

Business and Employment in Japan

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INTRODUCTION

The Japanese hiring and career track process is not just a foreign to outsiders but probably one of the most unique situations in the world. School is a gauntlet that Japanese students navigate until they arrive in university which is considered a “last haven” before the stress and competition of resume writing, interviewing and selecting a lifelong career track. In effect the brutal and sweeping nature of the education system is continued in the interview and hiring procedures. This system which can be seen as efficient is extremely unforgiving to its participants and also to those who miss the opportunity to apply. The lack of empathy for those who cannot keep up can fracture the outlook of many lifelong career hopefuls, creating not only just hikikomori who withdraw from society but also NEET and Freters. These subcultures are direct results of the rigorous business culture of Japan.

Seeking a Career

In Japan, university is seen as a last moratorium before the unmitigated stress of looking for a job. Typically this hunt starts in the junior or senior year of university, though the students are still taking classes, they must begin filling out handwritten resumes and preparing headshots for their applications to various companies. This job hunt is different from the united states where students can seek careers that cater specifically to their skills, in Japan “formal age limitations have made the employment system more rigid.” (Mathews) The right and only time to apply for a job is before university has even ended for students, “the labor market in Japan is primarily open for fresh graduates.” (Mathews) This is called shuushoku katsudou, seeking

career track employment. This job seeking is supplemented by juku that employment hopefuls attend to learn how to receive their interview, dress for their interview and even how to bow appropriately. Every aspect of a young prospect is closely scrutinized as companies have thousands of applicants to choose from. A matter of what their degree or what type of special skills they hold is not a concerning matter. Companies most often train their new recruits on how to do their new career. Discontent among new employees has changed over the last few decades, a new worker from 1990 shares “I feel that I have made a terrible mistake entering this bank” (Mathews) as if to express that this will be his lifetime’s work. Ten years later in 2000 a worker expresses “I didn’t have any particular interest in this company when I entered it. I just wanted to use it; while getting paid...”(Mathews). This growing discontent among workers is widespread as they realize that they can, with probable financial loss, move to a different company after acquiring skills that they need – but this financial loss is a cost of searching for more happiness and contentment with their career track. There are many employees who “feel that there is no way to express discontentment from inside the company”. (Mathews). With less opportunities to hone their skills at their new jobs and not much of a chance to make more money elsewhere because of the hierarchical nature of the pay, more and more young Japanese finds themselves veering off towards one of three similar alternative lifestyles.

Hikikomori, NEET, Freeters

For their future, young Japanese choose to go along with the path laid out for them by society; school, university, interview and work for a company for life. There is growing discontent from younger generations while can cause some unique situations to occur. One is Hikikomori which draws from a situation where there is so much pressure from society to keep

up or perhaps the experience of a major failure causes someone to withdraw completely from society. Hikikomori can be of any age and can occur after any kind of high stress situation which does work out positively for the individual. Society's demands for the individuals to stay on track can make even the smallest failures something considerably dangerous to a person's psyche as the bullying can become intense. Shirai states "economic growth creates a complicated and competitive society. Children brought up to live in this...society..paying attention to life with high academic achievement deprived them of abilities to create human relations" (Shirai 2004) In a conformity oriented society, not being able to keep with your peers can be devastating. Not every person decides to withdraw from society if they find that finding a life long career track is not for them. Some individuals decide to become NEET or Freeters. NEET are persons who are not being educated or employed or trained and simply live off their family and government aid. In comparison there are freeters, who are those who are part time workers or contract workers, this excludes housewives and students. Though freeters have jobs, there is worry that freeters will not acquire skills necessary to have a strong workforce and also not contribute enough in tax revenues. There is a distinction between NEET and Freeters being that one is not participating in any type of regular work and the other is participating in part time work, though these states can overlap and definitely do. There are particular transitions in Japanese society that are hot zones for NEET or Freeters to happen "two crucial stages in the transition that we need to give special focus to: around 18 and around 23 years old, when the majority of young people leave school or university and enter the labor market." (Inui, Sano, Hiratsuka, 2007). Falling short of goals set for them by society creates a trap for those who cannot find motivation beyond no work or part

time work. The small window of opportunity to find a job after university is a frame of thinking that needs to change in order to rescue these people.

CONCLUSION

Support from family and society is always something that is beneficial to the psyche of a growing child and later young adult. Going to school and becoming successful is a dream that many people hold in their hearts in order to give back to their society and parents for raising them. In Japan this sentiment can become a burden as society lays out severe rules for how to move from start to finish, from birth to a career. There is merit in the fact that the system is created to continuously welcome as many workers as possible which each cycle of university graduates however there are some who cannot or fail to join that group as it sets off for *shuushoku kastsudou*. Where these individuals fall is varied but usually falls into three categories *Hikikomori*, *NEET*, and *Freeters*. There are ways to move between these categorizations and even move up out of them but each has specifications that must be met that become tougher and tougher to escape as they become older.

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