu* progressed. Rather, I found that it was because they did their orientation and applications completely alone. Takehiro wrote his entry-sheets by himself, studied for tests alone, and went to interviews without consulting the career-centre. Another woman stated that, initially, she thought that job-hunting was a "battle" she had to "fight alone" [*shūshoku ha, hitori deha nain desu ka? Kodokuna tatakai, to omotte imashita*]. All students arguably go through the process alone, research after their own interests, and prepare by themselves, but most of them also received considerable assistance. Moreover, other students stated that support was only natural. Takehiro arguably lacked social connections to assist him, but also did not reach out to his career-centre. His wish to become a system engineer was perhaps not well-formulated at start, but he did attend many internships. The complete absence of resources, however, hindered his application, and he failed. Or, in his words: "I realised system engineering would be too difficult."

Towards the end of May Takehiro became somewhat anxious. His friends succeeded left and right, but he was still stuck without work. His university got wind of his situation and advised him to attend a *setsumeikai* of a food company hosted by the career-centre. Because he found the presentation somewhat interesting he wrote his phone number on an attendance sheet without giving it much thought. The company called him the next day and asked him if he would not like to try the application. The day after he had his first interview, the one after that his final one, and he received an offer the same evening. When I asked him if he considered his *shūkatsu* a success, Takehiro did not reply with the word 'success' [*seikō*] but instead stated that, according to him, his job-hunting was now finished [*ma, sono naitei de, shūshoku owarō kana to omoimashita*].

Takehiro's lifepath is first of all affected by a lack of financial capital. Student loans are a burden, and because of his demanding part-time job Takehiro had less time to study or to engage in university activities. Despite this hindrance, Takehiro saw university as the sole option. His casual ascend to university is interesting, because it indicated that continuation to university is almost straightforward.

Other students, including children of high school graduates, also saw university as "natural," and did not envision themselves as working after high school. In many cases, this educational expansion induced attitude change occurred within the period of a single generation.

To capitalise on this education, however, a somewhat proactive approach is required. Takehiro did start *shūkatsu* as he is essentially supposed to: by himself and in accordance with his own wishes. Paradoxically, this puts him at a disadvantage in comparison with other students, who almost all received considerable amounts of support. Ayame had perhaps similar gaps in her knowledge, but she was able to transcend these with help of the career-centre. Takehiro did not reach out to the career-centre, and perhaps this must be seen in the overall 'absence' of motivation Takehiro demonstrated. He was not driven from the outset, and the internships only made him doubt about his one choice, instead of making him eager to explore other options. Takehiro's failure was picked up by the career-centre, and although the search was not directly mediated, it was brokered to some degree. For students from less prestigious universities and from a lower-class background, this function can have substantial value. The failure to find initial employment, however, cannot simply be attributed to background or university. Attitude and individual aspects are of considerable importance.

I sympathised with Takehiro because his reflection on job-hunting in Japan bordered on the philosophical: "why," he asked me, "[did] *shūkatsu* have to be so collective in Japan?" He felt he had little personal choice, which made him unhappy, and at some point, almost depressed. Now that it was finished, he felt better. Although Takehiro did not seem overly excited about his employer, he stated that he would do his best at his new job. He was also determined to keep looking for chances to become a system engineer.

8. Conclusion

The present study aimed to explore the conditions that structure the transition from universities to workplaces in contemporary Japan. I argue first that the transition is not a fixed entity, but an evolving process: from a mediated affair *shūkatsu* has become increasingly the responsibility of students themselves. The various narratives are testimony of the fact that students develop their own wishes and strategies, and their job-hunt is a lengthy and meaningful conclusion to university life. Intervening tendencies, however, still play a part in the transition. *Senpai* can act as a type of recruiters at prestigious universities. Moreover, the career-centre at less prestigious universities can provide direct and indirect support. In other words, *shūkatsu* in Japan has not simply shifted from institutional to individual; some types of mediation seem to persist.

