



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

Hugvísindasvið

Invisible Japan

Are old Japanese values hindering further internationalization?

Ritgerð til B.A.-prófs

Birgir Bachmann Konráðsson
Janúar 2012

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Japanskt mál og menning

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Abstract

Japan is facing a serious population decrease in the next forty years. People's longevity and reduced birth rates put Japan in a situation where it is likely it might have to increase immigration. However, such rapid increase in foreigners is a delicate situation that should be looked at on a sociological level so as to avoid cultural clashes. Therefore it is important to look at the old traditional values in school and work life in Japan in order to gain a greater understanding of foreigner relations. There are many theories surrounding these traditional values but many tend to be oversimplifications. One such theory accredits the Tokugawa period (1600-1868) with many of the values found in modern Japan. The school system on the other hand, gives an insight into how values like cooperation enter the public mind, not to mention the *senpai/kohai* system of seniority. Contrary to what many believe, many of the values in the work place were only implemented in the early 20th century. It could perhaps be implemented to appease today's international market. Foreign workers in Japanese companies are largely regarded as temporary workers, but are often given better benefits. Some traditions of the old work system like the strict rules regarding presentation of a business card can seem strange and unnecessary to foreign workers not used to such procedures. These out-dated traditions coupled with Japan's overwork epidemic do not make Japanese companies look good in comparison. Young people are rejecting the older work systems and creating their own work style by becoming *freeters*, thereby indicating that change is already happening.

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Introduction

A country is only as good as the people who live in it. What happens when the population starts to decline? People get older and there are not enough young people to keep up the balance between those who are working and those who are not. The average Japanese couple in 2010 produced 1.39 children¹, which is well below the minimum of 2.07 required for a nation to grow at a normal rate (Sugimoto, 2010, p. 83). The consequences of declining birth rate are manifold. The proportion of people aged 65 and older was 23.1 per cent in 2010. Studies show that in 2050 that this percentage will have increased to about 39.6 per cent.² There are varying statistics year by year, but most point to one conclusion: Japan becoming one of the “oldest” industrial nations in the world (Hewitt, P.S, Campbell, J.C., & Usui, Chikako, 2003, p.16).

The total population of Japan, which now is around 129 million, is predicted to plummet to around 100 million people in 2050 if nothing is done.³ As a result, the age dependency ratio: the percentage of the population that is younger than 15 years and older than 64 that are considered non-working is rising. The old age dependency ratio is calculated by dividing the number of people over the age of 64 by the amount of people working. The proportion of people aged 15-64 (the average age of the working population) in 2011 is 64 per cent, divided by the proportion of people aged over 64 (which is 22.8 per cent) gives us an estimated 3.5 labour forces supporting each senior citizen. As the elderly increase in numbers and not enough new people take their place in the workforce due to the decline in birth rates, this results in an estimated 1.5 labour forces supporting each senior citizen in 2050.⁴ This increasing amount of people who aren't working places a great expense on the system in whole. The problem is not only the decline in births but also people's longevity.

¹ *Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications* “Declining Birth Rate and Aging Population”

² *Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications* “Declining Birth Rate and Aging Population”

³ *Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications* “Trends in Population”

⁴ *National Institute of Population and Social Security Research* “Population projection for Japan”

The average mortality rate in Japan in 2011 was 82.25 which ranks fifth highest in the world.⁵ With healthcare constantly evolving, as well as Japan's high health- food- and hygiene awareness, these numbers are expected to grow consistently over the years (Boseley, 2011). This means that there will be an increase in the number of elderly people who don't work and need financial support, they will live longer, but at the same time there will be fewer people in the working environment to support the consequent increased demand on the economy.

This is now is a crucial moment, not just for Japan, but other countries that will experience this problem in the near future. Others will look to Japan and study the way in which they'll react, a situation which puts the Japanese government under a lot of pressure. This problem has been on the horizon for a while, yet the government's attempts to alleviate the problems don't seem to have been effective. Researcher Junichi Goto even argues that trying to increase the birthrate now would even make matters worse (Goto, 2001).

Another suggested solution voiced is that opening Japan up to the increased immigration of foreign workers might ease the problem (Chapple, 2004). Japanese companies' interest in foreign workers is increasing every year (Aoki, 2012). However, there are a number of problems that need to be addressed before that can happen. In particular, the tendency in Japan to look at foreigners as members of another group, as it can border on prejudice. I believe that through looking at the root of these differences, it's possible to find solutions and deepen inter-cultural understanding. In order to make this argument, I intend to look at the Japanese school system for possible insights into the development of this way of thinking. Are children being actively taught to be reluctant to accept foreign people into their social circles? Is this way of thinking seeping into the work environment, possibly creating a difficult and sometimes hostile working environment for foreign nationals? Which values are counterproductive and what needs to change so that the "inevitable" future surge of foreign workers can co-exist within Japan in a multicultural workplace?

⁵ CIA- The World Factbook "Country Comparison :: Life expectancy at birth"

In this paper, I ask whether Japan's old values are counterproductive to the inevitable increase in foreigners in the coming years. I will explore some of the theories made by a number of sociologists, anthropologists and researchers throughout the years discussing the origins of the trends and values of Japanese society. We will see some of these trends emerge in the modern school system, especially in the early kindergarten and elementary school. We will then work our way into adulthood, where yet again we find some of the old values passed to the work life. There I mention that some of these aspects can seem a bit strange for foreign individuals coming to work in a Japanese company. Finally, I will discuss how Japanese youth are possibly growing out of these old norms, as seen by the increase in "*freeters*" in the past decades.

Some of the data comes from the many books published in the early nineties during Japan's economic turbulence, and is therefore a bit out-dated. Hence, in order to get an accurate view of a foreign perspective in today's world, I conducted two interviews who (in lieu of anonymity, are named Kevin and Steve. Both of whom are and have been working in a Japanese education institution for over a decade. Their collective opinion will hopefully give a fresh perspective on the modern Japanese education and work environment. The full version of the interviews are to be found in the appendix.⁶

However, before we can look into the workings of modern society, we must first delve into the very beginning to try and understand how today's society has evolved.

⁶ Direct quotes will be submitted with grammar and spelling unaltered.

