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"Not like my father"

How 'generational gaps' and traditional ideals
influence young Tokyo residents in the transition
towards independence and adulthood

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Abstract

This thesis is about the life-course progression towards adulthood in Tokyo, Japan, as my informants experience it during their transition from higher education towards and into employment. It is based on a seven months' fieldwork in 2014 and a revisit for one month in 2015, carried out by participating and observing in multiple social circles. As there is a strong narrative surrounding generation gaps in Japan, the context of the thesis is placed in my informants "struggles" facing ideals and values of a past they do not find connected with their present. The key/core-informants was in their 20s and early 30s on different points of this transition, and it is their conceptualization and understanding of adulthood and how they experience the generation gap that is used as the foundation to explore their progression towards adulthood.

On one side of the generation gap in Japan the elders, my informants parent's generation and grandparent's generation, color the young generations as weak, spoiled and "less-Japanese" than themselves. On my informant's side, the elders are called "stiff", "outdated" and "lacking a sense of joy". I will present through exploring my informants thoughts and reasoning as they progress through life, both as they reflect over the past, present and future, how they distance themselves from the image of their parents and the lifestyle of their elders. With statements such as "I don't want to become an adult" and "I don't want to become like my father" they express how they distance themselves from how society worked. However by adding "I fear I will end up like my father" they also present it as something that might not be avoidable and saying that society still might in effect work the same way as it did for their parents.

This thesis explores how my informant's image of adulthood and society came to be through family and school education, and how they later apply strategies to alter or renegotiate the way one becomes independent. Thus, in turn what adulthood will be for them and how it will be "gained" in order to avoid the "life of their parent's generation".

Dedications

Firstly, I would like to thank my first supervisor, Tord Larsen, for reassuring me that the topic for me thesis was interesting and for telling me that "You know this, there is no problem".

Secondly, I would like to thank my second supervisor, Jan Ketil Simonsen, for believing in me, taking interest in my thesis and for urging me to write it in a way that gave justice to my informants.

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Most of all, I would like to dedicate this thesis to the memory of three important people in my life that passed away during the course of my master's.

†

Leif Bjaanes

19.06.1926 – 19.12.2013

To my grandfather, the once young schoolboy that traded his lunch with prisoners of war during the Second World War for wooden figures. That with time would come to work with a computer as huge as a room, one of the first of its kind in Norway, but with age never bothered with using an ATM. Early in the 1980s he traveled to Japan, and over 30 years later I followed in his footsteps, adding an extra meaning to one of the themes in the thesis, generation gaps. May you rest in peace.

†

Nishiyori Yoriko

28.03.1950 – 4.01.2015

To my Japanese surrogate mother, that opened her home and heart for me when I was 20 years old and first set foot in the land of the rising sun. Without her support and care, I do not know if I would have had the reasons I needed to return. May you rest in peace.

†

Tommy Skaar

29.03.1989 – 12.03.2015

To my dear friend, an important light during the dark times in my teens. I hope there is now peace where there once was trouble. Thank you for all that you made me realize, and I am sorry for all the things realized too late. May your son forever bear your resemblance, as I will forever treasure our memories. May you rest in peace.

Prolog

During my third visit to Japan in the summer of 2011, I stayed in a quiet temple area in Fukuoka, mere minutes from the busy main streets and central train station. One day just as I had left the apartment complex where I stayed to find somewhere to eat, heavy rain suddenly started to pour down. Instead of going back in to get my umbrella I decided to try the restaurant just next to my apartment. I entered into an old restaurant in a small old Japanese house, looking as old as the temples that surrounded it. As I entered an old Japanese couple stared at me as if I had fallen out of the sky, making me feel as if I indeed had taken a wrong turn at some point. The old man stood behind the counter eying me, the old women on the floor in front of me frozen with a tray of dirty dishes. If not for the counter and the yellowed paper strips on the wall serving as a menu I could have easily been in someone's living room. I asked in my then poor Japanese if they were open, and I am until this day unsure if they understood me but it was as if my voice broke the spell and the old woman unfroze, smiling and pointing at a chair. I sat down and started to read the menu, realizing that the amount of Chinese letters and the lack of the Japanese alphabet made it hard to decode the menu with my less than basic reading skills. In the end I simply ordered one of the four dishes I was able to read. As I was served the food I started to eat, constantly feeling the gaze of the old woman sitting to my right, openly staring. The old man worked behind the counter, but also he stole glances from time to time. As I finished my dish, I sat there, suddenly feeling unsure how to properly ask for the bill, becoming extremely self-aware. The few words I had exchanged with them in Japanese had been awkward and I was unsure if they even had realized it was Japanese I had spoken. The old woman came over and gave me an old ceramic cup with Japanese green tea, slowly and overly articulated she said "*O'cha*", Japanese for green tea, and the old man stretched his head over the counter repeating in a heavily accented English "Japanese tea". I took the cup in my hand, for some reason remembering a tea ceremony I had watched at my language school, and therefor turned the cup three times in my hand before I drank of it. I did not think much about it, and as I finished it I stuttered the words "bill please" in Japanese. Almost two weeks later I returned, I was tired and it was raining and this place was simply the closest place. When I entered, I once again got the feeling of having gone wrong, but this time for a different reason as I was greeted with "Oh, he has returned!" by the old woman and "Hey! Please sit! Are you hungry?" from the old man. I sat down, surprised and confused by the sudden change. The old man introduced himself, his

name was Oji and he had worked in this restaurant for close to 50 years beside his wife. As I sat down he started to explain something to me, but he was speaking too fast with too many words that were unfamiliar to me. Finally he found an old Japanese-English dictionary from the Second World War, finding a word and pointing at it "*kandou*", meaning deeply moved. After much back and forth I realized what he was trying to tell me, the previous time, the way I had drunk my tea had moved him. He told me that young Japanese today, especially all those born after emperor Showa's death in 1989 were bad, they did not respect themselves or others. They would swallow their tea, not savoring its taste or the moment of drinking it. Before I left that day, he made me promise to never marry a Japanese woman, as he told me "they are bad people". Japan was changing he told me, the young had lost their Japanese spirit.

This conversation with Oji would lay the foundation for the thoughts that in turn lead me to write this thesis. A study of becoming an adult in Tokyo, through the transition from university to work, seen in the midst of the Japanese generational gap.

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Seijin Shiki: The coming of age ceremony

In Japan the age of majority is set to the age of 20, and every year on the second Monday of January there is a national holiday called *Seijin no Hi* (Coming of age day), celebrating all those that became 20 between the previous *Seijin no Hi* and the current one. Every municipality will send out invitations to those that turned 20 in this period to attend the *Seijin Shiki* (the coming of age ceremony). Being the national day where adulthood is celebrated I set out to observe and ask questions at the ceremony. The ceremony was to be held at Yokohama Arena over two ceremonies as there was a total over 22 000 people to attend. It was split in two groups of a little over 11 000 per session. With these numbers, Yokohama is known for having one of the largest *Seijin Shiki'*s in Japan.

I will start this thesis off with the recounts of how my first "real" day in the field was as I made my way to the *Seijin Shiki*. The following chapter will provide empirical description that provides a background for the theoretical reflections that follow in the next chapter.

Getting there:

I woke up early, about the same time as the old wooden house shook as if hit by a small earthquake. This was however just the *shinkansen*[1] flying by set towards Osaka, an hourly occurrence throughout the day. The thermostat on my gas heater displayed the same temperature in the room as it was outside, barely over freezing. As I left the house a digitalized polite Japanese woman's voice wished me a good day from a small box on the wall as I armed the alarm. As I entered the street it was dead quiet except for the huge Japanese crows perched on the meshwork of wires and powerlines crisscrossing the air. In the end of the street I stopped and bought a can of hot coffee from a vending machine and resumed my walk. As I entered the next street towards the train station, I found myself a part of a long line of mostly men and some woman in suits silently walking towards the train station.

It always made me think of scenes from zombie movies where mindless bodies shuffle through the streets, a comparison I often shared with Japanese friends, they would laugh and agree but would often add their own comparison "Yeah, or robots, as parts of a big machine".

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[1] The Japanese bullet train.

The line just grew as smaller streets fed into the main street, but as we got closer to the station, a pedestrian crossing signal divided the long line into groups each time it shifted between red and green. The station itself was fed with either lines or groups of passengers from all the surrounding streets. As I approached the station, the lines merged as they one by one fed the automatic ticket gates with either tickets or applied their smartcards to readers to enter. As they entered the masses split into two groups, each group heading towards the stairs for the respective platform. Most of the people that stood there waiting for the train with me were men in suits, among the masses of office workers some student in their student uniforms could be spotted. The colors of the suits and the uniforms mostly followed the specter black-grey-blue so standing there in my red shoes, denim pants and a red sweater must have caused me to stand out quite a lot. However with my different skin color, hair color and height my entire being was an anomaly at the station at that very point in time. The commuters all stood in multiple lines all over the platform, seemingly chaotic but actually strangely systemized. Along the platform station attendants stood shouting that the next train would arrive in so and so many minutes, to mind others, stand in line and such.

On most of the stations of medium size, such as this one (close to 100.000 passengers per day) the platform has multiple lines in different colors on the floor; some of these are just used during the morning rush. These lines make up the guidelines that let you observe the order in the masses. Lines determine if you are standing in line for the first train or the next. In the very center of the line there is a gap free of people where passengers leaving the train are free to exit, but as fast as they have left this gap is closed in the matter of a second as commuters rush onto the train. All the order observable in Japan, and for which Japan is famous, seems to disappear in that instance as people sometimes are pushed and bags are thrown up into people's faces in the chaos. I have never once seen anyone apologize or even acknowledge others during this rush onto the train, even when I have heard people shout out in pain the mass still moves as there is nothing else in the world than getting on the train. As the last people step into the train they press themselves in by touching the walls around the door at the same time as the white gloved station attendants push them in far enough for the door to close. I have the feeling that trains in Japan do not operate with max capacity as a number, but based on the mere fact if the doors manage to close or not.

These men in suits commuting to work early in the morning are mostly what is referred to as *salarymen*. The in many ways stereotypical image of Japanese men in suits scurrying around busy streets so often seen in the European media and depicted in movies is

what the Japanese themselves call *salarymen*. For women; *carrier-woman* or *office-lady* are sometimes used, but many women I talked with preferred *salaryworker* or even *salaryman* over *office-lady*. The category itself was originally the *kigyo senshi* (corporate warriors) of the post Second World War era that rebuilt the country after the devastation that had ravaged Japan. With time, "they" also managed to build a "new" Japan that by the 80s had become the second biggest economy in the world. At that time the *salaryman* and the *sengyo shufu* (full-time housewife) was the ideal middleclass path to follow for their respective genders. Today the image of a *salaryman* is less flattering; especially by the young, it carries a connotation of stress, stress related health issues, no social life and depression.

On this day, being a public holiday, there was at that point little that gave me the impression that this was a day any different from any other day. All the seats were taken and well over a hundred stood in the ails holding on to the handgrips suspended from the ceiling in each cart. As the train rolled to a stop at smaller stations few got off, but large lines stood waiting to board. When the train stopped at Yokohama Station a large hub and close to business areas the carts emptied themselves fast. As people left the train I spotted a young women still sitting further down the cart from me. She was dressed in a colorful *furisode* as if spring suddenly had come in the midst of winter. The *furisode* (literary swinging sleeves), is a type of Japanese kimono distinguished by its long sleeves ranging up to 114 centimeters, hence its name. It is held as the most formal style of kimonos worn by unmarried women in Japan. As there is few occasions to wear such a formal kimono I was often told that *Seijin Shiki* was most likely the last chance for the women to wear one. The woman in the train's *furisode* was red, but covered in a flower pattern in various colors. Pink, peach, white, gold and different shades of red. Truly beautiful and an extreme contrast to the stark *salarymen* still left in the cart. Around her waist was the characteristic *obi* (sash) worn with kimonos, with matching patterns and colors. Her hair was nicely done, with parts of it held up by a red flower pin. Around her neck was a white fur shawl or an imitation fur shawl. While I scanned the remaining passengers, as it up until now had been almost impossible to see much else then those in my immediate vicinity, I realized some of the men still in the cart seemed both too young and overdressed to be *salarymen*. After changing train and finally reaching the destination for the *Seijin Shiki* I was surprised that most of the people that left the train with me were *salarymen*. I could count on one hand the women in *furisodes* walking towards the exit.

As I left the automatic ticket gate I spotted more women in *furisodes* standing around by themselves engaged with their smartphones. At that time I wondered where all the thousands of participants were "hiding". As I saw one woman in a regular dress I started to note down how many women I saw in *furisode* as someone had told me in advance that fewer and fewer chose to wear *furisodes* during *Seijin Shiki*. It brings a smile to my face recollecting this though as I believed it would be significant as well as possible, it was not. As I went to buy another coffee I realized that every seat in the Starbucks was taken by women in *furisodes*, almost all of them sitting alone focused on their phones. I went back to the station hall and drank my coffee as I watched the women wondering why everyone stood all by themselves. I was suddenly startled by a loud and piercing "Iiiiiiiiiiiiiii" from a woman behind me and the additional "*hisashiburi*[2]!" As I turned around two women were holding each other's arms sharing comments on how beautiful the other was, while jumping up and down in the same spot. As time progressed, it became clear that all of these women standing by themselves with their smartphones all stood waiting for their friends, and each time a train rolled into the station the loud shriek of the train breaks was soon followed by the women shrieking as the groups grew. As all the members were there, they moved out of the station and towards the arena where the ceremony were to be held.

Most women, with a few exceptions, seemed to wear *furisode*, and the parade of hundreds of colorful women from the station to the arena was really something else than the line of commuters during rush-hour observed little more than an hour earlier. The men mostly wore suits, again with a few exceptions, most of them with more accessories than the average *salarymen*. With shiny watches, shiny ear piercings and such. What separated them the most was the colored hair. Many of these young men had colored their hair blond, shades of brown, and some had even colored it multiple colors, all of which will never been seen on a *salaryman*. Some of the men wore kimonos as well with the traditional *hakamas*[3], in contrast to the *furisode* as the male *kimono* often were unicolored, such as red, green, blue and white. The men in general, especially those in suits, were quieter than the women, many walking in silent groups or walking by themselves. With some exceptions as there were some groups of

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[2] Hisashiburi: A typical greeting when you meet someone you have not seen or met in a while (long time since the last time we met, I haven't seen you in ages). It seems and feels more similar to the Norwegian "lenge siden" (lit, long time since) being short to say and the definition of long can vary greatly.

[3] Hakama is a formal divided skirt used with kimono and other traditional clothing such as by monks and practitioners of certain martial arts.

men, often donned in kimonos, shouting and making a lot of noise. Jokingly calling people they saw and knew by call-names, often less flattering names, where many called upon seemed to dislike the attention. I was later told that these were most likely men that worked in construction or any sort of manual labor, as they by the age of 20 already could be working.

Both while walking towards the arena and while waiting outside older men would walk through the crowd smiling and taking pictures of the girls in kimonos, sometimes elderly women walked past and would smile and comment on how beautiful the kimonos were amongst themselves.

I did not manage to arrange so that I could observe the ceremony from the inside at Yokohama Arena since only those that received the formal invitation from the municipality can enter, this being those that turned 20 between the last ceremony and this ceremony. I did, however manage to observe another ceremony in Minato on my revisit to my field, January 2015, and thus I will describe the ceremony based on that observation.

On the inside.

The *Seijin Shiki* at Minato was a bit different from the one in Yokohama, mostly because of the amount of people attending. While the one at Yokohama the previous year had been held in a huge arena over two sessions, this one was held at a banquet hall at a hotel in one session. The municipality of Minato is an expensive area in Tokyo, famous for holding almost all the embassies in Japan and some of the most upscale shopping districts. Between the *Seijin Shiki* in 2014 and the one held in 2015, 1 504 people registered in Minato came of age, out of these 786 attended the ceremony.

I had been put in contact with one of the officials at Minato municipality with great help from the Norwegian Embassy. She had agreed to escort me to the ceremony provided that I brought an interpreter and promised to not talk to any of the participants.

As I made my way towards the hotel 11 o'clock, a considerably warmer day than a year earlier, also part due it being later during the day. The lines of *salarymen* towards the trains had been traded with equally large groups of *salarymen* heading for lunch. When I closed in on the hotel I could see smaller groups or single individuals dressed in suits and kimonos walking towards the hotel. Limousines and expensive cars passing by, some stopping outside the hotel letting of groups for the ceremony. I met my Korean friend that had offered to act as an interpreter for the occasion. We stood waiting in the lobby among the hundreds of participants, occasionally stared at by others as I a European in a suit stood there

among them speaking English with an underdressed Korean. The shrieks and shouts of "*hisashiburi*" along with other pleasantries was heard all over the reception much as it had been in the train station in Yokohama. Some parents followed their children inside the reception, some finding a seat in the lounge to sit and wait for the ceremony to finish.

The official greeted us, a nice woman in charge of communication between the municipality and the embassies within it. She admitting that it was her first time attending a S*eijin Shiki* as she and her children all had decided to skip it and therefor found it to be an interesting experience. However she repeatedly told me that we did not have to stay for the entire ceremony and more or less guaranteed me that it would be boring for me to sit through it. She was wrong. Already when the doors opened and we entered things started to happen. With a smile, but some uncertainty the staff started to greet me and congratulate me with the day, expecting that I was one of the participants that had come of age. First we came into a small hall where the participants showed their invitations, we had to wait until someone could come and verify that we were allowed inside as we lacked the formal invitation the other participants carried. As we followed the line up some stairs and through a hallway staff standing along the walls continued to congratulate all that passed, me included. Inside the banquet hall multiple lines of chairs where set up facing a stage where 13 students were seated. On the left side of the stage two rows of chairs were occupied by high ranking or honorary officials, among those the mayor, stood facing the rest of the seats. The official that was accompanying me stood for a while wondering where we should sit and asked around until finally we were told to sit amongst the other participants in the center row straight in front of the stage. We did not sit for long before one of the staff came running over and shouted "Parents aren't allowed! You have to wait outside! Please leave!" the official became clearly uncomfortable looking at me and told me that I did not have to worry then facing the staff that just repeated "You have to leave. No parents!" and at one point putting his hand on her arm as if to lead her out. As she tried to explain he kept on telling her to leave, but after repeating herself multiple times stating her position, why she was there and pointing to a pin in her jacket he got quiet. It seemed to dawn on him that he had just shouted and almost pushed a city official and his face became blank and his eyes distant. He only managed to grunt "I see" before he hurried away and out of the room. I did not see him again before we left. The most interesting with this is the contrast to what happened just moments after. A man in a red kimono came in with the imperial Japanese flag over his shoulders. A group of men seated in the section just next to us shouted his name. As he noticed them he shouted out

"Well who do we have here. Today we are adults, today you all become men! Lets get drunk!" and as he said this he plowed through the empty chairs separating them; knocking them over in the process. This drew most people's attention even from the two rows of officials next to the stage. He had almost everyone's eyes on him, including the mayor, but this did not seem to bother him at all as he started to sway the flag and then lay it over one's head and then drag it from head to head over and over again while speaking as if he handing out blessings. His posture, the way his voice carried and the action performed with the flag made it look like a priest or some authoritative figure giving blessing with the flag as a symbol for something greater. It was hard to know how to take it, if it was some sort of mocking as he behaved as the greatest authority in the room, if it was to make a formal day already very informal and relaxed into something even less serious. Based on many of the smiles and laughs it summoned it seemed to be at least received as a comic relief for some of the participants. I still do not know what the design was intended for, and the official I sat with was quick to look away from it as if it did not happen, similar to what the mayor and many of the other staff and officials in the room did. Yet the reactions that came was what stood as a contrast to the earlier incident. One of the staff came over and gently placed his fingertips just below his shoulder and with the other hand stretched out pointed towards the row of seats that were being filled. In a quiet voice he told him "If you could be so kind to please find your seat", and the man with the flag sort of shrugged and grinned to the row of men in front of him before he went and found his seat among a couple of friends that celebrated his arrival with laughs and shouts.

The way this was handled oppose to the incident where the official accompanying me was mistaken for a parent can easily be explained with the person reacting simply being a different person. Yet the way the room reacted, when the official was told to leave, the room looked at her a different way. The staff that came towards the official and the staff telling her to leave were different in their approach. This is simply my experience, but it felt as if the room looked on as if someone had done something wrong at that time. While the man with his flag was left alone for a surprisingly long time and ignored by many, as if what was happening was not an issue. As if the best reaction being no reaction. When he finally was told to find his seat, it was done with a soft voice and polite words.

Soon after this the seats were filled, the doors closed. A drawing and the words "Pioneer" was projected onto the walls on both sides of the stage, the theme chosen for this years ceremony in Minato. The ceremony started as the announcer greeted everyone and

congratulating them followed by information of emergency exits and the ceremony's program. 13 Members of a *Seijin no Hi* committee, all being 20 year olds themselves, opened up with speeches themed under "being a pioneer". This was followed by the mayor's speech.

As the mayor took the stand, a relatively tall man, he spoke with a soft voice congratulating the participants. From where the man with the imperial flag was seated one of his friends answered by shouting out "*Arigatou*[4]!". The mayor continued without giving it any attention. He spoke about all the good things that had happened for Japan lately, good results in sports and Nobel Prize winners, talking about how it all brought hope to the society of Japan. That over 13 million people had visited Tokyo the previous year, and because of the Olympics the world was paying more attention to Japan than ever before. He urged them to and expected them to be more active in this global era, and told them that adulthood gives them this chance. He continued by urging them to tie ties to the community, that voting was a social responsibility they now carried. "By voting you have the chance to bring good changes to society". In a humble voice he asked them to "please vote", and encouraged them to take more interest in politics. To be grateful and thank those that helped them reach 20 safely.

During the speech people in the same group as before occasionally shouted out comments to what the mayor said or laughed audibly. Sometimes it summoned laughs from among the participants, other times it was met with silence. The mayor did however seem to ignore it from the total lack of acknowledgement. His speech was followed by a speech from the deputy mayor. A short older man with broad shoulders, grey hair and liver spots on his forehead waited patiently as the microphone was lowered before he started. He greeted the crowd with similar words as the mayor had, but his voice was strong and authoritative, and as he shouted "*omedetougozaimasu*[5]!" and bowed it was as if a spasm ran through the crowd and at least half of the participants immediately bowed and you could hear stammering voices answering "*domoarigatougozaimashita*[6]", all echoing each other. The bow looked as if it almost had been involuntarily, a purely instinct driven reaction to the tone and volume of his voice. If it was not for the word said and its replies it could easily have been seen as a command given and accepted. For a moment, it seemed as if some tension lingered in the air as he continued his speech, but before he finished it felt as it never happened. People went back to talking amongst each other, many looking down on their smartphones sending

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[4] "Thanks" in Japanese.

[5] One of the most formal ways to congratulate someone in Japanese.