The life-history approach gave an insight in how class background influences manifest in childhood. Yoshio's narrative exhibits the effect of family choices: his parents encouraged his studies and sent him to *juku* at an early age, and Yoshio described his trajectory in terms of 'purpose' and 'direction.' Erika, who started thinking about employers from middle school, shared this goal-oriented attribute with Yoshio. Both students furthermore talked about their job-hunt in similar 'purposeful' terms, which demonstrated an overall sense of agency. For Ayame and Takehiro, however, stratification was only tangible from high school onwards. And, instead of 'purpose,' 'accessibility' was found to be a leading principle, also partly in how they structured their *shūkatsu*. The narrative of Takehiro moreover validates that financial capital remains a decisive element in Japan.

University background was the attribute that most influenced the job-hunting of students. I argue, therefore, that the value of education in labour market entry goes beyond the simple credential; the knowhow and contacts an institute may offer are of paramount importance. A first striking divide, noted above, was in attitude: *shūkatsu* was a 'personal project' in the prestigious universities, which was for many students a continuation of their background values, while at less prestigious universities job-hunting had more the characteristic of a simple 'access' to the labour market. Furthermore,

prestigious universities offer a valuable environment of knowhow and network resources that students can attain, and they expressed considerable agency in the pursuit of these forms of capital. Students from less prestigious universities, contrarily, could rely less on capital at their universities, and for them the career-centre was a valuable point of contact. These differences in the narratives above offer some explanation as to why *shūkatsu* varies so over university level, and why students from prestigious universities spend more time and effort on their job-hunting.

Gender remains a dominant issue. All women stated that some industries were best avoided, and many recounted some negative experiences. Tsutsui (2010) already noted how women must work harder if they wish to attain similar positions as men. In this respect, the women from prestigious universities expressed again more agency. Erika was an example of how hard work can be rewarded. Other female students from prestigious universities instead chose specific industries or companies. Ayame, on the other hand, was less explicit in her description of gender constraints, and she did not indicate that she actively adapted her strategy. A possible explanation for this discrepancy is that women from prestigious universities feel more able to do so, and they may overall be more determined, on basis of their credential, to achieve a high status in the labour market. Additional research on the differences in awareness and consequent strategies of female students is necessary.

The results have two implications for further studies on the university-to-work transition. Firstly, as mentioned above, it advocates a positional perspective on education. Through a process of position-taking high-class students can keep their relative advantage at prestigious institutes, predominantly because these offer valuable cultural and network resources. Second, the role of mediation is still relevant, albeit in multiple forms. At prestigious universities, alumni networks have yielded to *senpai* or *kone*, and these can now greatly influence job-hunting. At less prestigious universities the career-centre can act directly as broker, but attention should also be turned towards the opaque 'advice-function' of these institutes. The questions are how many students truly depend on such advice, and to what degree it influences their *shūkatsu*.

The reach of the research method demands that we are moderate in claims to generalisation. The framework is conditional, students come from a specific context, and the universities I visited are not comparable to all 'more' or 'less' prestigious institutes. Nevertheless, the narratives contribute to our understanding of the functioning of class background and educational institute in contemporary Japan. All students engage in a demanding process, but how they handle that process depends on their position, resources, strategy, and broad contingent factors. A club contact, for example, may suddenly lead to new opportunities, and ways to employment are formulated throughout the process. *Shūshoku katsudō* is, in conclusion, not a singular activity. Instead, it is a multitude of options and possibilities, and ultimately students must navigate their own pathways.

Bibliography

Amano, Ikuo. 1997. 'Structural Changes in Japan's Higher Education System-from a Planning to a Market Model'. *Higher Education* 34 (2): 125–39.

Bertaux, Daniel. 1990. 'Oral History Approaches to an International Social Movement'. *Comparative Methodology, London: Sage*, 158–70.

———. 2010. *Le Récit de Vie: L'enquête et ses Méthodes*. 3ème éd. Paris: Colin.

Bertaux, Daniel, and Paul Thompson. 2007. *Pathways to Social Class: A Qualitative Approach to Social Mobility*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Borovoy, Amy. 2010. 'What Color Is Your Parachute? The Post-Degree Society'. In *Social Class in Contemporary Japan: Structure, Sorting and Strategies*, by Hiroshi Ishida and David H. Slater, 188–212. London: Routledge.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1979. *La Distinction: Critique Sociale du Jugement*. Paris: Les Éd. de Minuit.