1. Nihonjinron

1.1) Theories on Japaneseness

There are numerous theories around regarding Japanese society and the Japanese way of thought. Many of these contradict each other but the theories focusing on Japan as a homogenous society are often referred to as *Nihonjiron* or Theories on Japaneseness (Sugimoto, 2010, p. 2). Many scholars have attempted to explain the Japanese way of thinking in simple terms. These theories have gained both praise and criticism among writers and sociologists. Anthropologist Amanuma Kaoru for example, ascribes the core Japanese personality and every aspect of Japanese behaviour to form the idea of *ganbaru* (persistence and endurance) (Sugimoto, 2010, p 4)

In the book *Introduction to Japanese society*, Yoshino Sugimoto divides these theories into three categories. The first is the notion of *amae* in Japanese society. This theory puts forth that Japanese people get emotional satisfaction from depending on other people, usually their superiors. That showing individuality is unnecessary and loyalty to the group is highly regarded. Some examples of this can be found in the school and workplace and will be discussed in chapters 2 and 3. The second category directs its attention on the relationship between people. It discusses that communication of those higher up in the social hierarchy, leaders, bosses etc. to the ones lower down is encouraged. Vertical hierarchy and strong connections are shown as opposed to the western style of horizontal hierarchy where there are less personal relationships between superiors and subordinates. The third category discusses the way the Japanese people try to achieve harmony and cooperation between different groups by working together towards a single goal. This ability is credited to have helped Japan get back on its feet following the Second World War (Sugimoto, 2010, p 2-3).

In a similar vein, economist and author Taichi Sakaiya, has put forth the theory that looking at Japanese ancient history can give us an insight into how the homogenous tendencies in their society have been strongly influenced by the strong presence of agriculture in Japanese culture. Rice cultivation, which

has been around for as late as the *Jōmon* period (c.a. 11.000- 400b.c.), required certain ways of thinking so people could survive (Takamiya, 2001, p. 209).

Since Japan is a mostly mountainous region, arable land is hard to come by. Out of the 222.000 square miles that Japan covers, only 60.000 of them are habitable. (Sakaiya, 1995, p. 292) Combine that with rice needing vast amounts of water to grow, farmers in Japan had no choice but to work together so as to maximize the harvest. Unlike farmers in many other countries where each farmer was responsible for their own land and harvest, in Japan's case, the community had to work together to ensure that water could be accessible through the canals in between the rice paddies, flood banks and that roads would be in repair as well as accessible. This system of working together ensured that families and individuals could survive in an environment where they would otherwise not have been able. Again, due to space constrictions, farmers did not have the option of herding animals nor hunting in the woods to as great an extent as was possible in other countries. In other words, it was not a matter of personal preference to be a part of the community, but rather a matter of survival (Sakaiya, 1995, p. 77).

Even though arable land in Japan is limited, it is considerably stable. Farmers did not need to plan far into the future to try to predict floods or other sudden changes such as the farmers in India or China were forced to, so instead focused on experience and the memorization of farming methods that worked well. As a result, a different kind of leadership emerged. Where in other countries, leadership was determined by foresight and determination, in Japan, values like self-sacrifice and a sense of tradition were held in higher regard. In a way to decrease conflict, these leaders were chosen through a system in which age was regarded synonymous with experience. That way, anyone had the ability to become a leader, granted they live long enough. This seniority system, which will be discussed in later chapters, is believed to have reduced jealousy and promoted equality between the people. This importance on equality and community is often thought to have followed and shaped Japanese society and culture to this day (Sakaiya, 1995, p. 78-80).

Another theory suggests looking at some of the social reformations established in the Tokugawa period (1600-1868a.d) for realising some of the aspects of Japanese cooperation tendencies and the willingness of today's corporations to place large amount of trust toward their employees and allied corporations. An argument set by Charles Hill puts forth that the Japanese methods enhance productivity and lower cost, mainly because of how Japanese society's norms present themselves and how the value system is designed. He mentions that many scholars such as sociologists Robert Bellah (1957), and Ronald Dore (1973) as well as historian Herman Ooms (1985) consider the Tokugawa period to be a critical time during which a definite evolution in informal constraints, values and traditions occurred. Many of the qualities, which can still be found in modern-day Japan (Hill, 1995, p. 122). The two main traditions upon which the norms and values are based are firstly the agricultural village life, as mentioned before, where significant cooperation was needed to secure a good rice harvest. Secondly that the unique fusion of Shintoist, Buddhist and Confucian ethical- and religious thought developing into neo-Confucianism, helped form strong traditions involving loyalty and filial piety (Bellah, 1957, p. 55).

In his argument, Charles Hill explains seven attributes derived from this value system that he believes gives Japanese companies the edge when conducting business. The first attribute mentioned is *Group Identification*. This attribute, as mentioned before, is a result of the prevalent rice cultivation, which required individuals to work together and create deep emotional attachments to the group so that the villagers could survive. Because of this, groups of five families called *gonin-gumi* were created to work together on the rice cultivation and on bigger projects wherein the entire village came together working as one (Hill, 1995, p. 122). This attribute shows a value system that encourages group work and discourages so called free riders; those who don't do any work. Hill points out that having this system reduces the costs that are required in order to achieve cooperation in societies that don't have such strong values.

The second attribute is *Collective Responsibility*. In this attribute, identifying with the group meant that whatever the individual did, it represented

and affected the group, be it family, *gonin-gumi* or village. In other words, if an individual would not adhere to the social norms of his or her group, the group would be forced to take responsibility. "To be cast adrift without the support of relatives in a society such as Japan was indeed the worst of all possibilities" (Bellah, 1957, p. 35).

This notion was strengthened by the third attribute, *Loyalty and Filial Piety*, infused with the neo-Confucian ideology that it was one's sacred duty to show loyalty to one's superiors, coupled with the mix of Shinto ancestor worship, filial piety (obligation and devotion to one's parents) became commonplace in Japan (Hill, 1995, p. 123). Hill argues that these notions of loyalty make the Japanese system less expensive for the higher-ups to control their subordinates.

In the fourth attribute, *Reciprocal Obligation*, Hill mentions that loyalty does not only apply to those of a lower rank. The neo-Confucian ideology emphasizes that superiors appreciate the benefits the subordinates bring to the group and that they have obligations to them as well. This is a sort of honour system based on the fact that those leaders who do not repay their relationship with their subordinates would be branded as without honour and integrity. However those who honour this rule would benefit from it greatly. Sociologist Nakane Chie compares this attribute to the lifetime employment system of modern Japan. Those who are trusted with honouring this system would be rewarded with job security, good salary based on seniority and finally benefits upon retirement.