[6] One of the most formal ways to thank someone in Japanese.

messages or playing games. The group sitting in front of me shared comments and seemed to have their focus elsewhere for most of the time during the entire first part. A man straight in front of me flanked by two women mumbled "Ah, I really want to drink" where upon one of the women replied "I agree/me too". Comments and conversations concerning the plans or peoples wishes for what to do after the ceremony seemed more important than anything else, the woman straight in front of me was playing a game on her phone that looked quite similar to Candy Crush Saga. It seemed like a paradox that so many sat in this hall without paying much attention, when the very speech by both mayor and deputy mayor were themed with taking responsibility for one self and others, to respect others and contribute to society by being a pioneer. The part about voting was repeated many times, as the participants received a letter they were told that they could use to write a thank you letter to the person that had meant the most for them throughout their childhood and post it as if a vote into voting boxes outside the hall. They were told it could be a practice at voting and "to get a feel of voting".

After the speeches, there was a short pause where everyone was asked to leave the hall. As we left the hall we entered into a smaller hall with voting boxes, but I did not see anyone posting their "thank you" card as we walked by. We stood in one of the hallways where the official smiled and asked how it was to observe. I smiled and told her it was very interesting, and commented on the two incidents that happened before the speeches. She nodded and said that the man was just trying to do his job, but he did it in a very rude way, and about the man with the imperial flag she just shook her head saying "They are still so young" letting that stand as the only comment. She told me that if I was bored we could leave, and I got the impression that she found it boring herself. I politely told her that it was very interesting and if it would not be any trouble for her, I would like to observe the second half as well. She seemed a bit reluctant, but agreed to stay.

As we returned to the hall the chairs were reorganized around groups of tables and a number of tables with food had been set up along the short sides of the room and the long side across the stage. Waiters walked around giving out glasses with different sorts of juice's and a toast was held before people started to line up for the food. One of the groups with loud men cut into one of the lines without any objections and when they reached the table there was six bowls of *ungaidon*[7] left. Three of them ate one bowl each and then ate the eel from the other 3

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[7] Japanese dish: Grilled eel on top of a bowl with rice.

bowls, all while laughing. The committee of students that had held speeches were in charge of entertainment, and it was done through Bingo.

Yokohama Arena: After the ceremony

As the doors opened again the kimono clad women and men in their suits poured out of the arena into the streets. Over 11 000 of them from different gates, turning what had been empty streets into a sudden mass of colors. Some waited near the exit to gather their friends and move on in groups, some individuals left by themselves seemingly as fast as possible, choosing the side roads instead of the main road most of them took. The progression carried through the streets back towards the station where different stalls had set up giving out leaflets and selling goods. The McDonalds next to the train station had a big sign of a BigMac menu for a special price reading "ビッグな大人になろう", a wordplay I guess would translate into "lets become big adults", where the "big" refers to the BigMac. The area around the train station quickly became crowded and loud as the masses split into groups. I first approached two women standing around waiting and introduced myself and what I was there for, one of them did her best to ignore me while the other seemed to listen mostly out of pity at first but as I continued she became interested and the other women soon joined by nodding as I spoke. I apologized in advance that some of my questions might seem both strange and stupid.

"Today's *Seijin no Hi*, and you've just been to the *Seijin Shiki*, right?"

Both of them nodded. "So, what is it? What is *Seijin no Hi*?"

"It's a holiday, we celebrate becoming adults."

"So, you're both adults now?" They laughed, loud, before smiling and shaking their heads together.

"No, we are still kids, its… It's just tradition."

"I see. So, how come you're not adults? Like, what does it mean to be an adult?" They exchanged glances as if unsure who should answer.

"Well, adults work, and have children. I'm a student and don't even have a boyfriend. And also, one needs to be responsible."

The other girl nodded and added

"*Sou desu ne*[8]. We are still children."

"You're not responsible?"

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[8] Japanese roughly meaning "that's right".

"Our parents still pay for school and give us money so we can study and live. Therefore, if I do not have a job or a husband I'm not responsible for myself. I'm in someone else's care."

"And you have to have children to be an adult?" They took some time thinking about this before one of them answered.

"No, but if you have children you're probably an adult or at least should be. But I think it's hard to be an adult without work, you have to be independent from you parents and responsible for your self."

"So what's the most important part of *Seijin Shiki* for you?"

"Its to celebrate that we have become adults, to go to the ceremony and hear speeches from important people."

"So that's what's important for you?"

"No, no, that's *Seijin Shiki.*"

"But for you, personally? What's important with this?"

"Ah, I see. It's to meet friends. To wear the *furisode* and to take pictures of it."

She tilted her head slightly to the side smiling, making a peace sign with her hand next to her face as she continued;

"Later we will have a party with friends and have fun".

In the background of our conversation women were posing and taking pictures together, and among them some men with professional cameras followed by assistants holding light reflectors were having photoshoots. As before, some elderly men with big Nikon cameras was walking around smiling and taking pictures of the women in kimonos. The men mostly stood in groups talking and laughing, and from time to time, a group would head towards the station.

I spoke with several groups of women, and was also blankly ignored by even more groups, most of those that took their time provided similar answers as the two first.

The men I spoke with seemed more talkative, but as the women mostly seemed to take my questions as something serious, the men would often throw in jokes as they answered.

A group of three men stood in front of a convenience store waiting as the line of people was moving towards the station. It takes a while for 11 000 to leave an arena. As I approached them they looked surprised an even if I had spoken in Japanese one of them stammered "We no speak English". I replied with "But you just did" in Japanese and they all

relaxed and laughed. I explained why I had approached them and asked if I could ask some questions and they told me they were waiting for some friends so they had time to spare.

As I asked what was important with *Seijin no Hi* and *Seijin Shiki* they all agreed it was all about meeting acquaintances and friends, while one added to take pictures. One of them laughed and asked if he was a girl, which he replied that he was just answering in general. As I asked what their image of adulthood was, what being an adult meant they started joking about it. Especially teasing a thinner man with glasses while saying "to know a women's touch". Many of the joke came at the expenses of others. Some examples: "To be as boring as ones parents", "not having your own life anymore" and such. Besides the jokes, they also said things like getting a job, becoming economically independent and caring for yourself. I asked them when one becomes an adult and again they laughed as they all pointed at the one in the middle of the group. "You're the most grown up of us, you answer" one teased. He seemed a bit uncomfortable with the situation and shrugged at first but then said "Ones sense of responsibility, I think". There was a nod of agreement and comments like "Good point", "Yeah, that's right". As I had asked those before I also asked them if they were adults, and the reactions were the same laughter and headshaking "We are still kids".

From these conversations it seemed to be two distinct ways of speaking about adulthood; one being that of objective markers such as working and independence through money. Things measurable, as markers of adulthood. The other being those of personal qualities, a sort of psychological or subjective state of adulthood . The first way to understand adulthood is similar to the five markers of adulthood used to conceptualize and measure adulthood in social sciences, being: "(…) having moved out of the parent's home, left school, started to work full time, married/cohabited and had children (Birkeland, 2013, s. 40)". Especially important are the three first; moving out, graduating and getting a fulltime job. All of these leads to an independence from your parents, and also implies that you need to take greater responsibility for yourself and your life. In the different conversation it was pointed out that some of these subjective markers, like being responsible, would come with time after the objective markers, and that even if you did not have a good "sense of your own responsibility" by working and being independent this would evolve. For most of the men moving out, graduating and getting full time employment was what made you adult, the rest was presented as what differed a "good" adult from a "bad" adult. The women agreed, but for most of them marriage and childbirth was mentioned as markers that would make you a

"complete adult", at least hinting that this was something expected, regardless of wants or intentions of doing so.

Gen-chan's take on adulthood.

Gen-chan[9] came into the *Izakaya*[10], she was short and slim, wearing black pants and a leather jacket. The other girls greeted her with "*otsukaresama*[11]" as she sat down and commanded "beer" while lighting a cigarette. Gen-chan turned 20 the previous year and was invited to the *Seijin Shiki* as all the other of her age had, but she had decided not go. A common friend had set up this dinner so I could meet her and some other women and ask some questions over some food and drinks. She looked at me and smiled, she wore more makeup than what I usually saw on Japanese women. She spoke, but not to me, yet it was about me.

     "That's him, right? Your friend?"

My friend confirmed.

     "His hair is strange, it's unfamiliar".

     "Why?"

The others laughed.

     "The color, you can see it's not colored, it should not be that color natural".

There was more laughter.

     "And his mustache, it's a different color".

She continued and said something I did not catch but it made the other women laugh, one instinctively covering her mouth. "What?" I asked in Japanese. One of them urged my friend to translate it and a bit embarrassed she told me that she wondered if my pubic hair was the same color as my hair or my mustache. Then she added that she had an almost uncontrollable urge to color all my hair the same color to set things right.

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[9] -chan, a suffix used with children, teenager and sometimes grandparents that the speaker is familiar with. It connotes a sense of endearing traits. This is what her friends called her and what she called her self, despite it being uncommon to use suffix behind ones own name.

[10] Izakaya is a type of drinking establishment in Japan where small dishes are shared between all those seated around the table and the bill usually split evenly despite some drinking and eating more than others.

[11] Otsukaresama is often translated to a way of thanking like "Thank you. That's enough for today", but it was also explained and used as "you did good" or "thank you for your effort today", the meaning defined by the context.

It was a strange start to the meeting, and I feared that Gen-chan might not be the most representable source for information compared with my other friends and informants. As we received our drinks and some small dishes of food I started to ask her different questions. At the beginning it was basic information to better get a picture of what kind of life she had lived and was living.

Gen-chan worked in healthcare, and although she would say that she felt that she was more or less similar to most Japanese women, she believed she was a bit different since she had chosen to work straight out from High School instead of studying. She was still living with her parents, but wanted to move out. As we moved on Gen-chan changed her way of talking, she joked less, and provided reflective responses. It seemed as if my questions touched issues she had strong and serious opinions about, making me realize again that despite what I had feared earlier, Gen-chan was a good source for information.

I asked her what an adult was and she immediately replied "*baka* (idiots)". She explained that adults were just big children; they were inconsiderate, irresponsible and egoistic. She remembered realizing it when she was 16, but probably it had started even earlier, little by little. When she was 16, she started working at a *Izakaya* and to work around drunk adults made her realize that being an adult means you don't have to care about what other people think and feel anymore. The ideal adult was described mostly by antonyms from what she originally said about adults, but she had few examples of such people in her life. It was more or less just about turning 20 to become one by law, and then in reality still being a child you would gradually become an adult by earning money through a fulltime job. The more we talked about being an adult the more definitions and criteria surfaced, as she meant that by being married and having children you would become an adult, but without that you would have to be independent and act like one. While we were talking one of the staff came to collect empty plates and glasses and Gen-chan asked him "Hey! What does it mean to be an adult?"

"Ah, to be an adult?"

He thought a bit while stacking the plates on his tray.

"Well, it doesn't mean that much, really? Just being able to take care of yourself".

I asked Gen-chan if she was an adult, and she shook her head adding a clear "no".

"I'm a *shakaijin*."

Shakaijin literarily translates to society-person or society-human, created by connecting the word *shakai* (society) with *jin* (person or human). In English, it is usually translated to and

understood as; being a full member of society. To be a *shakaijin* you have to, at the very least, be a fulltime worker, thus it often used as an opposite of *gakusei* (student). This does however make it a bit problematic since it implies that students in fact are not a part of the society mainly because they do not work and do not pay their taxes. This problem also adds in terms of being a housewife relying on her husbands salary, since it falls besides these criteria. As it could be the matter of translation I asked around if students and housewives could not be labeled as a *shakaijin*. The responses varied, but in common was the following traits: a person should be independent through work or a partner. In this definition both the housewife and the student through part time jobs could be called and call themselves a *shakaijin*. Some added that he or she also should have moved out, especially if he was a man. This way of understanding *shakaijin* makes it similar to the traits mentioned by those that attended the *Seijin Shiki* used to describe adulthood. Gen-chan described herself as not an adult, but a *shakaijin*, based on the same markers the others had used to paint their picture of adulthood. In this way she separated herself from the others since she works, and they study, but still distanced herself from being an adult. Why did she chose to say she was a *shakaijin* but not an adult? Because in the strict sense, what the students at the *Seijin Shiki* described as adults, and partly what she herself described as an adult, were markers she herself had. The answer came when I asked if her two older brothers were adults?

"I would say 50/50."

"Why?"

"Well, on one part they have moved out and has gotten married, they are working and have children, on the other part they still act like children sometimes and one of them gets easily angry."

For Gen-chan, a persons control of self seemed as important as financial independence.

Natsui's take on adulthood.

I met with Natsui (20) at a small event cafe that she worked part time at a couple of hours before her shift started. She had agreed to be a part of an unstructured interview concerning her experience with the *Seijin Shiki* that she had attended just a couple of months earlier. Natsui was a bright, caring person, as she smiled she produced a set of distinct dimples across her face as if framing her eyes and her smile. She had moved to Tokyo from a small village, causing other to refer to her as an "*inaka no ko*" (a child from nowhere/the countryside). She

had gone to Tokyo as her parents had done before her to study, going from a municipality with a smaller population than students enrolled at her university.

"So what would you say *Seijin Shiki* is?"

> "It's a celebration of the age of majority, that we have come of age and thus become an adult in the eyes of the law. That we from this point on should strive to become adults".

She started with a general explanation of the day as the others had done before her. It was almost mechanical, as if she read it from an official document. As I inquired further what the day was about for her, her smile grew as she answered.

> "It's all about seeing friends, you know, I think that's the case for most people, probably those that chooses not to go doesn't have friends they wish to meet again from their home town. Since my high school was far away and many of my friends from junior high school went to different high schools, it was an important chance to meet friends I had not seen for a long time again. Probably the last time before we all start to work, get married and have children".

"And how was it?"

> "It was great! I had been so worried you know, that nobody would remember me. I hadn't met most of them for so many years. I met friends from primary school and junior high, some studied, some worked, a couple didn't do anything and some had even married and gotten children. Everyone had changed so much you know, it was so fun. (…). *Seijin no Hi* is really more of a *matsuri*[12], a celebration in itself, and it has little to do with being or becoming an adult anymore. Its just governed by your age, if your 20, you can join".

"So what does it mean to be an adult?"

> "Well, when I was a child, an adult was someone that was allowed to do things kids aren't. They could smoke, drink alcohol, drive cars, and decide what cloths to wear. Now I think that there is multiple ways to be adult, different criteria to be one. On one side there is age, but not just age, age just gives you an impression if someone can or can't be something. At times, you're between this, as I guess I'm now. It's strange to call myself a child, but I'm more a child than an adult, I think. I guess one important thing is money, you must be independent from your parents through work, but again

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[12] Japanese festivals, specially popular during the spring and summer season in Japan.

you have to be able to carry the responsibility for yourself and sometimes others. But I think most people would say work, you need to work and manage yourself to be an adult, to be independent, at least".

"So, you wouldn't say that you're an adult now because of *Seijin Shiki*?"

"No, no, I'm still a child *desu nee* (you know, right?). Sort of at least."

"But what is the ideal adult then?" Her smile shrank as she repeated the question out loud for herself and thought for a while. "Based on your own image, not others."

"Well, hmm, proper, no, no, hmm".

She stopped and bit her lip, her smile was gone. Her face was serious and deep. She reminded me of Gen-chan that had gone from being silly and constantly giggling to serious and deeply reflective.

"It's the way of life, your view of life, liking and coming to terms with your own personality. That you're grateful, and that you're able to express it outwards. When your heart has grown spacious, then you truly become an adult, I think. You have stopped disliking or hating yourself and others, I think that's very important. Being able to respect and accept others. I cannot do it, or, I can, but it's hard. I sort of feel as if handling myself is hard enough."

I was overwhelmed by her answer, and where she usually would use a lot of filler words typical for Japanese, as well as taking pauses, she spoke with a fluent pace until the very last sentence. In light of this description of adulthood I repeated one of the earlier questions. "When do you become an adult then, close to this ideal?"

"40's".

Her answer was quick and confident, in a way that made me think that she mistook the question so I repeated it again and wondered if she truly meant to say in ones 40's.

"Yeah, 40's. My parents are in their late 40's and they are good and proper adults now, at least very close. They meet different people, different ways of thinking, and it does not challenge them. They are at peace with themselves, I think".

After a slight pause she continuous.

"Of course people in their 30's are also adults because, they treasure their life, but I think they are yet to understand how important they are for themselves and for others".

Natsui mentioned the objective markers when describing adulthood, but personally she attributed the subjective qualities of a person as the most important factors to be a "good" or "full" adult. As the others, Natsui described adulthood similar to how we speak of childhood

and adolescence, of changes and unclear transitions. Through different markers that implies where one is on the specter of the given life stage. You become an adult by law when your 20, but until you finish your education you are still a child or more a child than an adult. By getting independent through work you become sort of an adult, but there is still a specter of how "much" or "little" of an adult you are. Like Natsui, Gen-chan also gave the impression that there was personal reasons that she did not call herself an adult. Partly it seemed because of her negative image of the general adult, but also as when she described her brother as just partly adult as she used his anger and occasional childish behavior as the reason.

Masayori and the prospect of becoming an adult.

Masayori (25) studied his tablet through his thick glasses as we sat on the floor in a traditional Japanese *yakitori*[13] shop. He was checking to see if there was any updates on his quest for a career path employment. Masayori was the type of person that always had a calculating gaze, if it was trying to decide what dish to order or deciding what to say. He carried himself with a secure manner, seemingly always in control of himself and his feelings. As Natsui he had also moved to Tokyo to study, leaving a medium sized town for one of the world's biggest metropolis. He was now on his first year of his master's, the year master's students starts the lengthy endeavor of job hunting

Besides us, most of the other customers were *salarymen* in their 40's and 50's, all dressed in their suits engaged in after-hours meetings or a relaxed meal and drinks with co-workers. The sound level was high and many of the men were overly intoxicated, a normal scene any weekday in Tokyo. With the *salarymen'*s cheers and conversation in the background Masayori sighed as he put down his tablet. After we had ordered a new set of dishes I asked him how the search for a job was coming along and he sighed again "I don't know, it's still too early to say anything, but..." he paused slightly as a man at the neighboring table burst out in a loud laughter, "I'm not sure if I'm ready to become an adult". I asked him what he meant and again he waited for the same man's laughter to subside before answering, "I'm afraid I will end up like my father"

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[13] *Izakaya* that is specialized in chicken skewers.

Theoretical reflections.

In this thesis, we follow the transition from university to work in Tokyo, Japan, all seen as an expression of life course progression towards "adulthood". My key-informants were mainly in the age group 20s to early 30's at different stages of this transition. Where the field is Tokyo, the process researched is studying, working and the transition between the two as a step towards adulthood. However, the narrative is a matter of change, of generational gaps. As the topic of adulthood, generation gaps and transitions are big topics, and hard topics to properly address in a master's thesis it is important that the reader is aware and keeps in mind that the way the empirical data is conveyed might seem overly generalized. This is a conscious and deliberate choice as I chose to write in the words of my informants, thus when I use the category "Japanese" it is meant as an emic term, not an ethic one; leading to the generalizations stemming from the informants themselves. To narrow down the foci of my thesis it is the reality, sense making, logic and strategies of my informants that is used to paint the stories of their own lives. I have therefore allowed myself to present conversations as empirical data where my informants recounts and expresses meanings through personal stories and their own realities, despite never having participated or observed such situations, as the case is with primary school, job interviews and job training.

As seen in the prolog, the image Oji holds of young Japanese are not flattering, neither is Gen-chan nor the men I spoke with at the *Seijin Shiki*'s portrayal of adults. Looking to both science and media in and outside of Japan (Goodman, Imoto, & Toivonen, A Sociology of Japanese Youth: From returnees to NEETs, 2012; Kawano, Roberts, & Long, 2014; Mathews & White, 2004; Kingston, 2014) there is a well-documented and discussed generational narrative were both sides of the gap are describing each other's in highly unflattering words. I have chosen to see the generational gap through the transition(s) to adulthood, and as the previous chapter illustrates, one of the ways adulthood is conceptualized, is as being financially independent. Gen-chan and Natsui, however illustrates that the entire concept of adulthood is not without problems, as they struggle to conceptualize it both as an objective status and as a subjective status. With Masayori's fear of becoming like his father when he grows up, he clearly ties the transition to adulthood and the intergenerational tension together.

The research questions for this thesis is split in two, firstly "How is the transition from student to worker (adulthood) effected by traditional ideals and contemporary realities

(generational gaps)", and secondly "What strategies are used to renegotiate the traditional life-course progression in their own favor?"

In this chapter, I first discuss a more general basis for conceptualization of life stages, adulthood and generational gaps. This discussion is followed by a discussion on the historical and social background commonly seen as the basis for the generational gap in Japan, as well as the narratives on both sides of the gap.

Life stages

Adulthood as a life stage often comes across as a "taken-for-granted" stage (Blatterer, 2007), defined by what it is not, rather than what it is. On the other hand, life stages such as adolescence and childhood are fields of research by themselves in multiple disciplines, with a multitude of definitions and criteria's for where a person is on its road towards adulthood. Adulthood then is often described as what starts when adolescence begins, a problematic conceptualization as there is no clear point of either departure or arrival. The very understanding we have of life stages is the main evidence that life stages is neither as black and white nor definable as they often are presented.

When the American psychologist Stanley Hall (1904) labelled and described the "new life stage" adolescence he created the grounds for a focus that has shaped how we understand life and the progression of it in today's society. Today in postindustrial societies, some would argue globally (Arnett, 2013), adolescence is seen as a natural part of life and society, as natural as childhood. When Phillipe Aries's *Centuries of Childhood* (1996, s. was first published in 1962) came, it helped "reminding us (…) that the idea of childhood did not even exist in medieval society (…) (Erikson, 1978, s. vii)" turning the focus to the very debate of how, when and why stages like these come to exist (Settersten, Furstenberg, & Rumbaut, 2005). "It is now commonly understood that economic and social conditions in tandem create categories such as childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, middle age, and old age that are recognized and reified in popular discourse" (Settersten, Furstenberg, & Rumbaut, 2005, s. 3). What was described here is what happened with adolescence, when Stanley Hall (1904) described adolescence as an institutionalized life stage it fitted the circumstances of young people in America at that time and was quickly recognized and adopted as a new category for individuals no longer children nor yet adults.

The way we conceptualize life as separate stages, are in direct relations to the society and time in which we live. We often look back into the past and into the future with the same

conceptualizations and categories as we have from our viewpoint. The meaning of young, grown up and old were different in the Middle Ages, and not on a general level, but it would differ between regions as much as between social classes. In the way the world works today, with science and governments measuring and defining things into models, is there not a danger of overlooking changes that renders the definitions obsolete? With a world that moves fast, where things comes and goes, changes and return before people even knew they had been there in the first place.