Bourdieu, Pierre, and Jean-Claude Passeron. 1964. *Les Héritiers: Les Étudiants et la Culture*. Paris: Les Éd. de Minuit.

———. 1970. *La Reproduction: Éléments pour une Théorie du Système d'Enseignement*. Paris: Les Éd. de Minuit.

Brinton, Mary. 1993. *Women and the Economic Miracle: Gender and Work in Postwar Japan*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

———. 2010. *Lost in Transition: Youth, Work, and Instability in Postindustrial Japan*. Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Brinton, Mary, and Takehiko Kariya. 1998. 'Institutional Embeddedness in Japanese Labor Markets'. In *The New Institutionalism in Sociology*, by Mary Brinton and Victor Nee, 181–207. New York, NY: Russel Sage Foundation.

Bryman, Alan. 2012. *Social Research Methods*. 4th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Charmaz, Kathy. 2006. *Constructing Grounded Theory*. London: Sage Publications.

Chiavacci, David. 2005. 'Transition from University to Work under Transformation: The Changing Role of Institutional and Alumni Networks in Contemporary Japan'. *Social Science Japan Journal* 8 (1): 19–41.

———. 2008. 'From Class Struggle to General Middle-Class Society to Divided Society: Societal Models of Inequality in Postwar Japan'. *Social Science Japan Journal* 11 (1): 5–27.

e-Stat, (Government Comprehensive Statistic Administration). 2020. '"Gakkō Kihon Chōsa, Nenji Tōkei: Shingakuritsu (1948 nen-)" (Annual School Survey, Yearly Statistics: School Advancement Rate (from 1948))'. https://www.e-stat.go.jp/dbview?sid=0003147040. 8 July 2020.

Entrich, Steve R. 2017. *Shadow Education and Social Inequalities in Japan: Evolving Patterns and Conceptual Implications*. New York, NY: Springer.

Estevez-Abe, Margarita, Torben Iversen, and David Soskice. 2001. 'Social Protection and the Formation of Skills: A Reinterpretation of the Welfare State'. In *Varieties of Capitalism: The Institutional Foundations of Comparative Advantage*, by Peter A. Hall and David Soskice, 145–83. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Flyvbjerg, Bent. 2006. ‘Five Misunderstandings about Case-Study Research’. *Qualitative Inquiry* 12 (2): 219–45.

Fujihara, Sho, and Hiroshi Ishida. 2016. ‘The Absolute and Relative Values of Education and the Inequality of Educational Opportunity: Trends in Access to Education in Postwar Japan’. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility* 43: 25–37.

Fukui, Yasutaka. 2015. ‘“Hiseiki Koyō kara Seiki Koyō he no Idō ni Okeru Kigyō Kibokan Kakusa” (Changes in Transfer from Non-Regular to Regular Employment Depending on Firm-Size)’. *‘Shakaigaku Hyōron’ (Japanese Sociological Review)* 66 (1): 73–88.

Genda, Yūji. 2006. *A Nagging Sense of Job Insecurity: The New Reality Facing Japanese Youth*. Tokyo: International House of Japan.

Glaser, Barney G., and Anselm L. Strauss. 2009. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. 4th ed. New Brunswick: Aldine.

Granovetter, Mark S. 1977. ‘The Strength of Weak Ties’. In *Social Networks*, 347–67. Academic Press.

Hamamoto, Shinichi. 2018. ‘“Kyōikukikai Fubyōdō Kōzō no naka no Chūgakkō: Kokushiritsu Chūgakkō Shingaku no Kakusa to Gakureki Tassei Kōka” (Qualitative Differences in Junior High School Selection: The Effects of Inequality on Educational Attainment)’. Edited by Kazuhisa Furuta. *2015 SSM Survey Research Group* 2015 SSM Survey Report 4 (Education 1): 141–53.