The fifth attribute is *Harmony (wa)*, which is an important factor in both Buddhist and Confucian traditions. Here, the person is supposed to avoid conflict with others and be willing to compromise so that relations can run smoothly. Hill stresses however that this does not mean that people aren't allowed to express opinions, and that this neo-Confucian ideology places importance on leaders listening to their subordinates, which again would be a mark of a good leader (Hill, 1995, p. 124).

The sixth Tokugawa attribute is *Honesty*. The benefits of honesty in dealing with others must seem apparent, but what Hill means is that when mixed together with the aforementioned informal constraints, when it becomes possible to trust other people's honesty in business dealings and others, Japan again becomes more economical (Hill, 1995, p. 125). In other words, it's easier to communicate with someone you know is being honest rather than someone you don't fully trust.

The final attribute is *Individual Performance*. Here Hill argues that the hard work of the individual is indeed rewarded and that it is far from being less valued than in the West. However, the difference is that in Japan, the hard work the individual does for his group is more appreciated than isolated achievements. The sociologist Aoki Masahiko compared this attribute to the modern Japanese firm and mentions that although employees often get pay raises with seniority, they also get merit based pay as a supplement, which is awarded through "individual performance in pursuit of group goals" (Hill, 1995, p. 125; Aoki, 1988, p. 54). Hill then continues to explain how these attributes, when put together, form a unique entity, which, in theory at least, is easier to manage, and is less costly as a result compared to the West. He argues that the attributes mentioned above contain a set of "group oriented mechanisms" that help create cooperation (Hill, 1995, p. 125).

There are two ways in which this cooperation is reinforced. Through self-control and peer group control. The self-control aspect is described as when the employees relate to their status (be it rank or job title) within their workgroup as well as their company, which reinforces their identification with their organisation. The peer group control aspect is explained from the *Reciprocal obligation* aspect mentioned before where collective responsibility is valued. This creates tendency for people in a group to take interest in what other members of the same group are doing. The individual does not only think of his own work, but takes a part in other people's work as well, ensuring that no one is neglecting their duties which would then affect the entire group's credibility. The fear of rejection may be used by peers to keep other members in place. In other words, the individual performance that furthers the group's goals

increases the group's rank, which in turn increases performance, which is rewarded, by rank or pay increase. The harmony aspect then keeps groups within the company working together (Hill, 1995, p. 126).

Hill's thesis suggests that the Japanese way of less centralised management in companies compared to American and other western countries is the main reason why it's far less costly to achieve cooperation in Japan. The individualism of American culture makes it very difficult to achieve the same levels of cooperation (Hill, 1995, p. 126). Naturally these types of studies tend to be oversimplifications since not every company utilises the same systems nor the same people. It does however stress the cultural differences between Japan and other countries as well as the different cultural values. Hence it would be to be expected that some clashes have arisen and will continue to arise as a result of the lack of cultural awareness. It is also important to remember that *nihonjinron* is not set in stone, as different people from different areas of the country tend to behave differently. An important question to ask then is: if some of these values start cropping up among the people, where does the social education start and what effects does it have on relations with other people?

2. School

2.1) Early life conformity

Regardless of how things were handled in the past, when looking at the social tendencies in modern society, it is good to look to the source, the children.

The modern Japanese school system is comprised of nine years of compulsory education, from elementary school (*shōgakkō*) with children aged 6-12, to middle school (*chūgakkō*) from ages 12-15. Although not compulsory, kindergarten (*yōchien*), which takes care of children from 3-6 years old, as well as high school (*kōkō*) for 15-18 are sought after by the majority of school children. About half of all students in Japan, aged 18 and up, then enrol in university (*daigaku*) (Sugimoto, 2010, p 124).

As is the case in most countries, a central government is in charge of making sure that the Japanese school experience is as equal as possible for everyone. Although the children learn about the area they live in, and important aspects in said area, for instance what defines their town's economy and so forth, on the whole, the education system is regulated and standardized all over the country. Although regional dialects may vary considerably, children are taught a standard form of Japanese. Focus on geography and history also gives the children a sense of belonging to the country as a whole. The anthropologist Joy Hendry has argued that this emphasizes uniformity, since using the same curriculum means that the same information comes to be known by the majority of the students (Hendry, 2003, p. 82).

It is in these institutions that many children begin to learn the basic ways of thinking that they will carry with them into their adult lives.

The Japanese preschool that consists of Kindergarten (*yōchien*) and Day care centres (*hoikuen*) is a service used by over 1.6 million Japanese children between the ages of three to six.⁷ Although depending on the school, the ages can vary. Some schools take care of infants as well. In the wake of the declining birth rate in Japan, the government established the *Angel plan* in 1995 to

⁷ MEXT statistics "Students 1/2"

promote a better environment for mothers so they wouldn't have to choose between working or childbirth. For example, longer maternity leave coupled with shorter working hours while the child is still young. The plan also encouraged the increase in the number of schools, extended the day-care hours as well as various other factors (Ishikida, 2005, p. 43-44). Even though kindergarten is not compulsory, about 56% of children starting elementary school graduate from them every year.⁸ The kindergarten is where they take their first steps in becoming members of a society.

The preschool education in Japan is aimed at the so called "whole person education" in which emotional development, friendship and responsibilities are the main focus. As opposed to countries like the U.S. in this system, the intervention of the teacher is kept at a minimum, although they do monitor the children, so that they resolve their issues between themselves. Preschools are not thought of as places for academic study, which only takes up about 5% of the overall class time, compared to 20% in America. The children are also often separated into groups called *Han* (班), which are designed to help them develop cooperation and interpersonal relationship with their peers (Ishikida, 2005, p. 42-47).

In an article about the changing practices and methods in preschools in the last 20 years published about the *Komatsudani* preschool, a typical *hoikuen* in Kyoto, the researchers discussed the differences between Japanese and American preschools and their development for the past 20 years.

"The core curriculum of the Japanese preschool is to provide children with the opportunity to experience a social complexity that is lacking at home and in the community, under the care of adults who are less nervous and preoccupied than their own parents." (Tobin, Karasawa and Hsueh, 2004, p. 137).

By social complexity they mean that the children are more than encouraged to solve their quarrels without the teacher stopping them or telling them what is right to do in each situation. An example follows where a group of girls are arguing about a teddy bear. The girls quarrel and occasionally have

⁸ MEXT: statistics "Enrollment and Advancement Rate (1/3)"

small physical fights, but the teacher does not stop them nor give them a simple solution to their problem. Instead they are allowed to argue and only if it seems like they might hurt themselves does the teacher intervene. Even then all she does is either call out “that’s dangerous”, or even rarely, suggest that they solve their differences with *jan-ken-pon* (known in English as rock, paper, scissors). This is one of many ways that children learn about interacting with their peers by “discussing” their problems instead of getting direct guidance from a higher authority. The educators believe that the children get enough adult instruction at home and the preschool is a place of more complex social experiences (Tobin, Karasawa and Hsueh, 2004, p. 137-140).