Focus on the different life stages

There is a vast amount of studies on childhood and adolescence (Arnett, 2013; Arnett, 2004; Blatterer, Coming of age in times of uncertainty, 2007; Erikson, 1978); with multiple fields solely dedicated to them, since it is believed that childhood and adolescences lays the foundation for a successful transition to adulthood later in life. Most of these works define adulthood just by giving a minimal definition based on the five markers of adulthood (Birkeland, 2013) mentioned earlier, if they define it at all. Yet they use adulthood as a comparative size. It appears to be like speaking of the larva becoming a butterfly, just by describing the egg, larva and pupa, but never defining what a butterfly really is. There has also been an increasing amount of studies on old age (Lynch & Danely, 2013; Morgan, 2011), as more and more countries experience an increasing elderly populace, as life expectancy rises, and the elderly makes up an increasing percentage of the population. This timed with birthrates of many countries decreasing or stagnating as the typical post-war baby-boomers reaches old age changes the composition of many societies (Arnett, 2013; Settersten, Furstenberg, & Rumbaut, 2005). At the same time the tradition for children caring for their parents at home is disappearing in many countries, so responsibility has shifted from family to state (Arnett, 2013). Studies on childhood, adolescence and old age rarely touch the "what is adulthood" and only indirectly imply a sense of what adulthood is by defining what it is opposed to. Besides topics such as midlife crisis and adult learning disabilities there is not much that addresses adulthood (Arnett, 2004), and even these say little about adulthood itself. There is examples of articles and books in social science that do, in fact, address the issue of adulthood as a taken-for-granted status, but they are yet to be implemented into the larger discourse (Blatterer, 2007; Erikson, 1978; Settersten, Furstenberg, & Rumbaut, 2005; Blatterer, 2007).

The most famous and most discussed social anthropological study of transition towards adulthood might be Margaret Mead's *Coming of age in Samoa* (1973), where she questioned

the universality of experiences during adolescence. Mead (1973) frequently use the term adult in her book, where she speaks of an adult world with adult responsibilities and adult activities. If one chose to, one could map out her information and get a good impression of what separates the pre-adult world and the adult world on Samoa, but Mead herself does not define nor clearly characterize either a universal or a cultural adulthood, nor does she describe any major transitory events.

Arnold Van Gennep's *Rites de Passage* (1999, s. was first published in 1909) contributed by distinguishing the biological and the social, as he distinguished between bodily puberty and social puberty. In many ways, this is what Gen-chan and Natsui mentions with the objective markers of adulthood, firstly the biological being age, the social being what it means to be an adult in terms of independence. One might argue that when Gen-chan and Natsui expresses the extra dimension, the subjective state of adulthood, as they combine the biological and the social. In any way, they add a subjective state, a self of adulthood. Where playing the role of an adult, does not mean that one self is identified or identifying as an adult. Seen in terms of Goffman (1992) there is an aspect of role-distance in Gen-chan's case, as others identify her as having many of the markers for adulthood, yet she distances herself from the status. She "(…) is actually denying not the role but the virtual self that is implied in the role for all accepting performers (Goffman, Role Distance, 1990, s. 103)".

Adulthood

So, what is really adulthood? In sociology adulthood is, as mentioned, often conceptualized through five criteria/markers: "(...) having moved out of the parents' home, left school, started to work full time, married/cohabited and had children" (Birkeland, 2013, s. 40). This is a simplified and measurable way to identify a person as an adult based on objective markers he or she has obtained. These criteria are, however, not suited to indicate much of adulthood in traditional societies or societies fundamentally different from "western" societies, nor to really say what adulthood as a concept is. What it says is just how adult life is perceived as in the given cultures that operates with these five markers. Also, quite paradoxical, adult being a social status, saying something of ones place in society, is by these criteria not necessarily observable, as well as many of the markers being reversible in nature. Especially important here, in terms of modern societies where these markers stem from, are the fact that society has changed and is changing, and even if it might have indicated adulthood when they first came to be, they might not do so now.

What adulthood is expected to be and articulated as is based on the social order of adulthood (Mathews & White, 2004). The five markers are indicators of what the adult social order is or were in the western societies, and also in Japan. "The survival of that social order depends upon young people being willing to enter and re-create the world of their elders (Mathews & White, 2004, s. 1)". Adult social order being a way to see Bourdieu's habitus (1990), as family education and institutionalized education "infuse individual minds (Mathews & White, 2004, s. 3)" into re-producing the norms and ideals, or "to re-create the society that has created them (Mathews & White, 2004, s. 3)". This social order is in itself not adulthood, as the order changes as society changes, based on things as technological advances, the economic situation and so on.

Adulthood is, very simplified, just what the society expects a fully grown member of society to know, be and do. The status of adult simply embodies these expectations. The way we speak of adulthood makes it into a set status, a set way to be and live, so when the Japanese adolescences say "I never want to grow up" what they in fact may mean is "I do not want to become the adults my parents had to become". The reluctances to become an adult is nothing new, and many argue that generational conflicts between the young and the old is a fundamental and important part of the life course itself (Foner, 1984; Mathews & White, 2004; Blatterer, Coming of age in times of uncertainty, 2007). The last 60 years in Japan a narrative of such generational gaps has colored both science and media, where the fear has been and still is that the gaps are of an historic issue, not of the natural life course (Kawano, Roberts, & Long, 2014; Mathews & White, 2004). In such a way that the young will not just take the elders place and themselves become elders, continuing the social order, but change the order in such a way that the future Japan is a new Japan, different and disconnected from the past and thus not the future imagined by the old.

Generational gaps

"Inequalities between old and young are built into the very fabric of nonindustrial societies" (Foner, 1984, s. 240) and that it is a matter of life course, where the young will copy the old as they take their place keeping the inequalities between the next generation in place. This being similar to the way Matthews and White (2004) sees the "adult social order" in terms of habitus (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). They choose the same professions, conform to similar rules, follow the same progression by means of marriage and parenthood and thus uphold the social order (Mathews & White, 2004).

As mentioned earlier, the narrative of generational gaps has ranged for a long time in Japan, with generations labelled such as the *dankai* (baby-boomers) and the *shirake sedai* (the indifferent generation) have all been under critique for letting go of the core values of Japan and threatening the future order of Japan (Mathews & White, 2004). Nonetheless, these generations became the hard working corporate warriors and the homemakers of their time, living lives mostly similar to their parents. It could be argued that many of them settled for less by working harder and longer hours with less monetary returns than previous generations had. This causing it to seem as if it has been as Foner (1984) described in nonindustrial societies, merely a matter of the life course; where the generational conflict is a natural part of life course as each cohort negotiate for the power of their elders. Yet today, it seems as if it might be a matter of history, in many ways made possible or caused by the foundation laid by the previous generations. What points to a historic change is the fact that the adult social order in Japan seems to be threatened.

> Today (…) many Japanese young people are choosing not to enter "the adult social order": not hold stable jobs, as did their fathers, or to marry and have families, as did their mothers, but to follow paths of their own choosing (Mathews & White, 2004, s. 2)

And it is not just by those that refuse to follow, but also those with the inability to do so.

Harry Blatterer (2007) proposes the theory of normative gaps or normative delays in a society, meaning that the ideals and norms mediated and educated differs from the contemporary realities today's youths live by and in. The way the old and the young understand, seek, find and create meaning is done in a complete different mindset and concepts like love, labor, leisure and time carry different meanings. The adult social order of the past held to be real for the present is facing a "legitimation crisis" (Habermas, 1973) as:

> Every society – every "adult social order"- always face the possibility of "legitimation crisis" (to borrow Habermas's [1973] term), where its young people evaluate and make a decision as to whether or not to join that society. Does adult society seem worth entering? Is "the game worth playing"? (Mathews & White, 2004, s. 4)

As if the language of life changed beyond dialects (life course) but now rather resemble different languages (historic).

Generation gaps in Japan

In the introduction to a book on Japan's changing generation (Mathews & White, 2004, s. 1) many examples are provided of how the gap is articulated when young describes their elders

as; "old-fashioned, stiff, inflexible" and the elders describing them as ; "spoiled, self-centered, inconsiderate". These are descriptions I encountered myself and evident in the prolog and the interviews in the first chapter. This current generation narrative can be traced back to the post-Second World War area.

Japan has, throughout its history, had long periods of self- or enforced isolation from the outside world, the most famous being the *Sakoku* (locked country) period from 1633 to 1853 where foreigner were banned from entering Japan and Japanese from leaving. Heavily guarded docks such as the Dutch island of *Dejima* in Nagasaki were among the few places permitted for foreigners to trade with Japan, as long as it was under a Dutch flag. This period eventually resulted in the American Commodore Matthew Perry and the black ships (steam powered warships) forcing Japan open in 1853. The periods of isolation is often pointed at as one of the reasons Japan managed to "develop" into "such" homogeneous culture with its "cultural quirks" as it is seen by outsiders. The period that followed the Second World War did however see a period of rapid modernization, economic growth and technological advances to the point where they were seen as technologically more advanced than the "West" and on its way to becoming the largest economy in the world by surpassing U.S.A (Duke, 1986). During this period, Japan became an international player, opening up to the world, where the economic and technologic situation paired with an influx of foreign ideals and concepts transformed Japan bringing along great social and cultural changes in comparison to pre-war Japan. Already in the very beginning of the post-war Japan the critique of the coming generations were worded. A fear of an immoral and un-Japanese society fueled a growing debate and narrative of generational issues, addressing a growing gap between the young and the old (Sakurai, 2004). The young rebelling against traditional ideals and norms seen through school dropouts, youth movements, student uprisings, "immoral" behavior and *hiko* (misconduct) (Ackermann, 2004) such as with *enjo-kosai* (compensation dating) where high school students would date older men in exchange for money and gifts (Kinsella, 2014; Kinsella, 2012). As Tetsuo Sakurai (2004) points out, many of these "troubled", "lost" and "rebellious" generations would in time conform to a larger set of norms. They would end up working jobs like their fathers, raising children like their mothers and work hard until retirement, reproducing the life progression of those before them. As mentioned, today the situation seems different, the public outcries and panic-like narrative of a changing and even "dying" Japan is backed up by statistics that clearly show developing trends that threatens the "social order" of Japan, and by that the "adult social order" with it.

The normative delay: The changing Japan.

Since 2011, Japan has had a negative population growth with some predictions estimating as much as a 30 million population decline in Japan by 2050 (Statistics Bureau: Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications B, 2015). With a growing proportion of elderly compared to a decreasing proportion of children born, Japan faces difficulties to maintain the weight of its aging citizens. With 33% of all Japanese being age 60 and up, one third of its population is above the countries retirement age (Statistics Bureau: Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications A, 2015). The growing social- and health care spending is said to be greater than what the working population pays in income taxes.

Japan experienced an economic collapse as the Japanese asset price bubble burst in the end of the 1980's, the following period often referred to as "the lost decades" (Cave, 2014). The economy stagnated and many struggle to survive on their pension, forcing retirees to re-enter the workforce for minimum wages to supplement the pension they receive (Matsuyama, 2012). The elderly are in varying degrees dissatisfied with the situation, fear of a changing Japan they no longer feel familiar with. However, in the end they outnumber the younger generations and as the politicians that runs Japan are on average in their 50's and the biggest voters in their later years, the country seems to still be run by relatively traditional values and ideals. The institutions, mainly those in the education sector, still teach and follow a traditional path. Like the five markers for adulthood, it is also in Japan mediated as a proper life-course progression that starts with education, leads to work, marriage, childbearing and finally retirement. If we look to the statistic, in Japan, like most post-industrial countries, time spent in education has greatly increased, the mean age of bearing first child has increased from 25,6 in 1970 to 30,4 in 2013, mean age of first marriage from 24,2 in 1970 to 29.3 in 2013 (Kumagai & Keyser, 1996, ss. 21-22). But when one adds the percentage of those that never marries and never carries children the situation truly becomes different. 5% of the women were not and never had been married in the age group of 35 to 39 during the 1970, in 2005 it was almost 20% (Kumagai & Keyser, 1996, s. 22). Attitudes towards marriage has changed significantly in Japan over the last decades. In recent surveys, an increasing number reports that they find marriage pointless, as many as 33.5% (Phro, 2013). The financial security jobs were held to provide are no longer realities, merely empty promises from outdates ideals. With so many factors in the idealized and normative life-course progression, the reality the young faces does not align with the image the elderly and society presents them with. As they are choosing to or are forced to break with the traditional life progression that others are expecting them to follow

the results seem to be critique and scrutiny from the elderly and society. From the expectations and the results we can tell that Japan is experiencing a normative delay between traditional ideals and the contemporary reality of the young.

Deviancy or alternative lifestyles.

In the generational conflict driven narrative we find a multitude of social categories used to label those that has fallen on the outside of the traditional norms. "(…) Japanese mainstream society appears to be no different to western countries in terms of its capacity to continuously generate new social types, many of which flag deviance from socially constructed ideas about the organization of 'normal' or 'natural' life-course (Toivonen, 2012, s. 141)". The most famous being Japans "*hikikomori*" (Horiguchi, 2012), literarily translated into "pulling inwards", a form of withdrawal from society. The most relevant for this thesis is the rejections of the traditional path through *furitas* (Reiko, 2004)(from the English word Free and the German word *Arbeiter*), NEET (Not currently engaged in employment, education or training) (Toivonen, 2012), parasite singles and the "*Hodo-Hodo zoku*" (the "So-So tribe).

The *furitas* are those that has rejected or failed to enter career path employment, ending up working part-time jobs, freelance or minor positions in order to make money. The NEET are by the Japanese official definition "unmarried 15- to 34-year-olds who are 'Not in Education, Employment, or Training' (Toivonen, 2012, s. 142)". Parasite singles is much as the category entails, children that continue to live home off their parents instead of marrying and establishing own households, but is sometimes used in a broader sense of those that lives of others. The "So-So tribe" choosing to reject promotions and to distance themselves from work in a manner that they can maintain a less stressful and freer work-free time balance.

These categories are used to describe social groups (Toivonen, 2012), that in some way or another is seen as a deviance from the normal or natural life-course progression. In the generational conflict-narrative, these categories are often used as proof of the young's rejection or inability to follow the "Japanese model", raising the questions I ask in this thesis; how is the traditional ideals and the contemporary realities effecting their transition/s, and are the alternatives like *furita* and *parasite singles* strategies to renegotiate the traditional life course?

Prolonged adolescence, emerging adulthood or a new adulthood?

Similar situations as those in Japan can be found in countries all over the world, where adulthood is "prolonged" or "rejected" (Arnett, 2013; Arnett, 2004; Blatterer, Coming of age

in times of uncertainty, 2007; Settersten, Furstenberg, & Rumbaut, 2005). Terms such as prolonged adolescence is often used to describe those in their late 20's or in their 30's still living an uncommitted and adolescent like lifestyle. The American psychologist Jeffrey Arnett (2013; 2004) has proposed that it needs to be conceptualized as a new life stages which he has labeled "emerging adulthood" to bridge the period between adolescence and adulthood, claiming that to operate with terms such as prolonged adolescence or young adulthood are misgiving. The first conceptualization entails that they are still adolescence even if they have little in common with an 18 year old, the last wrong as it entails that they have already reached adulthood since their lifestyle is as much apart adults as it is adolescents. In many ways Arnett (2004) is proposing something similar to what Hall (1904) did with adolescence. A question I would like to pose is: when is it a matter of a new adulthood? I believe this question adds an extra dimension for this thesis, the possibility to read about my informants as pioneers for a new way to be an independent adult in contemporary Japan.

This thesis

In this thesis, I will explore how my informants move towards the first three markers of adulthood (graduating, moving out, becoming economically independent) as they look for jobs, graduate from university and starts working. By exploring their images and ideals in life-course progression compared to the traditional adult social order in Japan through education and upbringing I seek to uncover what might be the reasons for the "reluctance" towards the adult social order of their seniors. By exploring what happens as students, the transition from university to work, and as workers, I seek to explore the strategies used and implemented as they try to renegotiate the adult social order. By sticking to the narratives they expressed their own life and the Japanese society through I will explore the sense making and reality of my informants on their road towards independence.

Methodology and field

Background

When I came to Tokyo, Japan late December of 2013 to commence my fieldwork it was already my fifth time in Japan. The first time was back in the summer of 2009 when I attended 3 months of language school in Fukuoka. Fukuoka being the biggest city of the southernmost island of the four main islands of Japan. Between my first visit and my fieldwork, I had gone back once on a school trip and twice to attend language schools; once again in Fukuoka and the last one in Tokyo just 6 months prior to my fieldwork

The fieldwork was originally from late December 2013 until mid-July 2014, but as I received economical support from the Scandinavia-Japan Sasakawa foundation I went back for an additional month through January 2015 in order to observe the inside of the *Seijin Shiki* and to do interviews in connection to the recruitment season in Japan.

Locus

I chose Tokyo based on an already existing network and for Tokyo being a city where I was told many young Japanese moved to for studies and/or work, as was the case for many of my friends preexisting my fieldwork and for many of those that became my informants during my field.

I ended up living almost my entire stay in a guesthouse, resembling a large shared apartment. It was divided into several floors, all sharing two kitchens and one living room, but with bathroom and shower on each floor. The residents was a mix of workers as old as their 40s and students in their 20s. A fair amount of the residents were foreign exchange students, offering an outside view on many topics concerning the "Japanese way".

The guesthouse was located central in Tokyo, close to centrums such as Akihabara, Ueno, Kanda and Tokyo Station, and connected to the rest of Greater Tokyo through multiple subway and train lines. The immediate surroundings was mainly offices and restaurants, causing the streets to be hectic all day in the week, but close to empty during Saturdays and Sundays as there were few people actually residing in the area. Close by on foot the Akihabara district stood out as an extreme contrast to the office buildings next to the guesthouse with its neon signs, costume clad women and men, gaming parlors and electronic shops. The area is often referred to as the "Mecca for nerds" or "Electric town", because of it being a major shopping district for electronics and videogame and movie memorabilia. With

arcade halls spanning over 6 floors a person can get lost in videogames for hours as long as he brought enough coins to feed the machine. Not far North from Akihabara an old district named Ueno lies, and while Akihabara is famous for technology and "nerds", Ueno is famous for the Zoo and its elderly. I would often walk between these centrums pondering over their proximity in space, but distance in content. In such ways it was as if the part between these two centrums with its lack of restaurants, shops and colors, stood out as a physical representation of the gap I was there to observe.

Most of my core informants was encountered in these areas, and I often met them there daily even if some of them lived as much as a full hour away by train.

When I revisited my field I lived in a smaller shared house where all the inhabitants were in their mid to late 20s. During the revisit I was focusing mostly on what happens after a student starts working, and could thus not have lived any better place.

My informants

I met most of my informants through attending two "event cafés", one of them not that far from where I lived. The cafés was more like a social club open for everyone where themed events would be held throughout the week. This would range between cultural events, seasonal events, food events, language events/meetings, game nights, parties, and other types of themed nights. The people that attended the events were all between the age of 18 and in their 60s. Often there would be between 50/50 between the genders occasionally a slight bigger turnout among women. Some would show up for the particular event, others frequented the place no matter the event and the main social group they had was the one based at the café. For the regulars that mostly made up the social groups that used the café as a meeting point there would also be get-togethers and activities outside the context of the café and it was two such groups I ended up becoming a part of (adding a third group during my revisit). Students predominantly made up the two groups, but there was some *furitas* and *workers* as well, most of them in their mid to early 20s and some in their early 30s. In many ways the place reminded me of youth clubs I used to frequent in Norway when I was in my early teens as the place in many ways seemed random and unimportant, it was the possibility to go somewhere and meet friends, the café just turned out to be that "somewhere" for my informants. Others I knew from before and got to know during my fieldwork had similar places they attended as regulars, all from clubs, bars, cafés, social clubs connected to a hobby such as music, sports or games.

Besides these two groups, I had the already existing network of friends I would meet up with, but most of these were smaller groups and thus most of the participant observation was done in the groups from the event cafés.

The events at the cafés were informal and what usually happened was that after the first two hours the social groups would sit down and hang out almost as if they were in any other café. One main exception was the relation between the staff and the customers being unusually close and relaxed. The line between staff and customer usually so apparent in Japan was more or less missing between the regulars and the staff. It was whenever a new person met up for the first time that I was "reminded" that they were staff as the newcomer would approach and speak with the staff in a formal manner and being spoken back to in a humble way by the staff.

The event café would have between 5-6 events per week, and I would attend all or most of them during 5 months of my field. In the latter part of my fieldwork, I focused more on meeting the social groups outside of the event café context trying to focus deeper on the single individuals that made up the groups or to at least meet them in smaller groups in order to get deeper insight in each of their lives.

Research methods

As partly mentioned above, I mainly focused on participant observation, and in many ways it was what Katrine Fangen (2010) calls "fulltime participant observation (Katrine, 2010, s. 118)" as I continuously lived, acted and interacted with aspects of what I studied. Even when I was home in my apartment I would observe how late the lights went out in the offices across the street, or how sometimes people would stay and work until the early morning. I would interact with students, *furitas* and workers by just going to the kitchen. When my informants were working or at school, pursuing a job during job hunting, spending time with a girlfriend or boyfriend I would not able to participate. However, through simply walking around in Tokyo I would observe people in similar situations and by being a customer or talking with a random student at a café wanting help with English lessons I would participate in such aspects similar to those of my informant's lives as well. In such a way, even by entering my room and closing the door I would still be part of my field. Besides the strictly physical, contact with my informants through messenger apps on my phone would let me take part in their life by proxy as they would rely thoughts almost as live commentary on what they were experiencing during work, classes or just sitting on the train. As I spoke with my informants, the

observations of other people, the conversation with the informant, I was able to piece out an impression covering a bigger picture of their lives.

Language

As the empirical example provided by Briggs (1986) in his "*Learning how to ask*" of the *Mexicanos* in *Còrdova,* Japanese also draws upon a wide range of accepted speech forms (Briggs, 1986, s. 39). In Japanese however, there is a sort of hierarchical system of speech, which alters the way one speaks depending on its "status" compared to the one spoken to/with. The honorifics and its sentence-final particles may be influenced by social context, social distance, status (gender, age, social status; such as student, teacher, salaryman, manager etc.) where the relative relation between the speakers statuses or the context of conversation will result in a language that might seem as complete different languages for outsiders compared to the informal/plain Japanese speech form. For many the first thing a new part-time job or job entails in Japan is to learn or re-learn the proper way to speak to customers and managers. The differences between the different ways to speak are so big that I often met young Japanese that confessed they were "illiterate" in certain contexts. As there is an informal, polite, respectful and humble form (Okamoto, 1997; Okamoto, 1999, s. 54; Pizziconi, 2003), where the context or social distance might lay the foundation for what way to speak, but the speech itself also seems to reinforce the context, "trapping" the speakers in a fixed distance.

Being an intermediate speaker myself, I am far from fluent in such speech forms, so I stick to the plain and the polite form. However my "social status" being heavily colored of me being a foreigner it has never been a problem, rather it seems to have been a blessing. One of my best friends in Japan, a barkeeper and cook at a small Japanese Izakaya in his 40s once told me that "When we speak, we can be more direct since you are foreign, I think you know me better now [after some months] than the regulars that has been coming here for many years". I would encounter this many times, and the most fascinating was friends that were as fluent in English as I am in Japanese that would change to English when speaking about personal things. In the beginning I believed it was because of the abstraction of feelings and they considering their English better than my Japanese and thus changing language, but later multiple of them expressed that they felt more comfortable expressing certain things in English than Japanese. One 26 year old male saying that "Topics likes these [emotions] are hard for me to speak of in Japanese, almost as if I do not know how to express them". I do not believe the Japanese language is less suited to express feelings, emotions or self, but it seemed

that many of my informants that were somewhat fluent in English still felt that English was easier for them in such situations.