Hamanaka, Yoshitaka. 2010. ‘'1990 Nendai Ikō no Daisotsu Rōdōshijō: Shūshoku Katsudō no San Jiten Hikaku’ (The Labour Market for University Graduates Post-1990: A Comparison of Job-Hunting at Three Different Moments)’. In *‘Daisotsu Shūshoku no Shakaigaku: Dēta Kara Miru Henka’ (The Sociology of Transition from University to Work: Empirical Studies of the Changing Mechanisms in Contemporary Japan)*, by Takehiko Kariya and Yuki Honda, 87–106. Tokyo: Tokyo University Press.

———. 2018. ‘“Kōgakurekika Shakai ni Okeru Kyōikukikai Kakusa no Keisei” (Unequal Educational Opportunity in an Era of Higher Education Popularization)’. Edited by Wataru Nakazawa. *2015 SSM Survey Research Group* 2015 SSM Survey Research Report 5 (Education 2): 21–36.

Hirasawa, Kazushi. 2005. ‘“Daigaku kara Shokugyō he no Ikō ni kan suru Shakaigakuteki Kenkyū no Kyōteki Kadai” (Contemporary Issues in Sociological Studies of the University-to-Work Transition)’. *‘Nihon Rōdō Kenkyū Zasshi’ (Japan Labor Research Magazin)* 542: 29–37.

———. 2010. ‘“Daigaku Shūshoku Kikai ni kan suru Shokasetsu no Kentō” (The Investigation of Several Hypotheses in Relation to University-to-Work Opportunities)’. In *‘Daisotsu Shūshoku no Shakaigaku: Dēta Kara Miru Henka’ (The Sociology of Transition from University to Work: Empirical Studies of the Changing Mechanisms in Contemporary Japan)*, by Takehiko Kariya and Yuki Honda, 61–85. Tokyo: Tokyo University Press.

Honda, Yuki. 2005. ‘“Freeters”: Young Atypical Workers in Japan’. *Japan Labor Review* 2 (3): 5–25.

———. 2010. ‘'Nihon no Daisotsu Shūshoku no Tokushusei wo Toinaosu: QOL Mondai ni Chakumoku Shite’ (Questioning the Particularities of the Japanese University to Work Transition: A Focus on the QOL Problem)’. In *‘Daisotsu Shūshoku no Shakaigaku: Dēta Kara Miru Henka’ (The Sociology of Transition from University to Work: Empirical Studies of the Changing Mechanisms in Contemporary Japan)*, by Takehiko Kariya and Yuki Honda, 27–59.

Husserl, Edmund. 2009. *Ideen Zu Einer Reinen Phänomenologie und Phänomenologischen Philosophie, 1en Buch: Allgemeine Einführung in die Reine Phänomenologie*. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag.

Ishida, Hiroshi. 1998. 'Educational Credentials and Labour-Market Entry Outcomes in Japan'. In *From School to Work: A Comparative Study of Educational Qualifications and Occupational Destinations*, 287–309. Clarendon Press Oxford.

———. 2010. 'Does Class Matter in Japan? Demographics of Class Structure and Class Mobility from a Comparative Perspective'. In *Social Class in Contemporary Japan: Structures, Sorting and Strategies*, by Hiroshi Ishida and David H. Slater, 51–74. London: Routledge.

———. 2011. 'Transition from School to Work among Japanese Youth'. *University of Tokyo Institute of Social Science Panel Survey* 49: 1–32.

———. 2018. 'Long-Term Trends in Intergenerational Class Mobility in Japan'. Edited by Takashi Yoshida. *2015 SSM Survey Research Group* 2015 SSM Survey Report 3 (Social Mobility and Health): 41–64.

Ishida, Hiroshi, and Satoshi Miwa. 2009. '"Kaizō Idō kara Mita Nihon Shakai: Chōkiteki Suusei to Kokusai Hikaku" (Intergenerational Class Mobility and Japanese Society: Long-Term Trends and an International Comparison)'. *'Shakaigaku Hyōron' (Japanese Sociological Review)* 59 (4): 648–62.

Ishida, Hiroshi, and David H. Slater, eds. 2011. *Social Class in Contemporary Japan: Structures, Sorting and Strategies*. 1. issued in paperback. The Nissan Institute/Routledge Japanese Studies Series. London: Routledge.