The elementary school system seems to agree with the preschool, in that similar principles are applied. The children of the class are often divided into *han* groups for studying. There, the teachers try to mix children who excel academically with those who are slower learners, the shy with the more outgoing ones and so on, so that the group represents the full range of the children’s characteristics (Stevenson, 1991, p 113). Classes aside, the elementary school children are involved in various chores around the school. There is not much demand for janitors or school cafeterias, as the children, under the supervision of the teacher, clean the school together after classes finish, and during lunch time, they serve the food in the classrooms. This is done to help create a positive group feeling within the classroom, as everybody helps out in some way with the chores. The elementary school classroom is therefore not only thought as a place for learning, but like the kindergarten, a place for pleasant social experience among peers as part of the “whole person education” (Stevenson, 1991, p. 111).

As the children get older and continue to the secondary education system, some definite changes appear in the school’s teaching tactics. More focus is put on getting the children ready for college examinations. With the stress of trying to make the children learn large amounts of information in a short time, the Japanese high school education system has been criticised for being single-minded and not putting enough emphasis on thinking creatively (Stevenson, 1991, p. 115-116). Kevin, our interviewee, makes a note of this major difference

between junior high and high school and elementary school. He mentions that although a lot of focus is placed on education, that the main focus is on getting to the next level of education and that less importance is put on teaching children certain life skills. “They focus on passing tests, which draws them away from other aspects in life such as communicating with people outside your peer group, being involved in activities outside of school.” He also states that High school is “really the last meaningful education many students receive” depending on which degree the student is seeking.⁹ Steve agrees that after elementary school, “the rigid focus on right and wrong answers enters the equation to the exclusion of thinking and analysis”.¹⁰ It’s interesting to note that most cases of bullying (*ijime*) derive from lower secondary education in Japan i.e. middle- and high school as opposed to elementary school and university.¹¹ One has to wonder whether there’s a connection between the sudden change in school curriculum and the levels of bullying.

University education, which is undertaken by about 15 per cent of the population, is again completely different from the earlier stages of education. “One irony of Japan’s education scene lies in the sharp contrast between stringent schools and slack universities (Sugimoto, 2009, p. 148). After going through what is referred to as “examination hell”, many Japanese students use their time in university to relax. This of course applies to the average student and not students in medical, legal or other elite public service jobs. Japanese firms, usually don’t care about the student’s major or even how well they studied. Instead, they usually hire university graduates depending on how their university ranks nationally (Sugimoto, 2009, p. 149)

Kevin adds that university level is often just an extension of high school and simply a bridge between the education system and employment. Aside from the minority group that goes to study science, he says, “They can not seriously be considered as institutions of higher learning where students build their knowledge toward a career in a field related to their studies. They are not

⁹ Appendix 1: Q8

¹⁰ Appendix 2: Q8

¹¹ MEXT: Japan’s education at a glance “ 6-2 Trends in bullying cases”

designed for students to learn study and research skills needed in professional work places.” In short, it’s a gap period to have some fun and take a few courses that high school doesn’t offer. He mentions an example of a student who learned social taxation, but now works selling gambling cards to casinos. Another example is from a student that majored in French and wanted to learn cooking and is now working at a pharmacy, selling cosmetics. He mentions that many female students go to work as OL (office ladies) after graduation, even though that field of work doesn’t usually require a university degree. Although having a degree can get them a better paying job, the main reason for getting one is often just to find a good marriage partner with a good paying job. In other words, their major has nothing to do with what they do after university.¹²

2.2)Senpai/Kohai system. Vertical hierarchy. Seniority

Hierarchy is an important facet of Japanese education and indeed Japanese society. Children in the school system learn that as they get older, they gain seniority over the newcomers. They learn that they gain certain responsibilities, are tasked with taking care of their juniors and to become leaders to some extent (Hendry, 2003, p. 166-167). Although children in Japan have most likely already had a taste of the vertical hierarchy, which thrives in Japanese society, the age based hierarchy called the *Senpai/kōhai* system really starts to gain hold during middle- and high school years. Here, the juniors (*kōhai*) are made to show obedience, respect and basic submissiveness to their seniors (*senpai*¹³) on various levels.

This system is most obvious in the school and especially in sports and club activities where it is believed that in order to become a good team player, one must go through a sort of trial period where the first year students are made to do menial tasks such as arranging the equipment or cleaning the floors before and after practices each day. It sometimes goes as far as not allowing the first year students to do any training or practices related to that particular club for the time being. These tasks are considered their exercise in obedience

¹² Appendix 1: Q8

¹³ Sometimes written as “sempai”

and willingness to help out as well as to take orders. This behaviour of respect is not isolated within the school. Even when meeting their *senpai* in the street the *kōhai* are expected to show the same respect and to use the same honorifics, as they would do in the school (Sugimoto, 2010, p. 142).

This behaviour patterning goes hand in hand with the children having to have to clean their own school classrooms as well as various other places around the school. It's a sort of military based ethics system that tries to teach children the values of the team or group. A good example of the sempai/kohai system can be found in the essay "Bukatsudō: The educational role of Japanese school clubs" by anthropologist Peter Cave where a senior third year member in the Shoyama Technical rugby club is teaching a group of first year students about handling the ball.

"The third year explained the aim of the move and how to do it, then himself demonstrated it six or seven times, drawing the first years' attention to detailed points such as the position of the thumb as the ball was collected. He then had the first years execute the move one after another, praising some and giving further explanation and demonstrations to those who did it less well. The atmosphere was firm but friendly; the first years were relaxed enough to ask questions and to chat a little among themselves, but one who talked while the third year was giving an explanation was told to do 40 push-ups --which he did without complaint, receiving a good-humoured "good work" from the third at the end."(Cave, 2004, p. 405).

In this example, the third year student takes on the role of a teacher taking on responsibilities towards his juniors providing support and experience. Since he was previously a first year student and therefore had already experienced exactly the same situation, he has a sort of empathy for his juniors, which ensures that he's not too strict with them.