In effect, by often speaking as if the context was a meeting between friends by speaking informal/plain Japanese with people even if it was the first encounter, I often ended up not breaking the "native communicative norms" (Briggs, 1986, s. 39), but bypassing social distance. The response I got was that people I met experienced it as refreshing to speak "bluntly" about topics they all very much cared about, without having to "beat around the bush" as one salaryman put it. This however was without exception when speaking to those significantly older than me, from their 40s and up, with my informants in their 20s and early 30s it was the possibility to speak in English for those that could that seemed to make communication the easiest.

Interviews

During my fieldwork interviews were not in any way the main method or source for information, but among those done multiple ended up being presented in this thesis. Most of the interviews were done either as unstructured interviews that would turn into conversations with my key informants, or as semi-structured interviews with a somewhat formal setting to learn and gain information from persons outside my group of informants. The former usually more of an excuse to sit down alone and undisturbed with a key informant and be able to carry out a longer conversation where my informant felt safe to express themselves on topics not suited or natural for a larger group. The latter was mostly done in order to learn what recruiters, business owners, managers and seniors thought about the things my informants expressed and what I observed. Especially with the recruiters the interviews were also in order to "confront" them with my informants thoughts to see what they thought about it from a personal or/and a professional standing.

In some of the interviews with recruiters and HR-personnel I was accompanied by an older Japanese businessman that helped translate the more technical questions and answers. For different reasons he did not sit through the entire length of all the interviews, leaving for important phone calls and such during the interview. The atmosphere and the form of communication greatly changed each time he left the room, as the way of speaking had been formal, but as he left the form of speaking and the flow of the conversation changed into a more plain and friendly chat. It is hard to say in what extent the way of communication altered the information I gained in a positive way, but it felt as if it did, while on the other hand the more formal way might have yet yielded significant information as well. What, for

me, seemed clear is that the informal communication greatly changed the speakers points from being centered around "the company" and "Japan" to "I think" or "I believe". This can be the matter of formal communication being centered around the speaker representing the company, while in a more informal form it would seem wrong for the speaker to speak on behalf of the company. Still the information exchanged and expressed in the informal form and setting was more elaborate and rich in examples.

Additional information concerning the presentation of informants and the empirical data

The amount of people and locales that lies beneath this thesis as empirical shadows would surmount the space in a master's thesis and I have chosen to present some quotes without adding much background information of the informant behind it. As a very conscious choice, the stories I chose to present my informants through are in many cases based on how often certain things were said and done, hoping and believing I have managed to retell traits they in a relative sense shared. I have also chosen to write as if two of my informants were one, this done in order to further protect the identity of one of them.

I also realized, especially the closer I got to the deadline, that this thesis, the topics, were broader and more complicated than I first had foreseen. In order to manage this and continue with the thesis I decided to stick with the presentation of the transition in terms of my informants, and thus build upon their realties. The literature on many of the topics I present and discuss in this thesis surpasses what an individual can read and understand during the course of a mater's. I put the focus, in the end, solely on what my informants decided and presented as important for them in the given situations, thus the thesis might seem to draw an overly biased or darkened picture of the Japanese society. Therefor I repeat that all must be taken for what it was in the given context of my informants and the gathering of empirical data.

Generational gaps across time

"I simply don't want to end up like my parents" Masayori once told me. Although not all of my informants articulated it in the same way, all of them used aspects of their parents' lives as examples when they told me what they did not want or why they did not want it in life. In other words it became a central part of the narrative for why they did not want to follow the idealized model of adulthood, or the adult social order. I will explore my informants reflections on how their childhood played an important role in shaping their image of labor, love and leisure and what they held as different between themselves and their parents, as these concepts directly changes the logic of the five markers of adulthood. Why the work life and the marriage their parents had had was not an alternative for most of them?

Since the experience was influenced by my informants gender I will explore these separately. For each topic I will start by presenting my male informants experience before adding my female informants perspective.

As time flies by

On the train towards Narita Airport for a trip to Osaka I managed to sit in the wrong seat. An elderly man came on the train and upon finding me in his seat politely told me in close to perfect English that I was sitting in his seat. I apologized and realized I had seated myself in the row in front of my actual seat. After moving down a row I became curious of this man well into his 80's speaking close to perfect English with an American accent and mustered the courage to approach him. I did, his name was Hiroshi and it turned out that he had studied in America a couple of years after the Second World War. We ended up having a long conversation where he told me about his life, his family and how he had experienced the changes in Japan over the course of his life. His life and his stories worthy of a book by themselves, and never before have I wished that a train ride went by slower than it did. He told me how his family had been merchants for generations. His brother had followed his father's footsteps running the family business, while he had followed an academic path before returning to the family company. His three children, whom he seldom met, were strangers to their family history and had all become salarymen. After this chance encounter I asked my informant Masayori about his family history:

> I don't really know, I think my great grandfather was a farmer. My father has only
> spoken about his childhood and the family twice, both of them following funerals

while drunk. I mean like, elaborated about anything. I never really knew my grandfathers and don't really know much about them.

The Japanese family has changed over the past decades, and to say that the gap between Masayori and his father is greater than the gap between Hiroshi and his sons would be a hard point to argue. The fact is still clear, change occurs in varying degree between generations. In many ways the models my informants were challenging are those of a very recent structure in a historic perspective. Among the changes Hiroshi spoke about, he especially stressed the shift in family relations between his generation and his children's generation. When he grew up the family was the most important part of life, to carry on the legacy and the family name, two things he said that his sons did not care about, two of them being unmarried and childless now in their 40's and 50's. Hiroshi sighed "all they do is work".

Karoshi[14] – Death by overwork

This leads to one of the first points, my informants first encounter with work. Even if most of my informants never really held their parents to blame for the pressure they usually ascribed to society in general or to the more ambiguous groups such as "adults" or "elders" they all mentioned their parents as of why it was not for them to follow the same path into work, if they ever got the choice.

Work in Japan is famous for its overtime, especially so if one works as a *salaryman*. The overtime is often what is referred to as *sabisu zangyo* (lit. service overtime), which is unpaid. With commuting time varying between 30 minutes to 2 hours, a worker might easily spend as much as 12 hours at work and getting back and forth. In the end, the *salaryman* might not get paid for more than 7 ½ of these hours. This is the connotation and imagined lifestyle many of my informants expressed as that of the stereotypical *salaryman* in Japan. Often mentioning the Japanese word *karoshi*, meaning death by overwork, as the ultimate example of what it all could end in. A trend where men and women as young as their late 20s and early 30s has died by what is believed to be stress induced heart attacks (Kanai, 2009, Vol. 84; Kondo & Oh, 2010, Vol. 64).

As I was talking with Masayori about his relationship with his father during his upbringing, he immediately started to speak of his father's work life.

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[14] Karoshi: Term used on people working so much overtime they die or are in danger of dying.

My father was and still is a hard worker, always leaving early and coming home late, often past my bedtime. My mother would tell me that he was working so I could get toys and eat food, and in the future go to a good school. For me this did not matter, I wanted a father, and would do whatever I could to stay up late enough to see him. During weekends when he was off he often sat in front of the television drinking. Over the years it felt as if there was a great distance between us, a distance I think was even greater between my mother and father. Already then, I hated work, work was a place that stole my father from both my mother and me. He worked too hard, as if the company was his real family, and it did not seem as if he had any joy at home. Now I understand that he probably never had a choice, this is just the way the Japanese society works, or at least used to work. On the other hand, my mother was a homemaker. We were close, but I think she might have spoiled me, and sometimes I think she used me as a weapon against my father. They argued a lot, often about his drinking, I never saw any form of love between them. In my cartoons there were loving families where the father played sports with his son in the weekends and smiled when he came home from work, bringing the mother gifts or flowers and toys for the child. I wanted that, in many ways that is still what I want in life.

Masayori might have been more reflected upon such matters than many of my informants, as many simply stated "that's just the way things were", even if most of them added "but it does not have/I don't want it to be the same way for me". Masayoris story illustrates much more than how he perceived work through his father, but also the distribution of work based on gender and the state of his parent's relationship. How comics and movies had shown him an alternative to father-son relations as well as marriage. In terms of work, Hiroshi and Masayori seems to describe something similar, and as the following example will illustrate: for men work seems to have been the biggest part of their lives.

In a case similar to Masayoris, Hibiki a Japanese man in his late 30's told me that when he was a child he was afraid *of* work. He even had nightmares about "*shigotomon*[15]" coming to take him away he had told me laughing. He explained it by saying that his father seemed so happy during the weekend, they would play and go on trips together, playing flutes or guitar before bedtime. On regular weekdays, he would come home tired just as Hibiki was going to bed or after. Some mornings he would find him sleeping on the floor next to empty

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[15] Wordplay: Shigoto means work and mon means monster, literary "workmonster"

bottles in the living room. His father did not talk about work, but his mother had explained that he was tired from work after being such a hard worker for their sake. This caused him for a period in his life to fear the *shigotomon*, that it would make him tired and unhappy too. In many ways, the fear never left him, as he now is working as a freelance composer and musician with a home office. It is evident that he chose a different path than his father had done, and he said that it was thanks to the contrast between the weekend version of his father and the weekday version that made him realize that he wanted his life to forever be a weekend.

The interesting thing from both these examples is how they saw work as something taking something away from their fathers life, not adding anything. Masahiro saw it as something or some place that stole his father, Hibiki saw it as something stealing happiness and making his father tired. In many ways Hibiki had parts of what Masayori had wanted, a father that would spend time with him on weekends, but as one can see the image of work was quite similar in many ways for both of them. Upon asking Masayori what his father had worked with as a child he became silent for a while then finally answering "I don't really know. He works for a medium sized company that sells something, but I don't know what sort of position", Hibiki said something similar "Haha, I don't know, and sometimes I don't even think my father knew. Probably sales I would guess or sales related at least". This might sound strange, but as I later found out its common for Japanese companies to hire people as general workers, where you are hired to the company not to a position. Based on need and skill a worker would often be moved between departments or branches, especially in the first years of employment. They could all tell me what university their parents had studied at, but few of them knew what they had studied. Those that did could inform me that there was no apparent connection between their career and education. This disconnection between education and work is still true for many of my informants, creating a feeling that what you study is unimportant for the future, but the university one enters is. This will be explored at a later point in the thesis.

It is a reoccurring trend that my male informants grew up with a negative connotation with work, and felt alienated from the concept. However, for both Masayori and Hibiki, work eventually became something they understood as the means of making money and making a living, and thus accepted the fact that work was something they would need to get or make for themselves. But how did it affect my female informants?

Natsui spoke warmly about her father, even if she described him as absent. Even when he came home late he would sneak into her room as he came home at night and kiss her forehead she told me. She would pretend she was sleeping as he sometimes sat down next to her speaking to her of his day and how he did it all for her. She did not know if he knew she was awake or not, but she would always pretend to be sleeping nonetheless. It became sort of a ritual for her, and she would have trouble falling asleep before he came home. He would often smell of smoke, food and alcohol, a smell that for her was the smell of her father until she became older and learned it was the smell from the *izakaya* he often went to with his coworkers after work.

What Natsui stressed about her relationship with her father and his work was a mixture of gratitude and guilt, which she attributed to her mother. As Masayori and Hibiki both mentioned their mother being the one telling them about work and why their father did it, Natsui could report the same. Yet in Natsui's case it seemed more pressing. While Masayori told me he had good relations with his mother and told me he was kind of spoiled by her, Natsui said that she often fought with her mother and that she made her feel guilty that her father was working hard to provide for her and she answered by misbehaving. The misbehavior was usually minor according to herself, like questioning her mother's commands or failing to do her homework to a degree that satisfied her mother. She never argued with her father she reported, but seeing him tired from work or hardly seeing him coupled with her mother's comments made her feel guilty. She summed it up by saying "I'm grateful that he worked so hard for our family, that I always had what I needed, that I could go to a good university, but I sort of wish that he did not have to".

While most of the men did describe their relationship with their mother as good, they also pointed out that she pushed them to excel at school and to join after school activities. As many of my male informants had mothers that had some sort of higher education, and all had a father that had either gone to university or vocational school they all reported to have been pushed to pursue an equal or better path. From an early age, often around junior high school, it was clear for most of them that they were going to pursue higher education to get good jobs. They all had examples of how their mother had urged them to study hard so they could enroll at a good high school and a good university, get a good job and get a good wife. Although with a varying degree in how this path was urged, as the difference between "do what makes you happy, as long as it's good" and "get a good job at a good company and be happy". There was always a stress on doing it so a good wife could be found and to obtain the financial

stability needed to care for a family. In other words, the men were urged to follow a path that would lead to marriage and children. The same path as reportedly school, teachers and society molded them for.

An interesting contrast was the women's experience, how the relationship with the mother and what they felt groomed towards was presented as something else. As most of the male informants reported very similar experiences with their mothers, the women had multiple aspects setting them apart from each other. Natsui's mother was in many ways the median of most of them, she wanted Natsui to go to a good school, to get a job so she could be financially independent, but the ultimate goal was for her to marry someone good and raise up children and manage the house. Masayori was pushed to join clubs, as it is often seen as a an activity that builds character and also a place that socializes children into structures found at workplaces. Natsui was allowed to join clubs, to take violin lessons, but never pressured, but as the men she was pressured to attend cram school from an early age. Masayori termed himself spoiled by his mother, while Natsui described it as a mentor relation. Her mother shaping her to become a homemaker, but also to get a good education.

The relation and pressure or lack of pressure seemed influenced by my informants mothers past. For example if she had worked part time while they were kids, if she returned to work as they grew older, if she had been an homemaker, if she had above junior high school education. In Natsui's case, her mother had gone to a good university in Tokyo and had met her father at the university. They had worked together at the same company for 2 years until she got married and had Natsui. She stayed home and had two more children before she started to work part time as the youngest started school. Natsui described her like a proper, yet modern, housewife. She would get up early and make bento[16] for the children and her husband along with breakfast, she did most chores around the house with the help from Natsui. She had followed the model many present as the ideal in Japan, namely getting a good education (where one can meet a promising husband), get a good job (where one can find a promising husband), get married and have children (with a good husband), tend to the home (with the good husband supporting the entire family with his salary). Yet Natsui called her "sort of modern" since she understood that some things were changing in society. It was less likely now than when she studied to get a boyfriend and be able to marry shortly after university. Because of this, she also wanted Natsui to choose an education that gave her any

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[16] Japanese lunch box

sort of license, not just a degree, this in order to be specialized in a manner she did not believe a university degree provided by itself. Because of this the narrative around Natsui's future at home was that she would have to work and be financially independent until she found a husband, also because of the recession she was told she might have to work a while before they would be able to afford an apartment and maybe even work part time besides tending the home. Natsui dreaded the idea of working, but only like her father had worked, she told me she would very much like to work if the environment was different and the job fun.

The case with Natsui is interesting since she felt groomed to be a housewife, but also prepped for getting a good education and to work for some years or perhaps her entire life. Yet Natsui's upbringing was mainly focused on becoming a housewife, something she said as "I kind of hope I get married as fast as possible and don't have to work as much for money as I can do it for fun", mentioning marriage as a strategy to avoid work.

Marriage – The family is like a company

When it came to how their parents had ended up living, even if they distanced themselves from it they all defended their parents' choice of life in some ways. At least rationalized them, by pointing to the lack of options or saying "that's just the way it was". Hibiki said:

> I guess if he [his father] followed his dreams as I did he could never have settled down and had me when he did, so in ways I'm both sad and happy about it. Remembering my father tired from a job he did not like when I easily can imagine him smiling, playing music and traveling like I think he would have makes me sad."

This is an important point, as both Masayori and Hibiki spoke of settling down, marring and having children as something they did want, eventually, but it was always part of a distant future. Even though Hibiki said that his time was probably running out, but he did not feel as if marriage was something to pursue right now, he feared it might collide with his lifestyle. Most of my informant's parents had them in their mid or late 20's, meaning they usually had them between 3 and 6 years after they started working. If employment was mostly the means to support a family, as most presented it as, this stands as a big contrast to what my informants described as their own reason to work, in turn the way jobs are chosen and the reasons for choosing them also affects the form and time of marriage and parenthood.

The concept of work seemed different, as for my informants to work was something you do to be financially independent. Nevertheless, you choose a job that you want to do as long as you have the possibility. You do not live to work, but you work to live. Hibiki had not

chosen his career in order to support family, but to have fun and be independent, Masayori was planning for a future where he would land meaningful work that would not force him into a life as his father had lived. Natsui did mention marriage in terms of work, but not as her parents, she dreaded the idea of working as her father had and would rather get married to "free" herself from work. Other female informants did not mention marriage that much in terms of work, those that did mentioned how hard it was to work and have children as something negative as they wanted to continue work even if they got a child. However, the main point remains: education was in order to get a job, and neither of them was directly seen or articulated as means to get married and have children for my informants.

Based on how a job is not something they wanted just for the sake of supporting a family and an increasing interest for women to work and for men to have working wives, how has this affected the concept of marriage? A man does not need to work alone to support a family, with two people working the shared income is greater. Women stop choosing a job under the idea that they will get married and stay home. They plan their choices long term instead of as something temporary. At the same time, as a paradox, when the choice often is between hard work, long hours and tending to a home and raising children, some women prompted for marriage as a strategy to "save" time. Even one of my male informants told me in confidence that he would have liked to be a "housefather". He explained that tending the home, playing with the children and making food seemed as a better option than working overtime. Many criticize Japan for not being gender equal, and there might be much truth in this, but at the same time as my informants of both genders express, there is not really a winner on either side of the genders in relations to work. Based on the ideal the man gets to work and follow a career, but often by the cost of not getting to spend time with his children or his wife. In that sense since much of the criticism towards the government and companies about women working is that they need to choose between parenthood or work it is not that different. From my informants point of view jobs in Japan often seem to neglect family life by not providing the possibilities for both, simultaneously. Nevertheless, based on how they describe their parents, the job is ultimately the sacrifice a husband does for the sake of wife and children. In terms of the conceptual differences, women seem more governed by an ambivalent duality, they want to work, but the options makes the traditional marriage an easier option for them than for the male.

Concluding reflections

My informants presented their upbringing and their parent's lives as means to explain what they did not want for themselves in life. Putting much focus on the way their fathers had been absent because of work. Masayori, as presented in the first chapter, feared that getting a job might turn him into his father. As he had no plan to get married or have children in the foreseeable future, getting a job was not in order to provide, but to become independent and to thrive. He was seeking a life more in line with what Hibiki had created for himself, and by no means wanting to become a *salaryman* as his father. The concept of work, the connotations and ideals he presented as his own compared to the reality of his father and the ideals he felt society had presented him with did not match. The adult social order of his father, that of studying and getting a job as the first markers of adulthood was for him not in order to obtain the final two, marriage and parenthood. He wanted it in the future, but he explicitly pointed out that he did not want it to be as his own childhood. He wanted to enjoy life, to spend time with his future family, to play with his future child, and believing that the traditional life-course of his parents lacked the room for such, he wanted something else. Based on his choices that far in life, he seemed to be following the same path as his father, by studying in order to get a job, even if he did not think of it as the means to support a family. However, by strongly holding a different logic and ideal in terms of what sort of job he wanted and why he wanted it, he hoped he would be able to negotiate an alternative to what his father had chosen. Masayoris thoughts might understandably be seen as selfish as some elders (Mathews & White, 2004) chose to describe young Japanese by, as he did not see the choices as something he needed to do for others than himself. However it also seems as a mature and reflected reasoning for wanting to live differently.

My informants argued that there was more to life than living for a job, in order to provide for a family "of strangers" as one put it, or "to be married with an empty bed" as one women said. As Blatterer (2007) proposes to see the generational gap as the result of a normative delay or normative gap, it seems as if my informants are experiencing just that. While their parents and their education, as the next chapter will illustrate, imprinted norms and ideals on them they found to be illegitimate in their contemporary lives. Because of this the reproduction of the adult social order seems to be challenged as they idealize and seek different ways to grow independent. If marriage and parenthood is not necessities in order to be an adult, and adulthood is a matter of independence and responsibility, it seems as if it is the order that is being challenged, not adulthood in itself.

This chapter has illustrated how their parents exposed them and educated them towards the adult social order of Japan, and how the narrative of seeking something else was often spoken through their parents. As with habitus (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), the family education is just one part of the "imprinting" of norms and ideals, the institutionalized education was also a reoccurring metaphor my informants expressed the generational gap through.

The Japanese school «kills individuals» and «creates robots for the companies".

This chapter seeks to explore the statements that describes the Japanese school as somewhere or something that, in my informant's words, produces a certain type of people. A type of people often described as robots by my informants, for the sake of the Japanese companies, one of the more common metaphors used for *salarymen* among my informants. For me by a blurred line between emic and etic concepts, it seemed to be a question of individuality and conformity. However the narrative was towards an abstract societal pressure of ideals and enforcer of norms. Similar to their narrative about the differences of themselves and their parents, but with school the narrative seemed more aggressive, more accusing. In this chapter I will present the Japanese school system through my informants own stories supported by secondary sources, and explore how my informants experienced school as an ideal and norm enforcing institution. Through this we will see how the generational gap and the adult social order of Japan was mediated and experienced by my informants.

School rules: or does it?

During the interview with Gen-chan described in the introduction, Mariko, a 20 year old woman had also agreed to be interviewed. She came to the Izakaya later than the others as the interview with Gen-chan was well underway. As she sat down we took a small break as we ordered more food and talked a bit with Mariko. As Gen-chan, Mariko had started working straight out of high school in health care. Also like Gen-chan she had chosen not to attend the *Seijin Shiki*, but had chosen to take a *Seijin Shiki* picture in a *furisode* for her family and as a keepsake. She struck me as different from Gen-chan in many ways, as she was calmer, with her neutral clothing and makeup she did not stand out that much as Gen-chan did. She greeted me directly, even making an effort of speaking some English at first.

During the interview with Mariko, Gen-chan would occasionally add her thoughts, thing she had forgotten to say earlier or things she had not even thought about during our interview. This made the interview with Mariko more dynamic, and the other women around the table took greater part in what often turned into long conversations on different topics. As we touched the theme of school and school rules my friend helping out with some interpretation expressed that "the Japanese school creates robots that follow rules without asking questions" explaining that "this is what the companies wants". Gen-chan added that it "killed the individuals" in the

process, that it was all about being a *majimena*[17] student and then a *majimena* worker, a matter of "do and don't ask why".