Kagawa, Mei. 2010. '"Jiko Bunseki wo Bunseki Suru: Shūshoku Jōhōshi ni Miru sono Henyō Katei" (An Analysis of Self-Analysis: Changes in its Use in Job-Hunting Magazines)'. In *'Daisotsu Shūshoku no Shakaigaku: Dēta Kara Miru Henka' (The Sociology of Transition from University to Work: Empirical Studies of the Changing Mechanisms in Contemporary Japan)*, by Takehiko Kariya and Yuki Honda, 171–97. Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press.

Kariya, Takehiko. 1998. *From High School and College to Work in Japan: Meritocracy through Institutional and Semi-Institutional Linkages*. *From School to Work: A Comparative Study of Educational Qualifications and Occupational Destinations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

———. 2010a. '"Daisotsu Shūshoku no Nani ga Mondai Nanoka: Rekishiteki/Rironteki Kentō" (What Is Exactly the Problem in the University to Work Transition? A Historical and Theoretical Examination)'. In *'Daisotsu Shūshoku no Shakaigaku: Dēta Kara Miru Henka' (The Sociology of Transition from University to Work: Empirical Studies of the Changing Mechanisms in Contemporary Japan)*, by Takehiko Kariya and Yuki Honda, 1–26. Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press.

———. 2010b. 'From Credential Society to "Learning Capital" Society: A Rearticulation of Class Formation in Japanese Education and Society'. In *Social Class in Contemporary Japan: Structures, Sorting and Strategies*, by Hiroshi Ishida and David H. Slater, 105–31. London: Routledge.

———. 2011. 'Credential Inflation and Employment in "Universal" Higher Education: Enrolment, Expansion and (in)Equity via Privatisation in Japan'. *Journal of Education and Work* 24 (1–2): 69–94.

Kariya, Takehiko, and Yuki Honda. 2010. *'Daisotsu Shūshoku no Shakaigaku: Dēta Kara Miru Henka' (The Sociology of Transition from University to Work: Empirical Studies of the Changing Mechanisms in Contemporary Japan)*. Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press.

Katase, Kazuo, and Kazushi Hirasawa. 2008. 'Shōshika to Kyōiku Tōshi・Kyōiku Tassei (The Declining Birthrate and Educational Investment and Achievement)'. *'Kyōiku Shakaigaku Kenkyū' (The Journal of Educational Sociology)* 82: 43–59.

Kondo, Ayako. 2007. 'Does the First Job Really Matter? State Dependency in Employment Status in Japan'. *Journal of the Japanese and International Economies* 21 (3): 379–402.

Kosugi, Reiko. 2007. *'Daigaku no Shūshoku to Kyaria: 「Futsū」 no Shūkatsu・Kobetsu no Shien' (University Student Job-hunting and Careers: "Normal" Job-hunting/Individual Support)*. Tokyo: Keisō Shobō.

———. 2010. *'Wakamono to Shoki Kyaria: "Hi Tenkei" kara no Shuppatsu no tame ni' (The Youth and Early Career: The "Non-Exemplary" Case)*. Tokyo: Keisō Shobō.

Lane, Jeremy F. 2000. *Pierre Bourdieu: A Critical Introduction*. London: Pluto Press.

Matsuoka, Ryoji. 2018. '"Kyōikukakusa no Sūsei: Shusshinchiiki/Shusshinkaisō to Saishūgakureki no Kanren" (Trends in Postwar Japan's Educational Inequalities: Assessing Relationships between Ascriptive Characteristics and Educational Attainments)'. Edited by Kazuhisa Furuta. *2015 SSM Survey Research Group* 2015 SSM Survey Report 4 (Education 1): 187–223.

MEXT, (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology-Japan). 2019a. '"Reiwa Motonendo Gakkō Kihon Chōsa: (Kakuteichi) no Happyō ni Tsuite" (Basic Statistics on School Education 2019: Presentation (of the Definition Values))'. Tokyo: MEXT.

———. 2019b. '"Reiwa Motonendo Gakkō Kihon Chōsa Kekka no Gaiyō 2: Kō nado Kyōiku Kikan" (Outline of 2019 Results of Basic Statistics of School Education 2: Chances in Higher Education)'. Tokyo: MEXT.