On the other side of the coin, however, it is possible to find extreme cases where the exact opposite of the desired effect of this system can be found. Kevin's opinion on the *Senpai/kōhai* system is that it's only beneficial if the *senpai* treat their kohai with respect. He states that this is often not the case. "*Sempai kōhai* basically enables those at the top to use those at the bottom for

their own benefit.

This system then carries over to the workplace where relationships between bosses and normal employees can go as far as the boss offering help in the personal life of the employee, sometimes even finding a spouse (Hendry, 2003, p. 166-167). It's fairly easy to see the value in a system such as this upon entering school, in order to teach children certain moral values and such. However, the workforce is another matter altogether. It's difficult to believe the implementation of such values and systems was a coincidence, and indeed it wasn't.

3. Work

3.1) Introduction into the workforce. Kyōchōkai

It all started following the Meiji period (1868-1912) when the country went through a grand upheaval and transformation. Following the First World War, when Japan was stepping into the world as a modern industrial nation, although the economy was strengthening, the gap between labour and capital forces threatened the social equilibrium (Kinzley, 1991, p. 29-30). An effort was made to increase social harmony with workers and so the Kyōchōkai (The Cooperation and Harmony Society) was established in 1919. This society played a large part in introducing a new ideology in the industrial world using Confucian ideologies, which had already been around since the Tokugawa (1600-1868) period or even further back (Kinzley, 1991, p. xiv-xv). This society published various works, held lectures and established schools in order to push these community orientated values into popular culture (Kinzley, 1991, p. 147). In other words, the Kyōchōkai “invented” a culture of harmony within the working force that as was introduced in chapter 1 are present in modern Japanese workforce. It begs the question whether a movement like the Kyōchōkai should be implemented again. One has to wonder, with the increase in internationalization within the workforce, how people from other countries react to these fairly unique ways of thinking.

3.2) A foreigner’s perspective.

It is common practice, at least in large companies, to have long-term employees without any specific signed contract. These regular employees (*sei shain*) have full confidence in their job security. Even if the company has to cut back, the employee might get a pay cut but getting laid off is highly unlikely (March, 1992, p. 110). This may be recognized as the loyalty and filial piety attribute mentioned by Hill in the first chapter of this paper. That is: the employee is loyal to the company and the company is loyal to the employee in turn. The problem with this way of thinking is that foreign workers coming to work for a company in Japan run the risk of being looked at as “non regular employees” regardless of their qualifications. As Robert March points out “The Japanese think Westerners

are like “nomadic tribesmen” who fail to put down roots anywhere for long, in contrast to themselves, agricultural type people who cling to and remain on their land” (March, 1992, p. 111-112). Large companies aside, acquiring a job of course largely dependent on the applicant’s qualifications. My interviewees Steve and Kevin agree that in recent years, it has become harder for foreigners to obtain a teaching job in Japan. Kevin mentions that as there are now a larger amount of foreigners with longer work experience and more qualifications than only 10 years ago, when an MA was not always required. Today Kevin also points out, in order “To teach in a University requires an MA and two or more years experience in teaching in that field”.¹⁴ Steve adds that English conversation schools, which has been a popular choice for English speaking foreigners seeking work in Japan, are getting less numerous and offering less benefits to aspiring teachers. He does however mention that the job market for bilingual (English and Japanese) academics with a PhD in social science is expanding due to many programs aimed at internationalizing higher education in Japan.¹⁵

It is important to mention the difference between people who go to other countries for business and those who have other reasons such as for studying. The latter group has the advantage of wanting to understand and learn more about the country and culture, whereas business people “have objectives, tasks, deadlines and so on, and they have to fit into a pre-existing business organization and work through local people in achieving their goals” (March, 1992, p. 49). Both interviewees feel that the Japanese administrative system, although thorough, is a lot slower than what they experienced elsewhere. Kevin notes the rigid approval system makes processing anything a much slower task. Steve adds that the amount of those tasks steal time from academics that could be used for academic research.¹⁶

Much like the *senpai/kohai* system in school, it seems to be common practice for newcomers in a company to not be assigned any work or

¹⁴ Appendix 1: Q1

¹⁵ Appendix 2: Q1

¹⁶ Appendix 2: Q2

obligations for some period, as a sort of training period. Asked about his first impressions at his workplace, Kevin mentions having no specific tasks for about three months. “Not being proficient in Japanese made learning anything pretty difficult.” He was asked to “learn” about the office and find things he could not do. He points out that he was the first foreigner employed there in admin, so this was a new experience for him as well as the university.¹⁷ Another example from the book “*Working for a Japanese Company*” tells of Paul Grove, a man who when working at a department store, had to “familiarize” himself with the company, before being sent to one of the stores branches for actual training (March, 1992, p. 74). This method may seem unusual to people who are used to being hired for specific purposes in a company.

Kevin’s overall reaction to being a foreigner in a Japanese workplace seems to be a positive one. He mentions that being a foreigner means that people notice what you are doing and what you are not doing. Which can be good when those in higher positions take more notice and are more willing to listen to opinions. “If you work hard (and speak Japanese) people will give you credit. This can help put foreigners in Japan in a better light than they are sometimes put in.”¹⁸

When asked whether he has witnessed any discrimination in the workplace, he answers no. He feels the opposite is true where he works. “Foreigners are given better employment packages for doing the same work that Japanese colleagues do. “ He also mentions that an English teacher in Japan can get twice the amount of money for the same work as Japanese teachers with similar experience and qualifications.¹⁹

3.3)Japan’s unique business traditions: A blessing or a curse?

There are a number of unique business etiquettes in Japan that may seem weird and unnecessary to uninformed foreigners that aren’t used to those kinds of situations. Due to the vertical hierarchy in most Japanese companies, it is important to be aware of the rank and status of the people one might meet in ones corporate career in Japan. The position and rank of business people in a

¹⁷ Appendix 1: Q3

¹⁸ Appendix 1: Q4

¹⁹ Appendix 1: Q5

meeting determines many things such as who gets greeted first, seating position in a meeting room and so on. Some jokingly mention that even when playing golf, the order of the tee off depends on the player's salaries (De Mente, 1994, p. 25).

The most useful piece of information to remember during a meeting in Japan is the etiquette that revolves around the Japanese business card (*meishi*). *Meishi* are presented in the earlier stages of introduction and great care is taken when presenting it to the other person. The card should be carefully studied, as it holds more information than just the name of the individual. Looking at a *meishi*, one can find out the company where the other works, his or her status within that company, any title, which may come from that, and other common areas, which can be used to strengthen the relationship (De Mente, 1994, p. 24-25). After receiving the *meishi*, great care should be taken to ensure that the recipient shows the utmost respect. Should the recipient place the card in his or hers back pocket that would be considered extremely rude due to the close proximity to the buttocks (Goldman, 1994, p. 126). The *meishi* is in fact the reflection of yourself, your company and your status.