The entire conversation on the school and school rules started with me asking Mariko "What is adulthood?" and not that different from how Gen-chan had answered earlier she started by saying "they are selfish". As Gen-chan, Mariko's first answer was not as much what adulthood meant to her, and far from her ideal picture of it, but a description of how adults were not what she had believed as a child. As I asked her to elaborate, she explained:

> They don't have to listen to other people like children have to; they can do what they want. They will tell you 'don't do this and don't do that' but they do it themselves. Like my parents told me that coloring your hair was bad, but they did it themselves. They just told me not to do it because of the school [rules].

The following excerpt is a concrete example of school rules in junior high school and high school in Okinawa; found in the article "*Breaking the Rules in Japanese school*" by Benjamin Hill (1996), original comments by the author is included in square brackets. Note how the rules for "school uniform" (III) and "after school life" (VI) are the most extensive and concise.

The following written school code, shared by a private middle and high school, is more concise than most but otherwise typical:

I. Purpose:
   A. These regulations are based on our school's educational principles.
   B. All students must follow this code.
II. Coming to school and going home:
   A. Do not come to school by bicycle, motorbike, or automobile.
   B. Report to the teacher's room when coming to school in a holiday.
   C. Do not stop at restaurants, coffee shops, arcades, or pachinko parlors on the way to or from school.
III. School uniform:
   A. Wear the uniform when coming to school, even on holidays.
   B. Wear the summer uniform from April 1 until October 31.
   C. Get permission in order to wear a modified uniform due to sickness.

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[17] Meaning proper, diligent, good.

D. Boys must wear short hairstyle.

E. Girls must wear an appropriate hairstyle [less than shoulder-length, or in a bun or French braid].

F. No bangs more than eyebrow length.

G. No permanent, hair gel, dye, or anything else that reflects badly on our school.

H. No pierced ears. No nail polish. No makeup.

I. On cold summer days it is okay to wear long-sleeved shirts.

J. In the winter it is okay to wear the school cardigan, for boys, or vest, for girls, under the uniform jacket. [Schools are unheated in Okinawa, but students are not allowed to wear coats or sweaters.]

K. Do not modify the uniform in any way. [Four figures are attached depicting boys and girls in summer and winter uniforms, with many details annotated, e.g., "Skirt length is seven centimeters below the knee," and "White socks with no stripe."]

IV. Tardiness, absence, and cutting class:

A. Attendance will affect the grade.

B. After 5 instances, the teacher will call parents.

C. After 10 instances, the teacher will ask parents to come to the school.

D. After 15 instance, the student can be suspended.

V. School life:

A. Good behavior is needed, such as proper greeting, proper speech to elders, cleaning, and tidying.

B. Do not bring anything that you don't need for study.

C. Do not eat while you are walking.

D. Do not use equipment without permission.

VI. Afterschool life:

A. Behave well as a student of our school.

B. Do not go to any disco or nightclub.

C. Do not smoke or drink alcohol.

D. Do not dance, except for folk dancing.

E. Do not ride double on a bicycle or motorbike.

F. Do not go out after 8:00 p.m. (junior high) or 10:00 (high school) without parents.

       G. Do not acquire a driver's license without school permission.

       H. Do not travel or go to camping without school permission.

       I. Do not get a part-time job.

VII.   Any students who does not follow these regulations will be warned, suspended, or expelled from our school. [School Regulations, Showa Middle School and Show High School, Okinawa Prefecture] (Hill, 1996, ss. 101-2)

During the interview I asked them to give examples and explain how school rules worked. The examples they chose to use were the rules dictating how they could dress, rules banning makeup, fashion accessories, one telling me that her high school had banned being in a romantic relationship, a rule not found in the list above. As they kept on giving examples it was clear that there was a distinction between the rules, some targeted appearance the others behavior, as the excerpt given also displays. In addition, the rules were not limited to school time or school as a location but extend to even dictate what was appropriate past time activities for its students and setting a curfew for when the student had to be home or accompany their parents if they went outside.

      The rules seem to targets the individual as they dictate what is "illegal" for one person to do, but what the rules protect from seems to be that which can differentiate one student from the rest and challenging "the order". What my informants criticized was how the school hindered them from expressing themselves as an individual, in both behavior and appearance, repeatedly mentioning the ban on hair color as an example. However this specific example was mostly voiced by the women, and it seemed like many of the rules governing appearance were more problematic for the women. A second year female university student said:

      It's as if society expect us to be two things at once, things that can't be mixed. We should look proper, but not look 'good'. We should look the same, but still be different. It was really hard, and still is in some ways. The school and the companies, along with my grandparents has one idea, while movies and television presents something completely different.

With the males, the rules governing behavior seemed to be a bigger deal than that of appearance, however, harder to exemplify, while the women always had clear examples for how the rules challenged their "self".

      In common was the comments on how the rules and system tried to force "sameness" on everyone, but as this sameness did not exist outside of schools, and later outside the

companies, it did not make sense for them. This led most of them to call it old fashioned or outdated; rules that once may have made sense because the rest of the society worked more like the rules at school, and thus would have taught the students something valuable back then, but today they did not seem relevant elsewhere, presenting it as if there was a lack of legitimacy both to the rules and for the school to set them.

There is however more to it than just appearance and behavior. This alone was used to explain the uniformity, why the all were made "robots" in appearance, and parts in behavior, but this was not the complete picture. The "do as you are told and ask no questions" was explained with how school focused on root memorization and how many felt that they did not really learn anything as much as the just remembered things. They also heavily voiced a lack of or little room for creative thinking in school. A typical example they used was the Japanese English proficiency, as they start to learn it early in school, but few seem to be able to speak it. One of the women attending the interview dinner explained:

> We just memorized words, we did not really learn how to speak the language. Often our teachers would not even know how to properly pronounce the words. In the end, we did not really learn English as a language, but just a lot of words we only recognize in written form.

This I did experience myself, as I would often encounter situations while speaking Japanese were a word I did not know was used, and someone would write the word for me on a napkin or on their phone in English. In the beginning, I would react with asking "Do you speak English?" and they would always wave their hand in the air and repeatedly say "no". However, they would follow up by asking "how do you pronounce this", pointing at the word they had just written. Often the words they knew in English were words even native speakers seldom use, but as they are coupled with more day to day Japanese words they had memorized them during school.

Another examples used to illustrate the lack of creative thinking was life skills classes, or morality classes, were they would be presented with a case, a social situation, and discuss what would be the right way to handle the situation or to identify what had been wrong with a person's behavior in the specific case. "There were no discussion, there were just right and wrong answers" a female university student claimed.

As a summary before we continue, what they expressed were little room for the individual, but a feeling of forced sameness in school. This "killed" the individual and "created robots" for the Japanese companies. The robot part was a metaphor based on the root memorization, the following of rules without free and individual will, a uniform appearance

and behavior. This was, according to my informants, taught through the curriculum, the school rules and heavily linked with the Japanese companies. As the previous chapter illustrated with their parents, they could see how this way of schooling might have been relevant once in the past, but today they found it old fashioned.

For those that are not familiar with the Japanese school system and the school rules all that which have been presented now begs questions such as why would school care about student's hair color? How could a school legitimize the rules in ways that from a Norwegian perspective challenges the rules of a child's parents? And why is the group so important that it does not seem to consider the individuals that makes up the group?

The Japanese education system: From *gakko* to *ie*

In Japan the compulsory education covers ages 6 to 15, consisting of *shōgakkō* (elementary school) and *chūgakkō* (junior high school), where 95% is reported to have attended preschools before starting elementary school; most commonly during the age span 3 to 6 (UNESCO-IBE, 2011). While *kōtōgakkō* (high school) from ages 15 to 18 is not compulsory, it is reported that an average of above 90% enters high school after junior high school (Ibid). The high schools are not free, as the compulsory schooling is, and in general it seems as if private schools, colleges and universities are over represented above compulsory education level (Ibid).

The cohort progression from age 3 to age 16 is then quite similar between each member of the cohort. You can even say it is quite similar until age 18, as there is no repeating or skipping of grades in the Japanese school system causing everyone to progress simultaneously. However with high school being separated by entrance exams, with harder ones for selective schools, and school fees for both public and private schools, the high school carries a sense of sorting and separation based on cultural and monetary capital (Roberts, 2014). In the Norwegian school, there is a sense of difference based on the grades given during junior high school and high school, and a sense of sorting where those that falls behind might be taken out in special classes where the teacher to student ratio is smaller, and even difference in classes based on one's ability in math's for those that excel. In the Japanese school the case seems to be quite the opposite, as the group, its harmony and the sense of equality among its members is stressed. A good student is encouraged to help the weaker students instead of being given extra focus to excel (Cave, 2007).

The Japanese school system seems too revolve around the *gakkyu*, the class group, being the key unit in Japanese pedagogy (Cave, 2007, ss. 55-56) and this is where the concept of

harmony and equality is central. The concept of cohort classes, where each student in a class is born the same year, was imported from the West for the purpose of mass schooling around 1900 (Cave, 2007, s. 56). The concept was quickly embraced and already in 1912 a book titled "*Gakkyu keikei*", class management, was published by an author named Sawa (mentioned by Cave, 2007, s. 56), where Sawa compared the teacher to the head of a household, and students as his children (Original in Japanese, see Cave, 2007, s. 56). There are many concepts that are held as key concepts (Davies & Ikeno, 2002, s. 3) for the Japanese way of thinking, communicating and acting, one of these are *uchi* and *soto*, inside and outside. It bears resemblance to the in-group and outgroup used in social sciences, but the concept of *uchi* and *soto* are very much emic concepts and the division "reflect a basic dichotomy in the Japanese way of thinking (Davies & Ikeno, 2002, s. 217)".

> *Uchi* can be defined as (1) inside, (2) my house and home, (3) the group that we belong
> to, and (4) my wife or husband; in contrast, *soto* means (1) the outside, (2) outdoors, (3)
> other groups, and (4) outside the home (Davies & Ikeno, 2002, s. 217).

In perspective the very word for foreigner in Japanese, *gaijin*, or the more polite, *gaikokujin*, both start with the kanji for *soto*[18] (外), the first can be read roughly as "a person from the outside" the second "a person from a country outside".

> The concept of *uchi* and *soto* is often traced back to medieval Japan, closely to the moral codes developed during the Tokugawa shogunate (16th century until mid-18th century), through the *ie*-system, house-system (Davies & Ikeno, 2002, ss. 217-18). The *ie*-system was a system where the extended family was headed by a senior male; he would hold the main responsibility for the rest of the members (Davies & Ikeno, 2002, s. 217). The distinction between those inside the family, the household, the clan with those on the outside are described as huge, especially in the medieval to pre-war Japan. As the famous Japanese social anthropologist, Chie Nakane (1970) puts it:

> In the traditional Japanese pattern, each household is distinctly isolated unit of its own,
> complete with walls and high fence around the house to insure privacy. Yet inside, the
> walls consist of sliding doors made of paper so that privacy is kept to a minimum. The
> family stays together most of the time and moves from one place to the next, depending
> on whether it is eating, relaxing, playing, or sleeping. Although this pattern tends to

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[18] In Japanese most kanji, Chinese characters, have two or more readings. One being the Japanese reading, *kunyoimi*, the other being the chinese reading, *onyomi*. 外 (gai/soto).

create family unity, it widens the gap between the family and outsiders. (Nakane, 1970, s. 68)

What Sawa in effect did, was to connect the concept of teacher and pupil relations in the school modeled for mass schooling with the concept of the household; by drawing upon strong core values for thinking people and groups embedded in the concept of *uchi* and *soto*. School was inside, it belonged to the sphere of the house and the family, and a teacher was as much a parent as anything else to the kids in his class. The classmates, like siblings, all members of the same *uchi*.

A second key concept that is fundamental to understand the Japanese school system, the class room dynamic, and some would say the Japanese society in itself, is the concept of *shudan ishiki,* Japanese group consciousness (Davies & Ikeno, 2002, s. 197)*.* In terms of *uchi* and *soto*, *shudan ishiki* is the consciousness found in *uchi*, that which separates its members from *soto*, and it can also be seen as the very glue for the different groups that falls under *uchi*.

There is no doubt that the harmony of the group is vitally important in Japanese society. People often think and behave as a group, and what benefits the group is mostly regarded as the correct thing to do. As a result, an individual who is a member of the group cannot help conforming to the group's aims, sense of values, customs, and so on. In public, they try to maintain an attitude of support towards the group, even if their own personal ideas are at odds with the group values (…) (Davies & Ikeno, 2002, s. 196)

This leads me to what my informants called conformity in school and work, how they explained the subduing of the individual needs or urges to express oneself through behavior or appearance that threatened the "sameness" of the group. The excerpt describes the concept of *shudan ishiki* as the general ideal, and I never got an impression that my informants did not think in this way, the difference was how and with whom they thought it. While school put emphasis on equality and sameness in the classroom, described as a way to achieve harmony, Gen-chan, Mariko and other informants did not see it as *shudan ishiki*, but as something forced and unnatural. The anthropologist Peter Cave explore this through, what he describes as, a problem with defining the individuality/self by itself and as a part of a group (2007).

The school, the teacher, the classroom, as linked to these concepts could very well serve as an explanation for why the school has the legitimacy to set rules for its students in a way similar to what westerners might consider the realm of family affairs. However there are additional reasons for the current situation that stem from the post-war period in Japan, colored

by affluence followed by recession and then the current stagnation coupled with fears of rebellious and misconducting youths.

A static or changing society: Seen from the inside and outside (80s-90s)

During the decades following the end of the Second World War the school went from being in the same conceptual sphere as the family to taking over responsibilities that earlier had been family and *kumi*[19] related. With a 6-day school[20] week up until 2002 (Cave, 2014, s. 272), the time spent with the family, playing outside and interacting with the local community had shifted to homework, school clubs, cram schools and indoor activities such as watching television and playing electronic games. The school started to take an even bigger and more active part in children's socialization with a goal to mimic the pre-war childhood of Japanese children (Cave, 2007). The teacher resembled the senior male leading the household more than the distant and overworked father did, as the classroom and the schoolyard became the new neighborhood.

The group focused school with little room for individuality were not singular and without critique but part of bigger debates surrounding education, and already in the mid-80, when Japan was still a growing economy concerns surrounding the system were voiced. With calls for reforms in response to the changes in the Japanese society and the world economy different visions of Japan's future was under debated (Cave, 2007, s. 13). The debate mostly revolved around the same topics as my informants voiced during the interview, questions of individuality's place in the Japanese school, and in the Japanese society. The dissatisfaction with the Japanese school system included different groups such as "(…) parents, business leaders and commentators form across the political spectrum (Goodman R. , 1990, ss. 91-94)".

Japanese education was seen as too uniform and rigid, too restrictive of children's freedom, too focused on the goal of entrance examinations, and too concerned with inculcating knowledge at the expense of self-motivational inquiry and creative thought. Problems such as violence in schools (*konai bokryoku*), bullying and school refusal were blamed on the pressure that children allegedly felt as a result (White [1987] according to Cave, 2007, s. 14).

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[19] A geographically specific subsection of the Japanese hamlets (white jap, s1), in effect a close knit neighborhood.

[20] Being reduced to 5 school days per-week after 2002.

In contrast to the inner workings of Japan, during the very same period the Japanese school was the object of admiration, emulation and envy throughout the world (Cave, 2007, s. 14). The same things mentioned as negative aspects with the school by Japanese commentators were by many Western scholars and commentators credited as the reason for Japans economic success where Europa and USA were falling behind. This also goes to show that the type of connection between school and work pointed at by my informants is not a new thing, in fact it is a narrative that in the Japanese context was given much focus in the 70s and 80s, as Robert Aspinall notes:

> A common notion among Western authors writing about Japan is that one of the defining characteristics of "Japaneseness" is loyalty to the group. During the 1970s and 1980s, Western-particularly American-scholars and journalists visiting Japan noted the loyalty of the workers to the companies and cited this as a competitive advantage the Japanese industry had over the West. The Japanese education system was described by these foreign observers as being central to the socialization of such cooperative and loyal workers (Aspinall, 2014, s. 236)

As the increasingly individualistic West stood watching as the Japanese economy rocketed, the group mentality, the loyalty of the Japanese workers were identified as the reason for the difference. Books were written on the Japanese education system, with the western industry as its audience. Most notable is perhaps the book by Benjamin Duke "*The Japanese School: Lessons for Industrial America*" (1986), the books title proving the point by itself. Things did however shift as the Japanese asset price bubble started to burst in the late 1980s to the early 1990s, leaving a period often referred to as the "lost decade" in Japan, where Japan faced recession followed by stagnation. The Western approach to Japan changed as the dissatisfaction in Japan during 80s grew.

> Dissatisfaction with education continued through the 1990s, though the sources of discontent differed. Some on the Right wanted more stress on patriotism, 'Japanese tradition', and moral education; business leaders wanted more emphasis on creativity; teachers' unions wanted smaller class size and more resources; and some on the Left wanted the opportunity of high school education for all and the end of high school entrance exams (Cave, 2007, s. 14).

The gaze of other people: Observations of generational gap in norms and sanctioning

> The individual homes in the local districts have no contact with each other any more. Therefore the morals, the habits, and the common sense of the local community can no longer be transmitted to the children through the home. The children feel no more pressure from the local society and walk along the streets proudly smoking cigarettes, gather in front of convenience stores until late at night, or calmly put on makeup on the train. Children who do not feel the gaze of other people have lost their sense of morality (Ogi 2000, translated from Japanese to English in Ackermann 2004, s. 70)

This excerpt from Ogi (see Ackermann, 2004), a well-known commentator on Japanese education, serves to illustrate multiple aspects of the generational gap in Japan. That he chooses to describe the manner of how youths are doing "bad things" as proudly and calmly, in the way he explains it with them having lost their sense of morality because they no longer "feel the gaze of other people". In many ways, what he does is to claim that bad behavior happens because children no longer care that others sees it as bad. The school has taken a marked stance trying to combat this "lost sense of morality", but how was this gaze that they should have felt but no longer do? And why did it change?

As I was riding the subway in Tokyo around midday during a regular weekday, I found myself sitting in a nearly empty cart. I sat just next to the doors at the back of the cart, with two elderly women sitting straight across me. They sat with their bags on the laps staring in my direction, but never straight at me. In the corner of the priority seats on the same side of the carts as the elderly women, a young woman sat in formal attire occupied with her smartphone. On one of the stops a young couple came on the train with a child I would guess being around the age of 2 or 3 as he spoke in sentences and displayed evolved motor skills as he moved around. The father carried a small foldable stroller while the mother led the child onto the train. The mother sat down on an empty stretch of priority seats across of the woman. The father stood in front of her holding on to one of the handgrips with one hand using his mobile with the other with the stroller secured between his feet. The mother retrieved her own mobile from her bag and turned her attention to its screen. Their son at first sat in the seat next to his mother and sang, but loud enough to be labeled as shouting. As I had stayed in areas in Japan, both during and before the fieldwork, where the majority of the inhabitants were elderly and children few I was used to seeing elderly, especially women, smile and wave at children when they met one.

They would comment on how cute or good looking the child was whenever seeing one, often sighing, "I want a grandchild" by themselves, but loud enough to be heard. The two older women in front of me changed their glance from my general vicinity directly at the family, changing between the mother and the child. There was no smiles nor comments on the child's cuteness or handsomeness. The child soon got bored of sitting and started to climb up and down the seats as well as running a bit in the middle of the cart as he continued his loud singing without any reaction from his parents. The older women started to make disapproving sounds and make remarks like "he is so loud", "look, his mother is just looking at the phone", "a mother should worry for her child", the mother clearly heard the comments as she looked up from her phone and met the gaze of the two older women, but then just looked back down at her phone again. The child climbed back up on the seat next to his mother and started to stand and jump in the seat as he sang whereupon the father made a remark causing the mother to sigh and put down her phone. She then grabbed her child and pulled him down into a sitting position and then forced his feet immobile with her hand while telling him "This is not the *shinkansen*, you can't have your shoes in the seats". The child threw a tantrum, crying, shouting and trying to kick his feet free. The older women shook their heads and made surprised and shocked noises coupled with negative remarks that could have been aimed as much as the mother as the child in the way they were phrased, but they were said as if they were just speaking amongst themselves.

It is hard to say if this demonstration of disapproval, a sort of judgmental sanctioning displayed through sounds, remarks and body language is something that comes with age or if it displays a difference in upbringing. However, in contrast to middle-aged and younger Japanese I never saw this, while I often witnessed it with elderly. In the case just described I did not once see the younger woman in formal attire look up at the child, but she did however glance at the elderly woman as their comments and remarks became louder. The example with the child was one of few times I saw elderly react negative to children, usually it would be smiles and positive comments, but there were daily instances where elderly would react in similar ways towards both adults and youths. The most common example was if an elderly came onto the train with no free seats and nobody would stand up to free one for him or her. In those instances, like with the child, there would be comments and remarks amongst them, but loud enough for everybody else to hear. On very rear occasions, I would witness older men single out and ask a younger person "Have you not seen that there is an elder standing without a seat?", where attention of

other passengers in the cart would be directed at the person asked which in turn always would stand up and free his seat.

There was another situation that often occurred, where younger women would put on makeup or fix their makeup on the train, something the excerpt from Ogi mentions as bad behavior, and my informants agreed was generally seen as bad behavior, even if they personally did not see much issue with it. When elderly witnessed this, they would start to talk about it; as with the child and when the seats was taken, they would talk amongst themselves, but loud so all around them would hear it. It was an reoccurring trait, that the person that "did something bad" in the presence of others was not directly approached, with some exceptions, but would be drawn attention to, as if the group on the train were the moral guardians and the attention given the "social fine" dealt for the offence done.

It is first when you witness unruly children, taken seats in front of elders, women putting on makeup or similar things with few or no elderly around that the difference becomes clear. Firstly, the elderly usually sit in their seats looking in front of them or at people, if in groups often trading comments or small talking. In general, the Japanese train carts are defined by silence, even during the rush hour, as if the amount of passengers is irrelevant. The passengers are engaged in smartphones, tablets, handheld gaming consoles, reading or sleeping. The gaze usually fixed at their lap or the floor. There is few, if any, conversations, always carried out in a hushed voice. To quote a Jamaican women speaking on hear phone that I, and everyone else on the train, overheard on my way back from attending a New Year's countdown in Yokohama. "Mama, you would not believe it. They were just standing there, silent as Gods lamb, just as they are sitting her. Not one sound Mama, you would not believe it". There is often a strange sense of silence, even in areas with large groups, in Japan, the train perhaps the most noticeable because of its small space compared to the amount of people. Passengers falling asleep gradually ending up with their head resting on a strangers shoulder without any reactions given or received. If someone did anything that broke with the moral codes that either are implicit in Japan or explicit; such as those expressed through posters informing that "phones should be turned on silent mode on the train, off if you are next to the priority seats and to refrain from speaking on the phone during the commute". The common reaction seems to be ignoring it altogether, similar to what I observed during the *Seijin Shiki*, where actions went without explicit reactions. I have seen passed out drunk people on the floor of train carts, covered in vomit, intoxicated grown men stripping down to their underwear in the train and "going to bed" either on the floor or in the seats, and people usually look once and then look away.