Miles, Matthew B., A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña. 2020. *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*. Fourth edition. Los Angeles: SAGE.

Moriguchi, Chiaki, and Hiroshi Ono. 2006. 'Japanese Lifetime Employment: A Century's Perspective'. In *Institutional Change in Japan*, by Magnus Blomström and Sumner La Croix, 164–88. New York, NY: Routledge.

Müller, Walter, and Yossi Shavit. 1998. 'The Institutional Embeddedness of the Stratification Process: A Comparative Study of Qualifications and Occupations in Thirteen Countries'. In *From School to Work: A Comparative Study of Educational Qualifications and Occupational Destinations*, by Yossi Shavit and Walter Müller, 1–48. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Nakamura, T. 2010. '"'OB/OG Hōmon' to ha Nan Datta no ka: 90 Nendai Shoki no Daisotsu Shūshoku to Gendai" (What Were Alumni Networks? Job-Hunting in the Early 90s and Now)'. In *'Daisotsu Shūshoku No Shakaigaku: Dēta Kara Miru Henka' (The Sociology of Transition from University to Work: Empirical Studies of the Changing Mechanisms in Contemporary Japan)*, by Takehiko Kariya and Yuki Honda, 151–69.

Nakazawa, Wataru. 2018. '"Nihon no Kyōikusentaku ni Okeru EMI (Effectively Maintained Inequality) Kasetsu no Kenshō" (Validity of the EMI (Effectively Maintained Inequality) Hypothesis in Japan)'. Edited by Wataru Nakazawa. *2015 SSM Survey Research Group* 2015 SSM Survey Research Report 5 (Education 2): 113–34.

Nishimaru, Ryoichi. 2018. '"Secchisha Shubetsu wo Kōryu Shita Kōkōshingaku to Gakugyōseiseki no Kankei: Seibetsu to Shusshinkaisō ni Chakumoku Shite" (The Relationship between High School Sector and Academic Performance: A Focus on Gender and Social Class)'. Edited by Kazuhisa Furuta. *2015 SSM Survey Research Group* 2015 SSM Survey Report 4 (Education 1): 155–68.

Ochiai, Emiko. 1997. *The Japanese Family System in Transition: A Sociological Analysis of Family Change in Postwar Japan*. Tokyo: LTCB International Library Foundation.

Ogasawara, Yuko. 1998. *Office Ladies and Salaried Men: Power, Gender, and Work in Japanese Companies*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Ogawa, Katsunori. 2018. '"Kōgakurekika to Gakkōkeiyu no Shūshoku No Sūsei" (Higher Education Expansion and the Trend in School-Mediated Transition to Work in Japan)'. Edited by Yusuke Sakaguchi. *2015 SSM Survey Research Group* 2015 SSM Survey Report 6 (Labor Market 1): 103–18.

Oshima, S. 2010. '"Daigaku Shūshokubu no Assen Kinō to sono Kōka" (University Job-Hunting Assist Offices and Their Functions)'. In *'Daisotsu Shūshoku no Shakaigaku: Dēta Kara Miru Henka' (The Sociology of Transition from University to Work: Empirical Studies of the Changing Mechanisms in Contemporary Japan)*, by Takehiko Kariya and Yuki Honda, 151–70. Tokyo: Tokyo University Press.

Oyama, Osamu. 2010. '"Naze Kigyō no Saiyōkijun ha Fumeikaku ni Naru no Ka: Daisotsu Jimukei Sōgōshoku no Mensetsu ni Chakumoku Shite" (Why Have Firm Hiring Process Have Become Less Clear? A Focus on the Hiring of University Graduates for Office Positions)'. In *'Daisotsu Shūshoku no Shakaigaku: Dēta Kara Miru Henka' (The Sociology of Transition from University to Work: Empirical Studies of the Changing Mechanisms in Contemporary Japan)*, by Takehiko Kariya and Yuki Honda, 199–222. Tokyo: Tokyo University Press.