The superior-subordinate ranking system is very dominant in Japanese meetings. People adjust their way of speaking, how they react according to rank, which makes the use of *meishi* very useful. In addition, the seating order in dinner parties and other official functions plays an important role (De Mente, 1994, p. 25). In a dinner or meeting, the host and his group are seated on the side near the door, with the lowest ranking member nearest to it. On the other side the guest of highest rank also sits furthest away from the door, usually opposite to the highest-ranking individual of the host's company (Brannen and Tracy, 1993, p. 154-155). This may be attributed feudal times when lords were constant fear of attack. It would make sense to have the highest-ranking individual placed farthest from the door where an attacker might show up (McCormack, 2011).

These are but a few examples of how serious Japan's business world can be. There are even a number of indications that Japanese businesspeople may be working too hard.

3.4) Sleep four hours pass, sleep five hours fail: Overwork

One of the stereotypes about Japanese people is that they work very hard. This may be true to the extent that overwork has become a matter of public attention in the last few decades. Death by overwork has become such a common thing in Japan that the term *karōshi* has been specifically coined for this occurrence. A report composed by the International Labour Organization in 2004 reported that in 2001 28.1% of workers in Japan were working more than 50 hours per week. Compared to Finland (4.5%) and Sweden (1.9%) and it's clear that the average Japanese worker spends significantly more time at work than European workers in similar jobs (Iwasaki, Takahashi and Nakata, 2006, p. 537). An extreme example is that of Kenchi, an employee for Toyota who died at the age of 30 due to *karōshi*, having apparently done 80 hours of overtime every month for the six previous months before he died (Death by overwork in Japan: Jobs for life). This case is not an isolated incident. In 2009 for example there were 293 cases of workmen's accident compensation due to *karōshi*. 106 of those were deaths.²⁰

Collecting accurate statistics about *karōshi* may be difficult as Japanese employees are often made to work overtime unpaid as a kind of "volunteer" work for the company and as such is not counted as actual work for any statistics (Nishiyama K, Johnson JV, 1997). In 1998 the Labour Standards Law was revised to put a limit on the overtime-working hours as 45 hours per month. This limit however is easily avoidable and the International Labour Organization describes Japan as a country with no legal overtime limits (Iwasaki, Takahashi and Nakata, 2006, p. 538). On top of that, many workers take their work home, a term called *furoshiki zangyō* or "wrapped work".

Kevin, the interviewee, notes that Japan doesn't mix pleasure with work as much as many other countries. If for example an employee goes on an

²⁰ Ministry of Health Labour and Welfare: Section 7

overseas business trip, he is not allowed to extend it with his annual leave or bring his family with him. Annual leave is not supposed to be used for taking holidays. Instead they are intended for times when the employee is sick or has to do important things like renewing his visa, which allows him to work for his company. Kevin mentions, "There is little flexibility. I know that staff from other countries visiting Japan often bring their partner with them and include a few days leisure while here. This is inconceivable for Japanese. How can you work and have fun at the same time?!" He asks "Why is it that staff at universities all over the world are able to go home at 5 earlier, take more holidays and enjoy life more outside of work, yet run larger and more progressive institutions with greater variety in their education" and finally adds that "There must be something that the Japanese are doing wrong." ²¹

3.5) Change: Job security and freeters

With changing times, the amount of people who are looking for lifetime work with only one company are decreasing. Economic stress and other factors also come into play. The group of about 20 per cent of youths aged 20 to 30 that exist in Japan and survive without a steady job are collectively referred to as *freeters*. Loyalty to a company is getting less and less important as labour is becoming more flexible (Driscoll, 2007, p. 170).

The term *freeter* comes from the English word "free" and the German word "arbeiter" which means work (Hendry, 2003, p. 168). The term was coined in the late 1980's but became common in the early 1990's after the economic bubble burst (Honda, 2005, p. 5). The definition of the word *freeter* has a wide meaning as it can apply to a large number of people in differing circumstances. The White Paper on the Labour Economy published in 2007 by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare defined *freeters* as people without regular employment aged 15-34 who, in the case of women have graduated university and are single, and for men, graduates regardless of relationship situation. They are then split into three categories. Firstly for people who are currently employed but are considered to be temporary and/or part time workers.

²¹ Appendix 1: Q6

Secondly for people who are currently unemployed but are actively looking for part time jobs (often called *arubaito*). Thirdly for those who are unemployed not engaged in household duties, not in school or any other educational program and are actively looking for a part time job.²²

As seems hopefully obvious, it is not the case that *freeters* are forced to work part time and are unable to find a steady career based job. As the definition points out, *freeters* are people who choose to seek out part time jobs instead of trying to find a full time career. Many of them reject the standard working environment and the stereotypical “company –man” and instead willingly seek out less steady and often less demanding types of work.

Sociologist Yuki Honda describes the *freeteer* phenomenon as a widening chasm between the three key social systems in Japan: the family, school and labour market. *Freeters* may therefore be “pioneers of the coming society” (Honda, 2005, p. 6). Before the economic depression in the 1990’s the role of part time workers was mainly filled by women. Even The Labour Ministry and the government described part time and underpaid work through tautology as “woman’s work” (Driscoll, 2007, p. 176).

There are however many reasons a person might begin to follow the path of a *freeteer*. Many of them are so called “moratorium types” which is basically people who have dropped out of school or work without any clear thoughts on the future. In other words, they’re waiting for the right job to come along. Some are trying their hand in the “cultural” jobs market, trying to find jobs doing skilled work that rarely has any steady employment available. Others simply have no immediate goals for life and go from one part time job to another with no aspirations (Sugimoto, 2010, p. 103).

Honda argues that the changing family system might be pushing young people to become *freeters*. In many cases, young people are dependent on their families for financial support. If for any reason that bond is cut, by unemployment or even the death of the household’s main provider, the young

²² Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications Are "Freeters" regarded as employed or unemployed?"

individual loses that support. Without it, he must provide for himself or contribute to the household by doing part time jobs. Honda states, “The financial limitations of the family have the biggest impact at the point of graduation from high school” (Honda, 2005, p. 13). Those who fail university examinations and don’t have sufficient financial support to take a year off, become a *rōnin* and continue studying for the entrance exams may begin to work part time alongside their studies. Others who passed the examinations, but cannot support themselves may also be drawn towards working part time. With the pressure of both school and work, many decide to quit and become part time workers (Honda, 2005, p. 13).