The very first time I went to Japan, the summer of 2009, I witnessed a sleeping man shift between moaning and crying as he rubbed his pants over his genitals. He was visibly aroused, and the women sitting next to him clearly uncomfortable. The train was filled, all seats taken, and twice as many standing as those sitting. The people standing in front of him, occupied with either phones or books seemed unaffected and gave no visible sign of reaction, despite standing mere centimeters in front of him. The only visible reaction came from the young woman next to him; she was holding her bag between her body and his as a shield, simultaneously leaning away, red-faced with a visible reaction to his moans by contracting her body as if startled by thunder each time he moaned. In the packed cart, I could not identify anyone beside me that looked directly at him, and she as the only one displaying emotions that acknowledged the situation as uncomfortable. As he woke up after a while he yawned, stretched and took at his phone seemingly oblivious of the women next to him clearly uncomfortable.

I have been explained by many Japanese that when something is "wrong" people look away to prevent themselves of becoming a part of the situation. The ignoring of such behavior or occurrences are as much reactions as those of the elderly, but one is expressive and engaging while the other is silent and disengaging. I first learned this silent approach back in 2009, while on a trip with my host family to a nearby beach, as we sat down inside one of the many restaurant lining the beach. The table next to us was occupied by a large group with many children and women, but only one man. As he removed his shirt he displayed a fully tattooed torso, and in the process of undressing had displayed that both of his index fingers were missing. Both of these are famous and iconic symbols for belonging to the Yakuza or having belonged to the Yakuza, what is usually described as the Japanese equivalent to the Mafia. Suddenly my host sister gave me a newspaper, and in a normal voice told me to read it. I became confused as I did not know how to read *kanji*[21] and I knew that she was well aware of this fact. As I looked at her, confused, she just raised my hands and thus also the newspaper high enough so that it hindered my view of the man with the tattoos. Later as I asked them if they had seen the man, they all nodded and I was given a long lecture in how it was bad to acknowledge what was "bad". It was best to look somewhere else, as if watching the unmoral or taboo put you in risk of being colored by it yourself. But there was an extra dimension my Japanese surrogate mother added; that sometimes it is better to look away for the person committing the faux pas

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[21] The Chinese letters adopted into Japan which are logographic; meaning that a symbol represents a concept rather than sounds as with the Latin alphabet or with the Japanese alphabets.

own sake. Explaining that the disgrace or humiliation caused by the situation is enforced and strengthened if people give it attention, and in situations where the other person is unaware of the blunder it is better not to address it in public and bring shame to him or her. In the end it serves all those around better to ignore it, she argued.

The way of rules, sanctioning and conformity in schools, at companies and by elders were what my informants called old fashioned or outdated. It is fair to assume that the gaze Ogi is referring to is more in line with what the elderly in the examples displayed, and the averted gaze of the younger generations what the school has taken a stance to combat. In light of both the concept of *uchi* and *soto* and that of *shudan ishiki*, the elderly I spoke with described society as something else than the young. The elderly seemed to distinguish little between stranger and family in the public sphere in terms of morality. While the young would say things such as "When I'm in the train I feel alone, we are so many people but all of us in our private bubble" or "I do not feel any sense of 'being a part' of a group with the other passengers."

This does however add the important aspect of country versus city, as the loss of gaze seems to be connected to the place, not just in the sense of generational gaps. Natsui, being from a small village, described her neighborhood as still being governed by this gaze, while Tokyo being mostly free of it. She explained that "Nobody knows anyone they meet in Tokyo outside their neighborhood. Some will even just meet strangers from when they leave their apartment until they return home during a normal day. The hearts of Tokyo-people are narrow and have grown cold." I heard this description of the "cold and narrow heart" often, and as much by those born and raised in Tokyo as those that moved there in their teens. Natsui would miss the sense of connection from time to time, that when she walked the streets back home people would know her and greet her, but she did confess that there was a freedom being able to remain alone and undisturbed even if she went outside. An interesting dimension however was that some easily preferred "narrow and cold hearted" strangers than all-caring, all-seeing neighbors. A friend from the suburbs of Fukuoka told me just this, as her area was described similar as Natsui's village. She did however wish to move to Tokyo or Osaka more than anything else, "if only I found a job" she told me. She wanted to move to be free off the looks in her neighborhood and the gossip that followed; that according to her was the only thing the middle-aged wives cared about in their life.

Gen-chan portrayed school based on her experience as an institution that still functioned by similar ideals as what lies beneath the "gaze". Teachers would ridicule students, engage in bullying and while doing so heavily rely on inflicting "guilt" upon the student for not being

how he or she "should" have been. She, as many others, mentioning the Japanese idiom "*deru kugi ga utateru*", the nail that sticks up will be hammered down, (Aspinall, 2014, s. 236), what might be considered a similar, yet more explicit version of the Scandinavian "law of Jante" (Sandemose, 1962). Aspinall notes that "the well-known Japanese proverb (…) refers both to the conformity and the violence implicit in the view of the Japanese classroom (Aspinall, 2014, s. 236)", while as my informants pointed out, this idiom is normally used about the Japanese society at large, not just in terms of school. Gen-chan and the others portrayal of the Japanese school system and the pressure to conform is supported by literature on topics such as *taibatsu* (corporal punishment) in schools (Miller, 2012), and *ijime* (bullying) (Aspinall, 2014). According to some the case of "Japanese *ijime* distinctively differ from bullying in other societies, however, in that it is always collective (Yoneyama, 1999, s. 164)", and as Okano and Tsuchiya (1999) notes the teacher will "Rather than controlling the students themselves, teachers often delegate authority, roles and responsibilities to class members (Okano & Tsuchiya, 1999, s. 59). My informants ascribed these kinds of pressure to an outdated way to see society and organization of people, the self in the group, and thus expressed it as part of the opposite side of the generational gap. The ideals and norms expressed and experienced through school by my informants as proper ways to act and be was "(…) the way my parents ended up, or at least, the reality they live in and by" as Mariko expressed. In the way they expressed school, the norms and rules, the pressure towards conformity, they added it as an expression for the adulthood they did not want for themselves. They described an education of norms, which I see as the imagined and idealized (adult) social order in Japan, and presented it as illegitimate as when they spoke about their parents. In terms of the adult social order (Mathews & White, 2004), seen as something being reproduced through family education and school education (habitus), there is a readily expressed dissatisfaction and reluctance to conform to and live by such rules. Again, there is an expression of the normative lag (Blatterer, Coming of age in times of uncertainty, 2007) whereas the norms and ideals mediated and taught by, in this case, the institutionalized education system, is not in touch with the contemporary reality they see themselves living in, nor the future they hope and wish for.

They would also provide multiple examples of how this was for the sake of the companies, that it was easier to manage workers that did not challenge the already set norms. One informant in his mid-40s working at one of Japans largest companies claimed it was partly due to fear that new ideas was dangerous and explained that this was a result of a surge of new ideas and experimental ways to do business in Japan just before the economy collapsed in the

late 80s/early 90s. He said that the traditional hierarchical way of Japan was not easily maintained with young people speaking out against its elders, adding that many old might see the need for change, but fear that there would be no or little room for them in a changed society.

In terms of conformity I experienced a clear example of how behavior and self-presentation differs from outside where "one can be seen" and inside where one is "home" as I visited a bar dedicated to a Japanese music and fashion movement called *visual kei*, where the fashion might be compared to a mix of glam rock and gothic punk. The man I stood next to in the elevator on my way up to the bar was dressed in the typical *salaryman* suit, with a plain tie, a handbag in dark leather and a "proper" haircut. However as soon as he entered the bar he went to the toilet and came out in tight leather pants, makeup, high heels, wearing a longhaired wig. Many *salarymen* like him came in their suits, whent and transformed in the toilet before sitting down inside the bar. The stiff and "distant" appearance and behavior displayed outside of the bar disappeared as the suit and tie was taken off. Before leaving, all of them would go back, change and again come out, looking like any other salaryman, before heading home. The barkeeper told me that this was their free place, their reality, their life, but hidden and non-existent outside of them and this room. "It's better that way, better than being hammered down" he laughed.

In many ways, this illustrate an important requirement for the "gaze of others" to work, those looking must have some sort of "power" over one's life. In a small neighborhood, one person has the ears of everyone as he or she will retell what he/she saw, but in a city like Tokyo one person is just another "stranger" in the masses, holding no position to judge or sanction a young woman putting on her makeup on the train. When my informants go to school the teachers and their students will matter, and thus the gaze is felt, or when a person starts working the potential case a coworker or boss that "gazes" upon him or her while doing something "bad" holds the potential for sanctioning.

High School: Separated, but alike.

Peter Cave calls the Japanese high school "the great divide" (Cave, 2014, s. 285), even if the focus on the groups and little differentiation between students continues as described earlier. The great divide is between the different schools, whether or not it is a high ranking or low ranking high school, if it is academic or vocational. If the school is private or public did not seem to matter that much, the manner of selectiveness in student admittance was the key. Up until high school the path usually leads in the same direction for everyone belonging to a cohort

located in the same locality; the case of special schools and private international schools being the exception. When it comes to high school the school a student is able to enroll at will open up possibilities that other schools might not be able to provide; such as the school being linked to a prestigious university and having greater focus on academic studies for passing harder entrance exams. Enrolling at a vocational school is seen as less likely to lead to such paths, but opens the path of full-time work straight out of high school. The divide is governed by many factors, one being what I just described, but also facts such as the students ability to study and memorize for the entrance exam; something that is often linked to his or her family's cultural capital as well as their economic situation (Roberts, 2014). Whether or not they could afford to send him or her to cram school, if so for how many days a week, if they hired a tutor, and the final question being if they can afford to pay the school fees for the more prestigious high schools opposed to the cheaper school of lower rank.

Seemingly there is a paradox to the Japanese high school, as the school rules are said to generally be the strictest, and for many admittance a real struggle, but there is also a saying that "all you have to do to graduate is to come the first and the last day". I was told that this saying was meant for low ranking, less selective schools, where few if any was believed to aspire for any higher education. However, it was also said about prestigious schools as well; since some claimed that you did not learn what you had to at school, even if it was a prestigious school. The saying, I gather, is more about effort than actual attendance, and implies that graduating is not of any real issue. If you get excepted you will graduate, even if it is with a bare minimum. It was a common belief that the real learning happened at cram schools, from your tutor and by peer education in your groups of friends. According to my informants the high school just provided smart friends and helped your chances enrolling at prestigious colleges or universities based on the schools own prestige.

Natsui, Gen-chan, Mariko and Masayori, amongst others, were asked if they ever had or currently had a role model or someone that had inspired and supported them in life. All except Mariko answered no on having any sort of role model, but said that their friends had supported or inspired them to excel in school and hobbies or to follow their dreams in other ways. The friends either being of the same cohort form their class or school clubs or senior student that they met through the school clubs. Mariko said the same about friends, but added that her boss was sort of a role model for her now. She described her boss as caring, considerate, reflected and responsible. She had originally said no to the questions, but as I asked her about her image of the ideal adult, she mentioned him as an ideal adult because of his qualities and

corrected her previous answer by saying "thinking about it, he is probably the closest I have had to a role model". It stood in contrast to what I had been told by older Japanese, some as young as their late 30's, reported that they had had role models growing up, ranging from family members like ones father or mother, teachers, professors, seniors or bosses at their workplace. Those I spoke with around Hiroshi's age that were born either before or during the Second World War would often talk about public figures or elders from their local area as role models, supporting the image how prewar Japan as more connected to the local.

In Masayoris case he told me about his time at high school, how he believed if he had not made the friends he made at school that pushed him and supported him at school and outside it he would not have been able to attend the university he now did. Especially telling me about a specific friend that had helped him learn the math he needed to pass the entrance exam for his university. When I asked him if going to a prestigious high school had been important he did believe so, but not because of the school itself or its teachers, but because he had met other smart kids that had helped him evolve and excel. Masayori was the only person I spoke with in his 20s that said that the system was in anyway good, but was honest and said "it worked for me, so for me it was good" opening up the possibility that the system might not be so for everyone. He did also agree that most of the rules at school were "stupid" and "old fashioned" and did think that the school was fashioned in a way that produced students for the sake of the Japanese companies, but sort of shrugged it off repeating "I was able to use this system for my own benefit". Others were less positive overall, but had one thing in common with Masayori, that the people they met were those that had made the difference. While Masayori was sort of happy with the system since it had worked for him, the others seemed to distinguish their classmates and the school as separate. In Masayori's logic, all my informants were happy with school for providing the arena to make friends that in turn helped them and motivated them. However, as the case was, the others did not see these as connected, and more over, many of them were not happy with where they were or believed they were heading thus finding it harder to "accept" things that had been. A key point here is that when I spoke with Masayori, he had recently accepted a job offer at a company that for him provided a sense of meaning as he believed this job would provide meaningful work directly connected to his education. He therefore had a positive outlook on life, little need to point fingers at any bad things of the past. The others were either heading towards something they reported "scared them" or was already in a situation that they wanted out of.

Juken senso, the exam wars: The final barrier between school and university

In order to advance to higher education the students needs to pass entrance exams. The better the university the harder the exam. For those that aspire for a specific university or subject of study they are free to apply at any university of their choosing. However, I was told many would seek counsel from their teacher and he or she would tell them what sort of university he/she believed they were "good" enough to apply at. By not passing the entrance exams, the student will be left without a place to study and would be left with the choices of paying for a private school to tutor them for next year's entrance exams, to prepare for it themselves, to start working, or pay to get admitted at a vocational school of lesser prestige. This period is famous for its stress, and all of my informants knew of one or multiple stories of entrance exam related suicides. As the following chapters will illustrate, this exams might be one of the single most important situation in their lives in terms of life course progression along the idealized path. One informant saying, "One day of tests, and the result will decide our destiny. It is as if we were living in a fantasy novel, like Harry Potter, where a hat just decides what your life will be forever" as he looked back at the road that had led him to an office position at a bank. Doing good at the entrance exam in order to get accepted into a good university was what mattered. As my informants repeatedly told me, what managers at big companies, professors at university, old and young alike: what mattered was what university you studied at, in the end that was what would give them a job. Therefore, passing the exams was what mattered the most. Already at the age of 18 (16 if one counts entrance exams into high school) there was a feeling that the rest of their life was potentially decided by how the exam turned out.

Concluding reflections

I have mentioned some aspects of how the school system aimed to socialize children into "proper group" members, how it in parts is a reaction to the changes in society. However, it seems as if it has been an effort to work against changes, changes seen as potentially threatening the "Japaneseness" of the past. The school lays much effort and focus in teaching the children key scenarios of life progression, the diligent and loyal worker, it enforces and encourages group activity over individual endeavors and works hard to give the children lessons in morality and honor. In my informants case the world on which the concepts, symbols and scenarios the school is based on stems from the past, and the dissatisfaction they have can be described as caused by its lack of legitimacy in their contemporary reality. They do not see the world, and do not believe the world to be as the models and skills they are being taught. "They

makes us in a way that does not work, and when they realize we don't work, they blame us for it" a male *furita* in his late 20s sighed as he talked about his troubles finding a secure job.

Through a narrative around adulthood and independence my informants used both a reflective look about their parents and their generation as well as the school system in Japan as of why they wish not to follow the path they feel they are set towards. It expresses an attitude towards life and society that collides with the reality they themselves feel a part of or at the very least wants to create for themselves. Where the school was expressed as the source for learning and pressure of/towards the traditional ideals that builds up Japanese adult social order, they used the stories of their parent's lives more as to illustrate how the result of conforming and following the adult social order would be like.

University: Playing and delaying.

After the entrance exams, the students that succeeded will start their higher education. After 12 years of school rules and school uniforms, 15 for those that attended pre-schools with uniforms, they are free to do what they want and wear what they want; with "only" others and ones self's sense of fashion as a judge. They go from classes where the group is nurtured to lectures where individuals attend. Romantic relations, part-time jobs, hair color, makeup, all allowed, as there are no school rules in the same sense as those found at high school and in the compulsory schooling. There is no dress code for graduations ceremonies, where some universities are known for the graduates wearing cosplay[22] as they accept their diploma.

In this chapter I will present some narratives that portray the students as "bad" in the eyes of foreign and Japanese elders, and in turn retell the students own explanations and explore their sense making. Up until now we have been presented with their own stories of how they feel life has shaped or tried to shape them in certain directions and how they in various ways by action or in though are distancing themselves from a "traditional" pattern of life progression.

All of my informants that were still studying, and most of those working, had moved away from home to study in Tokyo. Based on their accounts, their friends and general impression of what was "normal", they said that most moved away to study. Those that did not were usually from the bigger cities, where moving would mean less prestigious universities. Therefore, it was not only the rules and practices of school they were free of, but for many also their parent's rules and practices. As Natsui described it "At first I felt a bit lost, moving [from a small town] to Tokyo, caring for myself, being responsible for what to do, when to do it and why. But after a while I just felt free (…)". Most of them described it in similar ways, as freedom, some even as an overwhelming sense of freedom; yet in the end of their second year, they started to talk about the imminent loss of said freedom as job hunting and work life was getting closer. This seemed to be the dominant narrative as we spoke in regards of becoming an adult or a *shakaijin*; gaining freedom and simultaneously the impending loss of it. This chapter will illustrate how they expressed the gaining of freedom, how they experienced it, and how it influenced my informant's lives and their thoughts about their future. I explore the aspect

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[22] Cosplay: Made up of the words "costume" and "play", a term used for those that dresses up as characters from books, tv-series, movies, animated tv-series, videogames and such.

of labor, love and leisure and how the period of studying provided additional alternatives to the life they earlier had felt prepped and pushed towards.

Playing at University.

The train was closing in on its destination and a sense of despair gripped me, as I knew that my conversation with Hiroshi would be cut short. I had so many questions and so many topics I wanted to hear his thoughts about. He had talked about how important studying had been for him, specially his time abroad in America. As he described how going abroad had made him rediscover himself, and upon returning how he had rediscovered Japan. During my previous trips to Japan and during my fieldwork I had heard many negative descriptions of the younger generations, often in terms of being bad students. As Hiroshi had clearly expressed the importance of the period for him personally, I wanted to know what he thought of the current situation.

"What is your impression of the university students of today?"

> "Well, everybody is different, right? But I think that since the last generations has been born and raised into an affluent society they have never felt struggles the way my generation did. That is not a bad thing by itself, but the communication between the different generations does not work that well because of this. I think. Japan is a very modern country, but I would say that 30% of Japan is still very conservative, very traditional. And these 30% are a very important percentage of society, and it will be hard to change this before old people like me die."

He finished with a laugh, seemingly as bright and energetic as any youth, causing me yet again to question his age. "What do you mean with 30%?"

> "Oh, it's just a number I created, but I think it's probably very accurate. Most companies have completely different generations in the higher positions than those on the bottom, many of the middle managers from yet other generation. It is the same with teachers and professors in schools and universities. In government and political parties, we cannot understand each other well, because we speak different languages. I think that many of today's youth live in the world, while many of the older Japanese lives in a Japanese-past (…) All the faults in today's young are the faults created or allowed by the old. I remember when I studied, back then it was a privilege to go to university, most people went from high school to work and some went to vocational or technical schools. Most people that could just followed the path of their parents, learning the crafts that were

already in the family. I received a scholarship you know, both to attend university and to exchange to America. We all [the students] worked hard at university, we felt that we had to, to deserve it. Today I read that most young have the possibility to go to university, now that is the normal thing to do. Many of them neglect their studies and plays around, without caring about their parents that paid for the school and their rent. It does not sound good, but it makes me wonder, where did my generation fail? Was it the way we raised our children that caused them to raise slackers? But, with all the stress being a *salaryman*, perhaps relaxing and playing when they can isn't that strange after all? And as much is given to them, by parents and society, can we really blame them for not being as hard working as previous generations?"

The last two question seemed to be a new ones for Hiroshi as he became silent for a while, seemingly deep in though. After a while he just laughed and asked me about university life in Norway.

Hiroshi's approach to the topic differed from what I usually was exposed to, as the more typical comments on youths from elderly's standpoint were more in the lines of "they are spoiled and weak" or "all they care about is having fun". Without limiting it to two he presented two potential reasons for the differences, one being affluence, the other being the communication created by differences based on the lack of understanding between the "different worlds" young and old inhabit. Instead of using the more established narrative I usually heard and that has been expressed by earlier mentioned literature, he asked where his generation had failed them. He did still categorize them as a generation of slackers, proclaiming that things did not "sound good", and in contrast to his generation, rebuilding Japan and thus "earning" the affluence it is not hard to imagine why the following generations might seem lazy especially in light of the topics introduced in earlier chapters. However as he finished he added an important dimension, what if they relax and play because this is the only time they can? As he had earlier expressed his children did not seem to care about or do anything else than work.

The conversation with Hiroshi illustrate many reoccurring aspects of the narrative around "bad youths" and "fossilized elders", albeit it was special that he in ways voiced both sides of the narrative. In terms of university it becomes almost a cliché with the "when I was young" speech, and by that logic condemning their behavior as bad or lesser. Still the negative remarks towards Japanese students is not solely worded by elders, but also foreign observers and exchange students would comment on, what for them appeared to be, lazy students. The

following excerpt is from a conversation with a Norwegian exchange student at one of the top ranked universities in Tokyo.

> I don't get it! What's the deal with university in Japan? Like, I spoke with a couple of high schoolers recently, and asked them what they wanted to do after high school. Guess what? All of them said [the wanted to attend] Waseda or Todai [two prestigious universities in Tokyo]. Not that surprising right? But when I asked what they wanted to study? Well, they just looked at me as if I was stupid for even asking. They simply said that it didn't matter as long as they got accepted! 'And then?' I asked, they simply said 'azobu[23] [to play]'! When I asked what they would do if they got accepted, they said they wanted to play!

She finished with a sigh and rolled her eyes, throwing her hands out dramatically, but then laughed.

> And they automatically think you're some sort of genius when you attend those universities as a foreigner, if they knew how much easier it is for us to get accepted than it is form them, they would get really surprised. But still, it seems as if we work twice as hard as the Japanese students do, but sure, it makes sense, our grades actually mean something in the future.

This was a reoccurring focus for exchange students, the fact that grades did not seem to matter for their Japanese classmates, while the exchange students believed they would need the grades in the future for either work or to progress to a masters or a PhD. A German exchange student added;

> One of my classes is like 60% attendance, so all you have to do to pass is to attend enough. Many people just sit with their phone while the professor is lecturing, some even sleep. There is even one of my classmates that actually brings a small pillow to class.

Other Japanese friends would reinforce this image by telling me how they got around the rules and that they had slept in class or skipped class completely. One male informant studying on his second year told me that:

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[23] The word azobu is translated into "to play" in English, but the usage differs as it in English arguably carries a more unserious and childish connotation. In Japanese the word is used slightly differently, as an adult can say "come play with us" where a English speaker would say "come join us", or "lets play together" in Japanese and "lets hang out" in English.

In some classes, some friends and I are part of a group where one of us comes to class and writes all of us up so we get attendance. It's very common I think. It does not seem as if the professor cares, since the log clearly shows that there were a lot less people present than names written but he does nothing to prevent it.