Payne, Geoff, and Malcolm Williams. 2005. 'Generalization in Qualitative Research'. *Sociology* 39 (2): 295–314.

Recruit Works. 2019. '"Dai 36 Kai Wākusu Daisotsu Kyūjinbairitsu Chōsa (2020 Nen Sotsu)" (The 36th WORKS Job-Opening to Application Ratio Survey (2020 Graduates))'. Tokyo: Recruit Works.

Rosenbaum, James E., and Takehiko Kariya. 1998. 'From High School to Work'. *Education and Training in Japan* 3 (6): 94.

Sakaguchi, Yusuke. 2018. 'Whose Risk of Non-Regular Employment at Labor Market Entry Has Increased in Japan?' Edited by Yusuke Sakaguchi. *2015 SSM Survey Research Group* 2015 SSM Survey Report 6 (Labor Market 1): 83–102.

Schütz, Alfred. 1971. *Das Problem der Sozialen Wirklichkeit*. Translated by Benita Luckmann and Richard Grathoff. Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff.

Shavit, Yossi, and Hans-Peter Blossfeld. 1993. *Persistent Inequality: Changing Educational Attainment in Thirteen Countries. Social Inequality Series.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Shavit, Yossi, and Walter Müller, eds. 1998. *From School to Work: A Comparative Study of Educational Qualifications and Occupational Destinations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Slater, David H. 2010. 'The "New Working Class" of Urban Japan: Socialization and Contradiction from Middle School to the Labor Market'. In *Social Class in Contemporary Japan: Structures, Sorting and Strategies*, by Hiroshi Ishida and David H. Slater, 155–87. London: Routledge.

Strauss, Anselm L., and Juliet M. Corbin. 1998. *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Tan, Jin. 2010. 'Grounded Theory in Practice: Issues and Discussion for New Qualitative Researchers'. *Journal of Documentation* 66 (1): 93–112.

Thompson, Paul, and Joanna Bornat. 2017. *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*. Fourth ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Thurow, Lester C. 1975. *Generating Inequality*. New York, NY: Basic books.

Tobishima, Shuji. 2018. '"Kyikukitai to Kyōiku Tassei no Fuicchi Kara Mita Daigaku Shingakukikai no Kakusa" (Discrepancies between Educational Expectation and Educational Attainment, and Unequal Access to Universities in Japan)'. Edited by Kazuhisa Furuta. *2015 SSM Survey Research Group* 2015 SSM Survey Report 4 (Education 1): 169–86.

Tohyama, Hironori. 2013. ‘Labor and Financial-Market Risks and Welfare Spending: A Comparative Study with a Special Emphasis on Japan’. In *Diversity and Transformations of Asian Capitalisms*, by Robert Boyer, Hiroyasu Uemura, and Akinori Isogai, 98–115. New York, NY: Routledge.

Toyonaga, Kohei. 2018. ‘“Gakureki ga Kyaria ni Motarasu Eikyō ha Kawatta Ka?: Shoshoku/Rishoku/Kanrishoku Ikō ni Tai Suru Gakureki Kōka no Sūsei Bunseki” (Have the Effects of Educational Credentials Changed? A Trend Analysis of the Impact of Education on First Job Attainment, Job Separation, and Managerial Position Promotion)’. Edited by Wataru Nakazawa. *2015 SSM Survey Research Group* 2015 SSM Survey Report 5 (Education 2): 191–218.

Tsutsui, Miki. 2010. ‘“Chūken Joshi Daisei no Shūshoku Katsudō Purosesu: Katsudō Kikan to Naitei Kakutoku Jiki no Kitei Yōin” (The Job-Hunting Process of Students from a Mid-Size Girls University: Factors That Determine the Duration of Job-Hunting and Offer Acquisition)’. In *‘Daisotsu Shūshoku no Shakaigaku: Dēta Kara Miru Henka’ (The Sociology of Transition from University to Work: Empirical Studies of the Changing Mechanisms in Contemporary Japan)*, by Takehiko Kariya and Yuki Honda, 107–28. Tokyo: Tokyo University Press.

Watanabe, Hiroaki R. 2018. ‘Labour Market Dualism and Diversification in Japan’. *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 56 (3): 579–602.