Financial problems aside, those parents that managed to find jobs relatively easily a few decades ago may also not have realized the changes in today’s job market and therefore haven’t given their children sufficient advice, leaving young people hesitant to make the decisions necessary to find suitable work (Honda 2005, p. 14). Secondly, Honda argues that the education system’s guidance is both rigid as well as lacking. Schools often seem to give insufficient information on other educational institutions or employment. He mentions an example of a high school girl living in the countryside who wanted to go to a college in Tokyo for studies. She was given little to no information on how to apply or what she should expect when studying. She eventually dropped out and became a *freeteer* living in Tokyo (Honda, 2005, p. 14).

By rigidity, Honda means that many teachers try to “strongly recommend” individual students to apply for a certain university or company, based on their academic records. This method however often results in a job mismatch as well as dropouts from companies and educational institutions (Honda, 2005, p. 15). Thirdly, as mentioned before, Japan’s working conditions in certain companies are less than acceptable to some people entering the job market. Irregular working hours, increasing workloads, insufficient salaries and other factors are contributing to more and more young people becoming *freeteers* (Honda, 2005, p. 17). There are also many positive reasons why young Japanese people choose to become *freeteers*. Many who are aspiring to become writers, photographers, musicians, actors or following other irregular occupations

become *freeters* as these jobs are often freelance, part time professions. Others find satisfaction in working in the ever increasing serving industry, thus having fewer obligations and less monotonous work. Honda quotes a *freeteer* saying

“I entered the department of technology at a university but I felt uninspired. I began working as a part-timer at a restaurant and was happy while working. I worked hard and the managed appreciated my ability. I respected him and he told me how interesting and important service work is. I decided to aim for working in a hotel, an ultimate form of service, and quit the university” (Honda, 2005, p. 14).

Conclusion

Japan's future is still being written. There are many factors that have to be considered when predicting anything further than a few months into the future. The current data suggests a huge population decrease in the next forty years. The so called "baby boomers" are entering retirement on a large scale and there won't be enough people in the workforce to support them. With the recent chaos following the Great Tohoku earthquake, I believe more young Japanese will consider the cities to be a preferable option, leaving the rural areas with an even greater age gap. This creates a burden on the economy that needs to be carefully examined and dealt with. One solution might be to allow more immigrants into the country to alleviate some of the problems while a more solid solution can be made. Although it seems like a simple solution, a lot of issues need to be addressed when thinking of bringing people from one society to another.

The argument contained in this paper suggests that discovering the roots and reasons behind the development of Japanese society can cast a light on whether or not any issues need to be addressed in order to make Japan more accepting to foreign workforces.

Many sociologists have attempted to describe the general Japanese mind and how the Japanese people behave as a whole, but I feel it is all too easy to generalise and readers should be wary of the sheer amount of theories that try to describe what "japaneseness" is. That being said, it is important to study the sociological background of the country, so as to get a clear picture of why such and such aspects emerge in the social consciousness. The school system is a treasure trove of information in which a number of the social and cultural aspects that have been described by sociologists are actually very present and being taught to young children.

Through kindergarten and elementary school, the youth of Japan are taught some values which derive from pre-Meiji era doctrines. I believe the Ministry of Education has the power to "update" these values to be more fitting to the modern era as they did in the beginning of the 20th century with the

Kyōchōkai. Putting children into groups to equalise the class and the *senpai/kohai* system are just the tip of the iceberg of values taught in schools that carry on into the workforce. The sharp change in secondary education indicates that educators in Japan either feel they have nothing more to teach children in regards to social upbringing, or they simply don't have the time in the curriculum, as preparations for the strenuous university entrance examinations take up most of the time. In any case, we can see certain old values go through the school system and take place in the work life as well.

Values of cooperation and harmony within the workplace still seem to play an integral part of work life in Japan, although they were only being implemented in the beginning of the 20th century. Some of these values may seem strange to people from other countries that did not grow up exposed to them. Certain business traditions such as the *meishi* (name card) can come across as unimportant only to cause confusion and result in a reluctance to conduct business altogether. Top that off with some Japanese companies' blatant disregard to overwork limits, having their employees work unpaid overtime leading to an epidemic in overwork-related deaths. There is certainly room for improvement in regards to balancing work and social life within Japanese society. However, based on the information obtained from the interviewees, Kevin and Steve, it would seem that foreigners with sufficient education are generally well treated.

Change seems however to be just around the corner. Since the early 90's, many Japanese youths have rejected the norms of the modern workforce to become "freeters", working part-time without confining themselves to one company, as has been the norm for years. This rejection comes with its positive and negative elements, but the increase of "freeters" in society over the past decade seems to indicate a growing will to explore new ways of living without being forced to work for the same company for the rest of ones life.

While the most obvious solution to the impending decline in the Japanese population may not be so easily achieved, other measures must be taken to solve the problem. It is my contention that what is needed is an easier

way for foreign people seeking work to obtain employment so as to keep the old age dependency ratio at manageable levels. Furthermore, an increased cultural awareness on both sides may make it easier for people of different social backgrounds to cooperate and to avoid unnecessary conflicts. The increase in communication between countries via university exchange programs and scholarships has had its share of success. However, what of the uneducated worker?

All in all, I believe the Japanese values, although out-dated, are not counterproductive to Japan's cooperation with other countries and will not hinder further internationalization. The inevitable surge of foreigners to Japan won't be easy for either side and it's future holds many challenges. It will be interesting to see the progression of Japan's society in the next decades. Social change is the mark of an evolving country and Japan is certainly going in that direction.

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Appendix 1

Interview

Q1. Do you think it's difficult for a foreigner to secure a job in Japan? Can you give examples?

The competition in Japan is growing, so jobs in certain industries are becoming more competitive. I can really only speak for education, but it is now more difficult to secure a teaching position. There are also more foreigners living in Japan now with experience and qualifications. To teach in a University requires an MA and two or more years experience in teaching in that field. Until about 10 years ago an MA was not always required. (just a mini skirt and a cute smile).

Q2. In what way does the Japanese workplace experience differ from similar workplaces in your country?

The systems in place for achieving/processing anything are much slower. At the same time, because there is a more rigid approval system, everything is more thorough.