Another female student admitted that:

Most of my classes has mandatory attendance on 90% or so, so one of the first things I did was to calculate how many classes I could skip and still pass. Also I chose subjects that had minimal amount of tests and papers so all I had to do was to attend enough of the classes to pass.

For the elders the narrative seems to be a matter of "not being good enough" or "not taking responsibility for society", for the exchange students it seemed more of a surprise and inability to understand how students could care that little about grades and knowledge.

Through one of my connections a company gave me permission to use one of their meeting rooms to hold interviews. Before the first interview I was talking with one of the personnel while I waited for my interviewee. She was curious about my thesis and I tried to somewhat explain. When I mentioned my focus on youth today and the transition from studying to working, partly through job hunting, she nodded but smiled a bit as I added that in a traditional sense adulthood had been postponed later into life. The system and institutions I mentioned were familiar to her, but foreign to many outsiders, but as I continued and started to describe and paraphrase my informants she got defensive and the smile was no longer to be seen. It was clear that the things I introduced in name was familiar, but some of the content I described foreign for her as well. It was especially when I told her about all the students that said that they just "played" at university, that they slept in classes and hardly studied that she objected. "This must have been very bad students. Where did they study?" I told her that many of them were students at prestigious universities such as Todai and Waseda, other were from fairly high ranked universities. Again she expressed doubt. "I think these are bad students, and not representative. Probably from rich families so that they can get jobs when they graduate anyway". Her objections were good objections, truly factors that I had and was still considering, but none of them seemed to fit. None of my informants were from rich families, some were from families that clearly had or was struggling to sustain a middleclass lifestyle while also paying for school and rent for their children, others were from fairly well of families, but none of them in any way from a rich family.

When I asked the Japanese students about the topic of "playing" at university it was answered with a sigh and a "sheepish" grin, sort of in a casual way, as if "that's just how it is". There was no sense of "being proud", but also seldom any form for guilt expressed or observed, for them it was expressed as something systemized, something beyond them, a given norm to follow. They did not see their "laziness" as them sneaking away from something they should have done to do something they should not do, rather as a logical given as a student. Skipping class were portrayed as consequenceless actions as "I would probably not learn anything that would be relevant in my work life or personal life". While pursuing a hobby or a romantic relation, working part-time, partying, tending ones social life, etc., were actions with immediate consequence and future ramifications; "If I take extra shifts I get more money for my hobbies" or "I could meet my future wife at a party", etc. Takahashi, a 28 year old I met through the event-café was working as a salaryman at a sales office and had been working there for almost five years. He was skinny and looked young to be his age, something he was often told. He said, quite similar to how Hiroshi had said it "it is their time to relax and play; chances are that they will never get the possibility ever again".

A matter of playing:

The students themselves used the phrasing "playing" at university, while the elders and outsiders often used more negatively associated words, but both addressing the attendance and focus on grades, or the lack thereof. As Natsui had expressed earlier she had spent most of her middle school and high school cramming for tests to get into university, while her actual grades had come second, but nonetheless been prioritized. In university she did no longer cram for entrance exams as there was no tests left, she did not concern herself with her grades as long as she stayed in the realm between passing and average. What she told me was in line with what others had said to me: the grades were unimportant. This was as long as you did not study for something highly specialized as in medical fields or for a technical vocation such as engineering[24]. Not few claimed that attending a university club was more important than the

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[24] Technical studies was reportedly similar to vocational schools where the teacher or principle would recommend his or hers students to different companies. I was never fully explained in what way grades would matter in such instances, but one told me that the personal relation and family connections were more important than grades. In addition multiple companies had direct agreements with vocational schools or technical universities to get "first pick" of students. I have found no literature on this matter, but it was by many expressed as "common knowledge".

grades because of networking and how it supposedly was seen as significant in the application phase of job hunting if you had attended the same type of university club as the people that interviewed you.

On my revisit to my field I met a 22 year old woman, Chie, that was just about to start working the job she had attained through job hunting. As we sat and talked about her upcoming transition from student to worker she smiled at all of my questions, nodding as she answered "Sou desu ne[25], well, when you're in, your safe". "What do you mean with that?" I enquired. "It's like that with everything in Japan I think, clubs, university, companies, when you're in your safe". She continued and explained to me in detail what she meant.

> Like when you're a middle school student you need to work hard outside of school so you will be able to get good results on your entrance exam in order to get into a good high school. During high school you will have to work twice as hard to get into a good university, but when you get admitted into university you are sort of carried. The [prestige of the] university you are accepted at will correlate with the [prestige of the] company you get a job at. The amount of effort you put into your studies will most likely not affect the job you get, so if the subject isn't interesting for you personally why spend time studying it more than is needed to pass?

"But what about the companies, don't you have to submit papers with your grades?"

> No, I have never ever heard anyone ask for grades, when you apply you write down your university, your faculty and that is usually it. They might not know if you study history or human resources by the time they hire you. The logic is that if you manage to get into a good university you must have studied hard through middle- and high school to get accepted, your family must be good to afford to send you to such a university, the university you're in is proof enough. The grades, they are unimportant. What you studied, also unimportant. In the end the company will most likely train you and mold you for the positon or positions you will work. They just want someone that is proper and with potential to learn and work hard, and this is where the name of the university is supposed to be a stamp of quality.

"But this almost sounds like a system to reproduce class differences?"

> Sure, and it might have done just that, but the truth is that it is getting easier and easier to get into the prestigious universities and easier to get scholarships. In other words, it

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[25] That's right/I get it

is sort of like open for everyone and anyone as long as they pass the exams. It looks like most people still think that a student at a prestigious university is smart and hardworking just because of the universities name, so the idea that this is the reality still seems real enough. In practice however, I think this is no longer true, but the companies still act upon it as if it was so. Therefor students at prestigious universities get better jobs than those in less prestigious ones.

"But that does, in some ways, make it true in consequence? Like, the basis of it is wrong, I get that, but as long as the actions are taken on the premises of it being right it sort of reifies it. The consequences makes it true?" She looked at me a bit confused and I had to take a deep breath and clarify. "A student at a good university gets a good job, and then you can say that all good jobs are held by former students at good universities, so the pattern continues even if they might not be better at the jobs than others?"

Ah, yeah, haha, good point, but my point was that students aren't as hard working as people believe, and they don't have to, and maybe that's the very reason. I don't think that students today are less clever than my parents' generation, I just believe they are clever in different ways. If you don't have to work hard to get the job, then why do it? They already worked hard enough during middle- and high school. If you have 4 or 6 years that you can spend on yourself before starting to work, then why not? When you have the chance to play, you should play, we all know that we have and will work hard enough as it is. In the end, isn't that truly the smartest action anyways? Why pay for something free, when you can rather invest in something that enriches you.

Chie's points were clear, and her conversation clearly placed the matter of "playing" at university in the same category of difference in logic as a clear base in the generational gap. As the concept and connotation of labor, love and leisure as approached through their parents. If we set aside studies as a part of university and rather focus on what the "playing" entails, what is it that as both Chie and Hiroshi refers to as something that is a possibility as a student, but is removed or altered as a worker?

Leisure

As my informants moved to Tokyo to study, they also moved away from their parents watchful eyes. Like the case of Natsui she also left behind the neighborhoods where everyone knew everyone, and with it came freedom to do things in ways that earlier had been impossible. Most of them lived in dormitories, connected to either their university or private dormitories catering to students of certain areas. Pastime activities becomes a greater matter of self-interest and

earlier hobbies partly chosen by their parents or availability among the school clubs was mostly discontinued. For most, the dormitories provided freedom, being able to come and go as they wanted, spend time with whomever they wanted, and spend their time with things they liked.

Takahashi loved videogames, but his mother had believed they had negative effects and blamed them for ruining the younger generations of Japanese children so he had never been allowed to own one as a child.

> She blamed everything on videogames, youth crimes, school drop outs, everything. I would go to friends that had Gameboy [hand held gaming console] or Famicon [videogame console] just to play. The first thing I did when I moved to Tokyo was to buy a Gameboy"

Now he owned multiple gaming consoles, both handheld and stationary, a laptop and multiple stacks of videogames. For Takahashi, moving out and studying had been all about the freedom by not living by his parents rules, and the freedom of governing his own time. He had taken up an instrument, a performance art and started to study languages by himself. When he lived at home he would have to sit at the kitchen table and do his homework from school and the homework from the cram school he attended before his parents let him do anything else, usually resulting in little time to play during weekdays. As a student he could stay out late, eat whenever he was hungry, go where he wanted, as his parents were not able to survey him and thus enforce any rules. The others, like Takahashi, expressed a relief and a joy of being able to govern their own time, and they all presented it as independence and about taking responsibility over themselves. As Natsui told me:

> I know it's not smart to eat only fast food, nor to skip dinner and eat cake. I know that skipping lectures in order to go to Disneyland is silly, but I am in charge of myself, and this is how I feel free, and this is how I learn.

Labour

All of my informants that went to university had their first work experiences as university students, as expressed earlier school rules disallowing part-time jobs are not uncommon during high school. All of them having one or multiple part-time jobs. Natsui working at an event café along with two other restaurant jobs, Masayori had worked in restaurants as well, but he had stopped when he started his masters. None of them had anything negative to say about working, apart from the occasional dissatisfaction with a boss or manager. The act of working, going somewhere and doing a job for a given amount of hours a given amount of days a week for a corresponding amount of money was nice. The two main positive traits expressed were the

ability to make their own money that they could use on their own things and the work environment. Many of them had found some of their better or best friends in Tokyo through a part-time job, and when they spoke of the work environment they painted a positive image of working, however they still upheld the narrative of not wanting to work as their parents. The difference in how they spoke of their image of work prior to enrolling at university and as a student was however changed. In the past working had been something that consumed a person, often their parents, that restricted the possibilities to enjoy life. Work had been something forced, something one did to provide for others, by sacrificing oneself. With part-time jobs they painted a different picture, jobs could be fun, and in the case of Natsui give a sense of purpose, be experienced as something meaningful. The binary that was pronounced was a split between working like their parents and finding fulltime jobs with the qualities like in their part-time jobs. This reasoning seemed quite common, and might at parts explain the increasing amount of dropouts or graduates living life as *furitas* instead of following the ideal of career track employment. Rather juggling part-time jobs to keep the freedom to change if a job loses its sense of meaning but also being able to manage a free time that allows for hobbies and other leisure activities.

Natsui was quite clear on her thoughts at a social gathering at Takahashi's as the following excerpt illustrates.

I, Natsui, Takahashi and 3 more that had all met at the event café was gathered at Takahashi's apartment for a social gathering. We made some food and shared some drinks, where the topic of the conversation at one point turned to the topic of work as Takahashi wanted to change job to be able to work with something connected with his education and interests, if possible to get a better work environment like what he had had while he worked part-time. "I understand, I wish I could work with children" Natsui said as she nodded. "Then why don't you?" I enquired. "Well, to be able to work in a kindergarten I would need to study something else[26], so it's too late" she sighed. "Is it? Can't you just change?" I asked not fully grasping the dilemma. Natsui looked at Takahashi before she raised her shoulders slightly, "I could change but, that's really hard". Takahashi nodded, "Yeah, if she starts on a new education, it is 2-4 new years, years that her parents would have to pay for in addition to the two years she already did on her current major. And in the end it might not help, as its looks really bad if you change a

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[26] In order to work at kindergartens I was told that most places wanted certification gained by either going to the right vocational schools or by taking a set of exams at university.

subject and since she would graduate two years older than everyone else they would ask why and then know that she is what they call a 'quitter'". Natsui stared into the floor for a while before she sighed and looked up with her usual smile.

> I wish I could just get a fulltime job or like 70% position in something similar as what I do at the event café. I just really don't want to do job hunting, I really don't want to work. Like. I don't want to work that sort of jobs, it seems so hard and tiresome, no time for life. If I could work like I do now and make enough money, I would, and I would be happy doing it".

Following this we all started to fantasize about how she could open up her own event-café and truly be in charge of her own dreams. She smiled and laughed as we all enjoyed this hypothetical future where her job would be satisfying, however, after a while she sighed again and shook her head, "I think it would be better to just get married and have children, to be a housewife. Then I could have fun with the children and would not have to work."

The entire conversation based in how Takahashi wanted to work with something that felt meaningful. In his case it was a matter of getting a job that justified his education as he had strived hard to get a licenses as an accountant but had still ended up in sales, in addition to working with something that he found interesting therefor meaningful. The way he worked now was, in his own words, the typical Japanese *salaryman* working life: 3 hours commuting each day, average of two hours overtime, little time for friends and hobbies besides the weekends. Natsui still being a student already felt that the things she wanted to do were out of reach, that the road she was on would ultimately lead to the same type of job as Takahashi had. She clearly pronounced that what she wanted was something enjoyable and meaningful, and finally she expressed a not so uncommon strategy: to get married and having children partly in order to avoid working.

Part-time jobs clearly provided my informants with positive work experiences, providing an additional option besides the traditional career track employment straight out of university. Natsui wished she could find a job like her part-time jobs, Takahashi wanted to work with something that felt interesting and meaningful; none of them mentioned prestige as a factor. When I asked Takahashi what his best work experience had been he easily answered the years he had worked part-time at a small chain-restaurant, explaining that it had been because of his co-workers and the amount of free time that provided the possibilities to pursue hobbies, romantic relations and social life. Even if the pay had been low, it was enough for him to live

and maintain a lifestyle that satisfied him. Now as he worked in a medium sized company with sales, the reality was different.

> I don't know my co-workers, we don't talk about anything besides work if we talk, and it consumes most of my time going to work, working, doing overtime, dropping by the event-café and finally going home. When I worked part-time, at least I was paid by the hour.

I also asked him what he knew of his co-workers at his current job where he told me he knew very little about anyone. When I asked if his boss was married and had children he confessed that he did not know, and it was the same for most of his co-workers. When he had worked his part-time job he told me that they [coworkers] would talk about their personal life whenever business was slow, they would hang out outside work and he had considered many of them friends as much as co-workers, at his current job he would not have used the word friend for any of his co-workers. As I understood Takahashi, his quest to get a job as an accountant was to at least work with something that he found interesting and to justify the years he had used to pass the exams and obtain his license.

Love

Before Takahashi started to study, he had had few friends of the opposite gender. He had never gone on a date, but as a student he began to socialize with women on a regular basis. Takahashi got his first girlfriend as a student, and despite it being highly uncommon at such a young age they had lived together for a while (Ishida, 2013). However, his relationship had eventually come to an end. She had cheated on him and he had discovered it but did not manage to find the strength to confront her. As he returned home one day, while he was still trying to figure out how to confront her, he found the apartment empty of all her things. He said that he immediately felt relieved more than he had felt hurt. He did however express a kind of regret,

> If I knew, I would never have moved in together with her. I could have met a different girl, and might have been married by now, could even have been a father, I will never know. I wasted a lot of time that I could have spent on finding a good girlfriend on her. It's not the same when you start working.

As a student Natsui told me she had become a much more social person. Before she moved to Tokyo and started to study she had had one "true" friend as she called her, and some "regular" friends, all of them women. Now she had male and female friends, friends from all around Japan and an increasing amount of foreign friends. Natsui had confessed one night that she had never been in love with anyone, something that had shocked Takahashi that confessed

that he fell in love all the time. The issue for Natsui was that she really wanted to fall in love, to get married and have children, and as she already had expressed she wished that she could do it sooner rather than later because of the added benefits of not having to work. She wanted to meet prince charming she told us, refereeing to her self-proclaimed Disney "obsession".

All my informants readily spoke about love, and about how they all wanted a person that would share some of their hobbies and interests, but Natsui spoke of love above all the others. She spoke exclusively in a Disney or American pop-music-like narrative, and her ultimate goal was to one day get married by having a Cinderella wedding in Tokyo Disneyland. Albeit borderline extreme compared to my other informants, it was interesting how the core in what they said seemed to be the same, the difference being the narrative used to express it. The manner they spoke about love was largely through metaphors and ideals common in American media, be it movies, music, games or television. Seldom did I hear any Japanese metaphors used, few if any references to Japanese media depictions of love. The image of a husband or wife was seemingly different from what I was told was the "traditional Japanese" couple.

Takahashi wanted a girlfriend that would enjoy attending the same event-cafés as him, that would not mind him playing videogames and preferably join him playing. He wanted a wife that doubled as a best friend. When I asked if it was important that she was a good housewife in terms of cooking, cleaning and caring for children, he seemed a bit unsure how to tackle my question and as he answered he spoke very slowly "Listen, as long as she isn't bad at it, it does not matter. I want to cook and care for the children as much as she does. What matters is that I do not lose my 'me-time', and if I do I want it to be because it has turned into 'us-time'".

Masayori wanted a wife that would take her share of working, he wanted her to have a sense of purpose and as much a 'player' in their life as him, also summing it up as a girlfriend or wife with best friend qualities. A friend of mine from before my field study had once shared something similar, he was the same age as Masayori (25). Dreamingly, yet a bit shy, he had showed me a picture of his girlfriend and told me that he hoped they would marry. His intentions of marrying her was already acted upon as he had started to take cooking classes saying that he wanted to be a good husband "I wish to be like Scandinavian couples, where they share everything" he told me. After a while he confessed that he would in fact not mind being a "houseman" caring for home and children while she worked.

Something that was repeated was that during one's studies was the best time to look for a good girlfriend or boyfriend as they all believed that the opportunities to find a suiting match

upon starting to work was harder later in life. I would expect it being similar to what I know from Norway, which as one starts to work, the situations where one meets new people lessens compared to what is the reality for most university students. The pool of potential romantic partners then gets smaller if one does not actively seek out romantic relations via other social platforms. As the reality of working life in Japan differs in hours worked, hours commuted and after work activities with co-workers, the time and places to meet new people might be even more of an issue.

Early during my fieldwork, I experienced this up close as I thought I found the perfect informant. Her name was Misako, she was 26 years old and worked with youth unemployment through the local government office. She professed a deep fascination with my research questions and we met often to talk over a coffee. Each time we met, I had to wait for her as she came straight from work and even as she worked for the government unpaid overtime was not unusual. After a while she invited me and some of her friends so I could ask them questions for my thesis, and during the conversation we ended up talking about love and dating. Most of them described these issues with opportunities to meet potential partners. The most common strategy was for them to ask friends or co-workers to match them with someone. One of them, a 32 year old woman, told me that she out of fear of remaining single had started to seek out singles parties hosted by professional agencies. Some of those had been men wearing not nametags but tags stating their occupation and monthly salary. One of the others, a 28 year old woman, was annoyed as all her seniors at the office had started to nag her about getting to old to find a partner and setting her up with people they knew. After a while one of them asked me if I had a girlfriend, and I told them that I did. Misako looked at me in disbelief. The topic had never surfaced so I had never mentioned it, but as I did I also learned that she had a boyfriend, leaving me puzzled with why she reacted on my situation. Suddenly she did not have time for me during the remainder of my fieldwork. I realized after a while that she had spent her few hours of free time on several occasions on me. These were hours she normally would spend doing chores, relaxing at home, the precious hours she had of "her-time" during her weekdays. I also learned that she had been with her boyfriend for 2 years, yet she was still dating others. As I experienced similar situations with other women I started to mention my girlfriend to all women I met to be sure that they did not get the wrong idea. All of those that suddenly disappeared when they realized I was in a relationship all had started to work, almost all of them had boyfriends, but still they dated other men in secret. When I asked around after a really confusing and frustrating period I learned that the common way was to meet ones partner once or twice a week, often

consisting of a lunch or a dinner, or a date night. The explanation was that as people work they often end up having separate schedules therefor it would be hard to find time at the same time, resulting in few meetings. Doing the math then, Misako had been with her boyfriend for 2 years, resulting in somewhere between 100 and 200 dates. It might sound a lot, but when half of those might be 30-minute lunches, an average couple in Norway would have spent more time together before becoming a couple. This was an issue for many of them, saying that they were unsure if they really knew their boyfriend or girlfriend as they seldom met and when they met it would be for a defined activity, leaving the everyday side of a person outside the relationship. Takahashi told me once that this is why there was so many "*Narita rikon*", Narita being the name of one of the major airports in Tokyo *rikon* meaning divorce. Apparently, there is a considerably large number of honeymooners that end up divorcing as they return. This caused by spending multiple days in row with their partner and realizing they did not like that part of the person after all. As it is uncommon to live together as an unmarried couple young couples that date usually follow this model of meeting once or twice a week, keeping their interaction over online messages and phone calls between their dates. As in Misako's case, she had spent 2 years on a boyfriend she was unsure if was the right one for her, and if it did not work, she might have had to spend years looking for a new partner and then years dating that person until she was convinced that she knew him well enough. Dating while working in Japan thus seems to be a time consuming and lengthily endeavor. A strategy many women seemed to use was to date multiple people at the same time, one confessing that she had 4 boyfriends, three secret and one official, just in case the official turned out to be bad. For most of my male informants this was not the case, they seemed to stick with one partner and put their fate in her, still some men I spoke with was aware that many women had multiple boyfriends. Some of these told me that they would date women they knew had an official boyfriend, as there was less chance it would become serious and then it could turn into a uncommitted relationship with uncommitted sex for them.

As students my informants spent or had spent much time at social events, through their university, university clubs, hobbies, bars or clubs to meet new people and form friendships and romantic relations. Many hoping to find the right one before they started to work, but at the same time being honest saying that as they started to work location wise or time wise might render a relationship from university impossible as workers, especially if both of them were to pursue a career. Based on my male informants they all wanted a girlfriend or wife with best friend qualities, having common interest on their free time being essential. The traditional ideal

of finding a homemaker was not mentioned by any of them as important. For the women a caretaker seemed to be relevant, especially in Natsui's case, but they all spoke about love and someone that would treat them as an equal. Both of these ideals illustrated by my informants, especially by the men, stands in contrast to the traditional workingman and homemaker many of their parents lived as.

Moratorium: A matter of delaying the suspension

Studying at university was more than the playing, something I realized when I sat down one evening with Natsui at the end of her shift. She was complaining about her studies, how it all felt useless. I used the opportunity to ask her something I had wondered for a long time. "Why go through all the trouble of cramming and hard entrance exams to enter university and finally get a job you already have decided you will not like?"

> When I was in high school I still believed that this was something you had to do, and I was by no means ready to start working at that time, I'm still not ready. Even if I do not like my studies, I enjoy being a student, and I have actually thought about taking a masters just to delay job hunting and work, that or adding a year by studying abroad one or two semesters. I think being a student is just a long period of delaying, I guess that's the reason why we call it moratorium.

It was not the first time I had heard someone refer to the university period as moratorium in Japan, and it seemed to be a concept widely shared among those I spoke with. Moratorium meaning the suspension between one thing and another, not quite being either. In many ways this bears similarities with the concept of liminality (Turner, 1996), and fits to the background theme for this thesis being adulthood. As my informants are neither children or adults, too much of both to be either.