Yamamoto, Yoko, and Mary C. Brinton. 2010. ‘Cultural Capital in East Asian Educational Systems: The Case of Japan’. *Sociology of Education* 83 (1): 67–83.

Yoshida, Takashi. 2018. ‘“Shoki Kyaria ni Okeru Gakureki Shūeki no Jiten Henka ni Tsuite no Kentō” (Educational Expansion and Changes in Educational Return of Youth)’. Edited by Takashi Yoshida. *2015 SSM Survey Research Group* 2015 SSM Survey Report 3 (Social Mobility and Health): 165–80.

Appendix A – Topic List

The guide is a translation from the original Japanese. This is the fourth version of the guide, employed from interview seven onwards. Each version was only adapted slightly. The guide served mostly as a checklist for the semi-structured interviews.

Introduction

Thank you for allowing this interview. I want to ask you several questions about *shūshoku katsudō* in Japan. I study how young people find employment, and therefore I have several questions regarding your education and family background as well.

The interview is strictly anonymous. However, if you have a question you would rather not answer, please do not hesitate to inform me. Also, always feel free to interrupt me or to ask me questions. Once again, thank you for your time today.

1. *Shūshoku katsudō*

- As a foreigner I am unaware of job-hunting in Japan. Could you explain to me what exactly *shūshoku katsudō* means for you?
- When did you start *shūshoku katsudō*?
- How did you look for work?
    - Site? Friends? *Senpai*? School?
- What kind of work were you looking for?
- How many companies did you apply to?
- Could you give me an overview of your job-hunt, from preparation to finish?
- [At each step]: how was that?
- [At each step]: how did you prepare?
- [At each step]: did you experience failure; success?
- Did you receive a *naitei*?
- Are you satisfied with the result? If not, why not? What then?
- Could you tell me if you used *OB*?
- How did you look for *OB*?
- What was the role of your university?
- Can you tell me again how you prepared for job-hunting?

    - Did you visit university classes, the career office?
    - Did you prepare with friends or others?
    - Did you prepare for tests?
- Did you receive considerable support from somebody? (family, school, friends)
- Do you consider everything a 'success'?

1b. Personal effects

- Were you busy?
- Did you experience stress?
- Where you anxious that you would not succeed?
- [For women] Did you experience any discrimination based on gender?
- What was the influence on your life?
- You will soon graduate. Did you study to find work?
- You will now become a *shakaijin*, member of society. Does that give you any pressure?
    - Is it a big step in your life?
- How do you feel about job transfers?
- Do you have any other comments on *shūshoku katsudō*?

2. Family background

- Where do you come from?
    - Can you tell me something about where you grew up? (area)
    - In what kind of house did you grow up? (mansion, house, etc.)
    - (Did you have your own study room?)
- What is the education level of your parents?
- What is the occupation of your parents? Were they busy?
- Do you have siblings? Is their pathway like yours?
- How was your advancement to this university perceived? Normal? Out of the ordinary?
- Did your parents support your pathway?
- Did your parents influence your pathway?

3. Education

- Where were your elementary, middle, and high school?
- Were you busy studying?
- Did you participate in club activities?
- Did you have other hobbies?

- Did you go to cram school?
- Did you pass any exams to enter school?
- Where did other students from your school go?
- Did other students go to similar universities?
- Did your parents support your education?
    - School fees; *juku* fees?
    - Help with homework?
    - Make *bentō* lunch?
    - Give club support?

4. University Education

- What did you study at university?
- Were you part of any student clubs?
- Did you study any foreign languages?
- Did you study abroad?
- Did you go to university from the start to find work?
- Did you do anything for your resume? (e.g. volunteering)
- Did you have a part-time job?
- Did you receive financial aid?
- Did you have a student loan?
- Do you live by yourself? With your family?
- Was it your wish to go to […] university?

End (switch of recording device)

Thank you very much for today. Is there anything else you would like to tell me? Do you have any questions for me?

Final note

Do you mind if I take your contact details? I would like to know how you finish your *shūkatsu*. I will only send one message, feel free to reply.

That will be all, thank you for your cooperation.