Mixing work with pleasure is not done. For example, if you go on an overseas business trip, the idea of staying on for a few days in the destination region, using annual leave to have a look around, is not permitted. Once a business trip has been approved and started, it can not be changed. There is little flexibility. I know that staff from other countries visiting Japan often bring their partner with them and include a few days leisure while here. This is inconceivable for Japanese. How can you work and have fun at the same time?!

Annual leave is not in place to use for taking holidays. They are their for those unforeseen times when you must take time off work, such as being sick, going to the ward office, renewing your visa which you require to have to be able to work here.

Q3. What struck you at first as being most different when you started working in Japan?

I was not given any specific tasks for about 3 months. I was asked to 'learn' about the office and find things that I could do. Not being proficient in Japanese made learning anything pretty difficult. I was the first foreigner employed here in admin so it was a new experience for the university as well.

Q4. Do you think it's a positive thing to be a foreigner in a Japanese workplace? If so in what way?

You stand out so people notice what you are doing, or not doing. This can be good as those in higher positions will take your opinion into account more than normal.

If you work hard (and speak Japanese) people will give you credit. This can help put foreigners in Japan in a better light than they are sometimes put in.

Q5. Have you witnessed any discrimination in the workplace? Can you give examples?

No. In fact I witness the opposite where I am. Foreigners are given better employment packages for doing the same work that Japanese colleagues do. Pay for an English

teacher is more than 2 times that of a Japanese language teacher with similar qualifications and experience.

Q6. What changes do you think are needed in the Japanese workplace (if any) There needs to be more balance found between work and private time.

Why is it that staff at universities all over the world are able to go home at 5 earlier, take more holidays and enjoy life more outside of work, yet run larger and more progressive institutions with greater variety in their education. There must be something that the Japanese are doing wrong.

Less paper needs to be used. Everything has to be printed out and stamped. Electronic signatures and electronic approval system implementation would save money on paper, money on time and money on labour costs.

Etc.

Q7. Do you think having the sempai/kohai system in the school or workplace is beneficial and if so how?

Only beneficial if the sempai treat their kohai with respect, which is often not the case.

Sempai kohai basically enables those at the top to use those at the bottom for their own benefit. It also is the reason for their being a lot of unspoken about rape at high school / university in Japan.

There is no sempai kohai system where I work. There is a doukisei system through which those who were employed at the same time maintain a strong bond during the time of their employment.

Q8. What are your thoughts on the Japanese school system?

The elementary system I think is quite good. It could be better and more money could be spent on up-dating facilities, but for the kids it appears quite positive.

Junior High and High school maintains some meaning as kids need to study and focus on reaching the next level of their education. However in saying that, they are not taught life skills as much as they should be. They focus on passing tests which draws them away from other aspects in life such as communicating with people outside your peer group, being involved in activities outside of school.

Depending on the degree students seek at university, high school is really the last meaningful education many students receive.

Universities are simply an extension to high school and a step to be taken between high school and employment. A gap period to have some fun and play around with a few subjects not offered at high school. They can not seriously be considered as institutions of higher learning where students build their knowledge toward a career in a field related to their studies. They are not designed for students to learn study and research skills needed in professional work places. (In saying that, some faculties/fields do teach these, in Sciences for example, but this is minority of the student population)

I know a Law student who took a job selling gambling cards to casinos in southeast Asia. He supposedly specialized in social taxation. There was also a French major who wanted to cook but who now sells cosmetics to pharmacies. Most female students become OL anyway, which doesn't require a degree and applies nothing that they learn

at university. They do get better paid jobs and enter companies where they can find a good marriage partner. This is the main reason for females needing to get through university. Financial security through a well paid husband found in the work place.

Q9. What is your opinion on the current Japanese immigration laws?

Can't complain from my perspective. Looking forward to them introducing an automatic re-entry permit for so-call permanent residents. Currently you require a re-entry permit on top of your 'permanent' resident permit.

It would also be nice if foreign nationals, but who own property, pay more taxes than many Japanese and intend to live here for the remainder of their lives and who have children in the education system and who are paying for the pension, could be given the right to vote. Japanese in NZ, Australian, the US, the UK, probably Iceland have the opportunity to vote.

This is one aspect that reminds you that you are not considered as a first rate citizen.

The chapatsu lazy yankee going around annoying everyone at night with their girlie bikes and stealing are able to vote.....still along way for Japan to grow in this area.

Appendix 2

Q1. Do you think it's difficult for a foreigner to secure a job in Japan? Can you give examples?

Difficult is a relative term: for bilingual (English + Japanese) academics with a PhD in social science, I would say there is an expanding job market due to raft of plans and programs to internationalize higher education here.

Pure English language teachers probably have a harder time than before, as English conversation schools and so forth 1. Are less numerous, and 2. Seem to be offering reduced benefits.

Q2. In what way does the Japanese workplace experience differ from similar workplaces in your country?

Staff meetings are more formal. Academics teach very much in isolation from each other, with little awareness of what others do in their classes. There is considerable administrative work that is undertaken by academics, and this tends to absorb a lot of time that academics elsewhere would actually spend on research.

Q3. What struck you at first as being most different when you started working in Japan?

First experience of working! Lack of academic standards in universities was most shocking though: no serious evaluation is conducted in most institutions, I suspect, with a serious lack of feedback to students.

Q4. Do you think it's a positive thing to be a foreigner in a Japanese workplace? If so in what way?

It is easier in the sense that one tends not to belong to existing factions: one can remain somewhat outside of partisan conflicts.

Q5. Have you witnessed any discrimination in the workplace? Can you give examples? Discrimination requires some definition, but the clearest example of different pay and conditions for similar work would be the fixed-term contract office workers, who are Japanese!

Q6. What changes do you think are needed in the Japanese workplace (if any) More employees, even at the cost of lower pay for each individual employee, would be good for reducing the burden on individual workers so that they can have more of a life outside of the workplace.

Q7. Do you think having the sempai/kohai system in the school or workplace is beneficial and if so how?

One may be looked after or have background knowledge about power-brokers and so forth, but again, this can be detrimental given that one may become entangled in factional disputes.

Q8. What are your thoughts on the Japanese school system?

It is said to be quite good up until the end of elementary school, after which testing, with its rigid focus on right and wrong answers enters the equation to the exclusion of thinking and analysis.

Q9. What is your opinion on the current Japanese immigration laws?

They are much like anywhere else, except that unlike immigrant states like the US, Australia and Canada, and also different to the EU states, Japan is unlikely to draw people who want to enjoy the lifestyle, thus it is at a considerable disadvantage in the global competition for high value migrants.