> Upon further questioning, I discovered that many of my informants had either added a year to their studies by studying abroad or postponing classes in order to do job hunting a season later. Many reporting thoughts about studying more in order to postpone full time employment. Half-jokingly, a regular at the event-café told me that:

> This is probably the only time I get to discover myself, go places, meet people and try new things. I fear the future of high blood pressure, ulcers, stress, where the only 'fun' I have is on the subway home from work. That's why I need to make this period last, so I can find comfort in the good memories I make.

Concluding reflections

The period of studying at university was used as a way to speak themselves through, expressing positive experiences in terms of labor, love, leisure and self. When they spoke of what they wanted, they often expressed a student-like lifestyle, where the qualities of social life and work life as a student was what or similar to what they wanted of their future life. For Takahashi life had not turned out that way, and he was considering options in order to secure either a sense of meaning and/or a sense of belonging by finding a new job.

The way adulthood has been presented and expressed by my informants, at one hand becoming financially independent from ones parents similar to the first three markers of adulthood, the other gaining a sense of responsibility; studying was for most of them the road that was leading them towards these sorts of independence. During the student lifestyle they experienced life in ways that added alternatives or added to already established alternatives to the normed and idealized path they earlier had expressed dissatisfaction with through the parent and school narratives. The freedom gained and experienced during the years as a student was not readily abandoned in order to work and live in a way that in their eyes was outdated and relying on concepts that for them was changed beyond the logic of the old system. In order to be independent they wanted jobs, but not the same jobs with the same lifestyle as their parents, they wanted relationship and most of them wanted marriage, but not the same as their parents. Women as men wanted to work, and the logic of work was no longer in order to find a partner and to carry a household. Income was for independence and for freedom to enjoy oneself, to find meaning, for things to matter.

Job hunting

In October 2014, Japanese news agencies could report a case where two Japanese university students had been arrested based on evidence that suggested they were on their way to join *Daesh* (The self-proclaimed Islamic State) (The Asahi Shimbun, 2014). One of them, a 23 year old student, was asked why he tried to Join Daesh where he responded "My efforts to find a job (in Japan) didn't go well (The Asahi Shimbun, 2014)" Probably the reasons behind his choice were more complex than "just" not finding a job, but the mere fact that this was his response is significant. The fact that he had failed to find a job in the small window of time in a person's life where career track employment is seen as a possibility in Japan and thus could use it to justify this rash decision gives a strong impression of how serious job hunting in Japan is. Moreover, the responses the case got when I talked with my informants were more in lines with "but why would he join the Islamic state?" focusing on how he was Japanese and non-religious but never questioning his reason being: failing job hunting. Those that mentioned the part of job hunting used it as proof of how outdated and stressful the hiring system in Japan is. "You see, you see how stupid the system is? When it can push a young student to such a decision!?" a 23 year old male student commented on the issue, while a woman in her 30's commented by saying: "The system needs to change, we cannot have a system that breaks people, a system where everyone loses in some way or another". Speaking with the senior generation did not prove too fruitful on this matter, as most people just shook their head or shrugged, one did however comment upon it and elaborated his thoughts. A 50-year-old salaryman that I met at a small restaurant shook his head as I mentioned the case:

> Japanese youths are getting weak, too weak. I think if he could not get a job and could not face the failure this was the better way. Japan needs to rid itself with weak people, let them be stupid and die or go to jail, that is the best. Maybe we should not have stopped him.

Although an extreme view, it followed the same narrative I had heard so many times before: that Japan was not a place for weak people, and sadly, in many people's eyes the younger generation was considered weak and getting increasingly weaker. The job hunting and working life used as an example by the elders of how the younger generation was weak, while the very same was used by the young to explain how the elders were outdated as they also believed the system was.

The period of job hunting was painted as the forward cast shadow from their parents past that for many of them threatened their "freedom". Another example of the normative delay as the institutionalized path leads somewhere that no longer exist as a reality according to my informants. The turning point that might, despite all their resistance, "force" them into a life similar to their parents. Even if the lifestyle that comes with career track employment is described as similar to their parents the incentives and logic behind it is no longer the same, or absent according to some of my informants. The little or lack of incentives and logic are mainly twofold as on one side there is a difference in the economic incentives and on the other side the logic of marriage, childbearing and establishing a household, like it was mentioned earlier. The questions seems to be: why follow the path, if they fear that it leads nowhere?

In this chapter I will present the season for recruitment for career track employment in Japan called *Shushokukatsudo*, present multiple stages/phases of the process coupled with observations, excerpts from conversations and interviews. I will present the different strategies used and/or described by my informants, and explore the reasoning behind the choices they took. As an extra dimension, I will present excerpts from interviews with recruiters and HR-workers from different Japanese companies in charge of recruitment and job training. I will analyze this in light of adulthood and generational gaps

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Shushokukatsudo

Shushokukatsudo, the period for career track recruitment in Japan, differs from the style of recruitment found in other countries in multiple ways. First off it is seasonal[27], roughly starting in December and ending in June, but preparations often start already in October. Secondly, the job-hunting for career track employment is built upon recruitment of university students a full year before they graduate. Therefor the system is often labeled as "simulations recruitment of new graduates" abroad. This style of recruiting was also used in Korea, until a law was passed in 2010 banning it as it was discriminating based on age (Joseph, 2010). The system in Japan has been criticized for the same age-discrimination (Kaho, 2002), and even if a law was passed in 2007 to combat this, it's "effectiveness is doubted" (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2014). As the window for job hunting through *shushokukatsudo* is narrow, for what is 6 months in a

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[27] The season for job hunting has changed over time, the time referred to here is 2014 and the previous years. In 2015 some changes that aimed to shorten the season with 3 months was implemented, but it is debatable if it was shortened as many companies started with pre-job hunting intern periods for 3 months instead.

long life, and even if there are certain ways to try multiple times, the moment a person is "too old", he/she cannot job hunt through *shushokukatsudo* and the possibilities of career track employment becomes minimal. At least in ideal, the model of *shushokukatsudo* plays on the idea of life long employment, where newly hirees will rise in the ranks with time, get raises based on seniority, and in the end after a long life working for the company, retire and relax. This means that if everything worked, getting a job would set you for life, given that the job was tolerable and the company did well, thus removing any need for additional ways to get hired, but this is of course not the case for my informants.

The jobs gained and the way of gaining them through *shushokukatsudo* in Japan are also different than the way and type of jobs a student will get after graduation in Norway. The means of getting them is through an intricate process of attending presentations, sending applications, tests similar to entrance exams, personality tests, multiple rounds of interviews all of which are done multiple times for each of the different companies applied to. As the field studied and grades received are relatively unimportant for a majority of students, the jobs they get are as general workers, where they will receive around 3 months of official job training from the company. Then, often, for 3 years they will function in an apprentice-like position where they might and usually will be moved between departments and offices. In other words, they are hired to the company, not to a position, and they often do not know what kind of job they will do until they finish their job training. And even then they might not know what kind of job they will do in a year's time as the company might move them based on the companies needs. They are hired for the potential of skills more than they are hired for a specific skill they already have, a recruiter called them "competent tabula rasa". Some professions, such as doctors, engineers, and other technical professions are hired based on skills. They are called specialists while the others are called generalists. The Japanese companies have favored versatile workers that can be used as a resource where the resource is needed, thus if there is too few people working in sales, people working in different departments might be transferred to sales instead of the company hiring new salesmen if it is outside of the recruitment period. This way of training ones employees to fit the company's needs might have worked in the 60s through to the 80's. As the Japanese market is now struggling to find its place internationally, a workforce that needs to be trained in skills needed for international growth that the companies lack is problematic.

Already by outlining and giving a superficial description of *shushokukatsudo*, it is evident that either one does *shushokukatsudo* and get a job, or one can decide not to do it or fail

to get a job and most likely forever be outside career track employment. If then, my informants truly wish to not end up like their parents, could they not just abstain from job hunting through *shushokukatsudo*? To answer this, we should first go through the process of job hunting and let the empirical excerpts provide the answers.

Preparations.

Just as it turns midnight and the 1st of December starts; the majorities of Japanese companies announce their job offers for the season on employment sites on the internet.

> "I just sat there and waited the entire day, but in many ways it felt as if I had waited two months already. As it grew closer to midnight I logged into all the different sites and started to refresh the webpages again and again. When they finally were announced I spent the entire night looking through jobs and companies, already planning which job fairs to attend and signing up for company presentations". (Masayori)

Another student (22) reported that a sense of anxious waiting had started some days ahead of the lists being published, and this feeling stayed through the entire period. When he finally received a job offer, the feeling disappeared, but in its wake a new anxiousness took form "I can't believe that I'm going to start working in a year, as a salaryman. I'll become just like my father, Oh my god, I really hope I don't".

Prior to the list of companies and the number of positions being published most of the soon-to-be job hunters already started to prepare in October. They all called it a period of "self-evaluation". A period for them to delve into themselves and explore what their own strengths and weaknesses were, and how they had become that way. This was encouraged through books, presentations and seminars at universities, by recruitment centers, magazines and pamphlets. Especially the books, in form of job hunting guides, meticulously guided the reader through questions and provided examples for questions such as "my hardest experience in life". These questions were presented and coupled with answers that could and most likely would show up on applications forms and in interviews. So even if the process of self-evaluation seems to be a period of getting to know oneself, it is on the terms of questions by others, the very setup biasing the reader towards certain traits and answers being the right ones and other being the wrong ones; despite what might be the true ones. Written information to aid the job seekers through *shushokukatsudo* is plentiful, books even listing the average amount of holidays by companies, the same with sick days, the percentage of people that quit their job during or after job training, the average size of bonuses and such that could influence a job seekers decisions. Equally important seemed to be the information spread by word of mouth, almost as a type of

storytelling, where cohort after cohort had retold experiences from job hunting to their juniors in a degree that much of it was just "common knowledge". For some the expressed or imagined meanings of one's parents was also a major factor in their choices, "I need to get a job at a good company to prove to my parents that I am a good son" a 23 year old job hunter told me. To summarize, the preparation phase mainly concerns itself with collecting information and orientation.

Masayori seemed to be the one that had taken the preparation phase the most relaxed of my informants. At least this is how he presented it, but his preparations were still stressful. He had contacted his *senpains* (seniors) from school/university or school/university clubs and asked them how their job hunting experiences had been and to get tips. Masayori decided that his main goal would not be to get a job at a big prestigious company like the ideal often is held to be, but rather look for a medium sized company where he would be able to work directly with what he liked and what he knew. He decided this on the impression that even if it was less prestigious it was more rewarding and posed greater possibilities for a mobile future. From his *senpais* he got confirmation from those that worked in big and prestigious companies that the pay was bad and the unpaid overtime plentiful, coupled with big workloads. He confessed that he had considered his parents thoughts, but instead of asking for approval or their thoughts, he had decided to "just" inform them that he would not be looking for the "idealized" jobs, something they had accepted. However, he did not want to speculate how content they had been with it, but was happy they had respected his decision. His main stress during the preparations were the interviews, "I spent a long time trying to find good answers to the questions in the guides, but it was so hard, it still is". The guide and his friends told him that it was important to have good answers on the typical questions posed in the interviews. The guides posed questions such as "What is the most difficult thing you have experienced, and how did you overcome it?" All equal or similar to what the different companies often used, and the guides provided good example answers. However "(…) the answers are too good, it is not like everyone has had to fight hard to do something or to sacrifice much for their parents during their life" Masayori complained. He just did not feel like he had any "good stories" to answer with, and believed this was important, but after much self-evaluation he had found some answers he hoped and believed would suffice.

Koemi was preparing on a completely different level than Masayori, as she attended seminars, talks, introduction courses to job hunting, got counseling, did pretend interviews with counselors, read the guides, the magazines, and listened to others. What she did not do was

what Masayori had done, to speak with *senpais*. Koemi had lived and gone to high school abroad prior to university in Japan, thus lacking some of the connections and some of the "common knowledge" Masayori had acted upon. Much of the word to mouth information is based on specific cases that might not be generalizable or representable for the majority of companies, along with a lot of information that might be outdated, but acted upon by students as if true. For Masayori, his connections and reasoning had in his eyes falsified much of the information and the ideals; like how his friends had told him how working for a prestigious company was not preferable. Koemi had lacked the network to support or falsify the information she had gathered, leaving ambiguous information as much falsified as reified, making the information hard to maneuver and act upon. The fact that Koemi had lived abroad was a major stress factor for her during job hunting. The fear of not being proper enough or not fitting the ideals was felt and readily expressed by all of my informants, many of them also feared that they would let down their parents if they failed to get a job or have to accept a non-prestigious job. With Koemi there was however an extra dimension, it was less the fear of not being seen as a good enough worker, nor the fear of letting down her parents, for Koemi it was the fear of not being Japanese enough. Koemi was as pureblooded Japanese as my other informants, but her parents had moved to the United States of America when she was in her early teens, where she had attended American high school and a year of college before returning alone to Japan to study at a Japanese university. Her English was as good as her Japanese, a skill that one would believe to give her an advantage on the Japanese job market. However, the manner of how she acquired the skill, by living abroad for a longer period of her life, is what she believed could be a problem for her.

In Japanese, Koemi and others like her that has returned after living abroad as children, are called "*kikokushijo*", translated to English as "returning child", while some, me included, think that the term cannot be translated without losing most of its meaning (Goodman, Imoto, & Toivonen, A Sociology of Japanese Youth: From returnees to NEETs, 2012). Being a *kikokushijo* in Japan and the image of *kikokushijo* has gone through many changes since the 70s when the term became readily recognizable to all Japanese as a label for children that returned home to Japan after years abroad, a situation largely caused by Japanese companies that started to send workers abroad during the 60's (Goodman R. , 2012, s. 32). In the beginning the children was generally felt sorry for as they were forced to live abroad and attend foreign schooling since their fathers loyally had went abroad for their companies (Goodman R. , 2012). The issue was how these returning children found it hard to re-socialize and function in the Japanese culture,

often referred to as a reverse-culture shock (Goodman R. , 2012). The government, schools, research institutions, organizations and parents gave the issue much attention, with programs to give returning children extra help in re-socializing or re-integrating in the Japanese society (Goodman R. , 1990). With *kyusai kyoiku,* relief education, to help them reintegrate, with media painting them as "*kawaisou*" (pitiful, feeling sorry for or poor) and tales of poor fates of returning children being published both as popular books and as research papers the image of the pitiful *kikokushijo* was well established (Goodman R. , 1990). In the 80's the media focused on how young perpetrators of shocking crimes were *kikokushijo* (Goodman R. , 1990, s. 30), *kikokushijo* being linked by media to greater risk of being bullied, for being violent, committing suicide and murder, kikokushijo was seen by some as a treat for the Japanese society. For a short period in the 80's kikokushijo and Japanese students that had chosen to get their university education abroad was seen as privileged, as the people that could aid the internationalization of Japan, but as the economy of Japan stagnated in the end of the 80s, so did the ideal of an internationalized Japan (Mori, 2004, s. 155). Today the matter is unresolved, and being *kikokushijo* is gatekeepers between Japan and the outside, the question seems to be a matter of the beholder judging if the outside is good or bad for Japan.

When I asked Japanese people today what they though about *kikokushijos* most of them claimed that they did not have any problem with *kikokushijos* personally, but they would tell me of the negative views they believed others had towards *kikokushijos* and problematic situations they believed a *kikokushijo* would experience in Japan, all without being inquired about it. Retelling stories from the media of gruesome murders, suicides and social issues to prove their point. All the things I heard about *kikokushijo* painted an ambivalent picture, even those describing it in a more positive way spoke of them as if they were foreigners or at least different. All of which I heard probably pales in contrast to what Koemi has heard and experienced during her life. Now, as she was hunting for a career, she feared that her otherness would be an issue.

I asked Koemi if she felt less Japanese than her friends:

> No, not really, but I feel different, and I know I'm different, I know that the way I think and experience things is different from the typical Japanese way. I don't feel less Japanese; I feel as if I'm just slightly more 'something else' in addition to being Japanese.

"Do you think others see it that way?" Koemi got quiet, and I felt as if I had offended her.

> I don't know, probably not.

After she had answered, the topic was abandoned.

During the preparation phase the soon-to-be job hunters would in addition to the gathering of information and planning acquire formal business clothing, accessories, get their hair cut to proper length and style, colored dark and take professional portrait pictures to attach to their applications. The way of appearance is guided by the books, guides and influenced by word of mouth in an equally extensive way as displayed in the school rules in the earlier chapter. Many of the universities provide guides for this themselves, where I would recommend readers to consult Sapporo University's employment manner webpage where pictures of dress and hairstyles are shown as examples (Sapporo University, Visited 2015).

The transformation

One night as I was sitting at the event-café where I met many of my informants, being mutual regulars, or them being part of the staff. It was in early March, and I had frequented the café long enough to become familiar with most of the everyday regulars and most of those that dropped by once or twice a week. I was sitting at a table with Natsui where she mid-conversation suddenly stood up and broke out in an "*Aaaa*! Ken-san!" The door into the café had just opened and Ken had walked in, dressed in a dark blue suit, carrying a dark leather satchel in his right hand. The staff and some of the regulars voiced their own surprise, stood up, and walked over to greet him. Ken took a step into the café and bowed slightly and held up a hand excusing himself for disturbing at the same time as he said he was in a hurry, never really walking away from the entrance. The staff and some of the regulars, with Natsui in the front gathered around him all in turn asking how he was and how things were going. I had never met Ken before and I got the impression that nobody had seen him for a long time and that he might have started working recently, thus because of overtime finding himself unable to frequent the café. I did however get the impression that he looked and seemed a bit young to be a *salaryman*. He suddenly looked really tired as he responded to all the questions "I'm doing my best", the other responding with nods and motivational comments. Natsui touched the fabric of his suit and pointed at his hair "You look really *majime*. Like a proper *salaryman*!" she exclaimed. Ken proceeded to tell them how he had spent 10 000 yen or so on the haircut and 30 000 yen on the suit he was wearing while occasionally checking his wristwatch. "*Oh*, do you have your portrait picture with you?" Natsui asked, whereas Ken looked down and said "It's so embarrassing, I look really stupid". Everyone insisted on seeing the picture and it did not take much insisting before he opened the satchel and gave Natsui a picture. "*Wah*! Is this really you? You look so

professional! *Wah*, I can't believe it. Look, can this really be Ken-kun[28]?" She turned to show the picture to all the others, and they all commented on how proper and grownup he looked in the photo. The focus shifted as he again talked about how busy he was and how he had to leave soon because tomorrow was yet another hectic day with a formal dinner, fairs and interviews. As he left everyone told him to stay strong and he bowed multiple short bows as he thanked them. As soon as the door was closed behind him Natsui commented "*Wah*, job hunting! It seems really tiresome. Poor Ken-san, I hope he gets a good job" she finished with a sigh. It turned out that Ken had been there just some months ago, and that he up until that time had been a regular. Natsui told me how he had used to have colored hair, and what she described as wild hair referring to the way he styled it, always dressed in t-shirts with pop-cultural references, descriptions that did not match the Ken I had seen in the door with his "proper" haircut, suit, satchel, constantly checking his wristwatch to mediate his hurry.

As seen in this excerpt, Ken had gone through a visible transformation. He differed from his friends in the way he dressed, his hairstyle, the accessory he was carrying, but most of all he differed from the version of himself he usually presented others. For those yet to do job hunting or that refrained from it coupled with those that already had gone through with it the change of dressing was a clear symbol and in many ways the embodiment of the lifestyle that follows. Even if Ken was not one of my informants, and was not an intricate part of the social groups I attended, he is an example of the disappearance from the social groups and venues normally frequented, his short visit clearly displaying this. This disappearance caused much of my observations to concern themselves equally much with that and those present as that and those absent. As job hunting started for full many of my friends and informants seemingly disappeared from all social gatherings I would usually see them, as well as the activity on social media decreased. For weeks, I would wait for answers from some of them, and every time it was the same, apologies for their absence, stories of how busy they were, promises that as soon as they were done we would all meet up.

The hunt

As the actual hunt for jobs begins the lecturing halls gets empty and the arenas with job fairs gets crowded with men and women in search for a companies that potentially will end up hiring them. All my informants except Koemi that was doing job hunting during my fieldwork

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[28] Natsui deliberately changed from –san to –kun to emphasize his relative young age, even if he is Natsuis senior.

reported that they did not attend a single lecture during some of the months of job hunting, something their universities accepted. As Koemi had some classes with foreign professors that did not accept job hunting as a valid reason for absence she found it necessary to attend lectures in the entirety of the period.

In the streets the amount of university students seen during daytime in business areas greatly increased, all identified by their suits, accessories and hairdos. For the coming months they attend job fairs and company presentations. One would presume that the reason to do this was for one self to figure out if the company was interesting as a workplace, however this seemed not to be the case for my informants and those I spoke with. "You have to attend the presentations in order to get the entry sheets that you will need to submit your application to the company" and "Usually they will give you information about the company that they will ask you about later during the interviews or in the application form". As the preparation phase, they seem to attend the job fairs and the company presentation to acquire information dictated as important by others than themselves. Masayori did, as mentioned earlier, seek out information that he deemed relevant himself, while Koemi seemed governed by what was written and what others pronounced as important. However Masayori was as dependent on attending said fairs and presentations to get the "key information" to apply as Koemi and the others were.

As the jobseeker gets his or her hand on the entry sheet either by attending a presentation or by visiting a booth at the job fair he or she can apply by filling in the entry sheet and attaching his or her application. The entry sheets do however differ, but in common is that they ask questions such as "How do you believe you can contribute at [Companys name]?", "What makes you [Company name] material?", "What is your strengths and weaknesses?" and so on. Some ask for hand-written 10 page essays to answer such questions others less. A reoccurring trait is also that the companies might ask as much about the company as they ask about the jobseeker, as "what do you know about [Company name]" or specific questions about production, structure or history of the company. Because of these questions the jobseekers needs to pay attention during the presentation and take notes, as the information given might become central to the seekers chances of getting the job. Again, it is visible that the starting process of job hunting seems to revolve around the gathering of information and reproducing some of it at key moments during the application period.

The amount of entry sheets and application submitted during the period differs greatly, but sending up to 60-70 entry sheets was not uncommon, however Koemi sent 7 and Masayori

30. Albeit 7 applications might not sound like a lot, the time and effort to attend job fairs and company presentations to seek out and find the companies to apply to, the time spent on writing out individual entry sheets and custom application forms was apparently time consuming. It was hard to land on a number for how many company presentations, job fairs, company dinners and such my informants attended, but for the period most reported that on average they needed to be 2-3 different places in Tokyo each day while waiting for as much as 5 calls from different companies. There was time in between the things that needed them to physically be at a given location, but as Masayori told me "You're always waiting, always checking your phone, the internet, reading, but most of all, waiting". One of the oral stories so often repeated to me was that if you did not take the phone when a company rang to invite you to interviews, you would lose the chance and they would rather call someone else than try again. This fear of missing out, missing key information online, being too slow to reply to a mail, not answering an important phone call, cause many of them to be busy sitting at home or at a café just waiting for that next important piece of information in between attending job fairs and company presentations.

In addition to the entry sheets and applications, many companies require the job seekers to undergo exam-like tests to prove their skills in topics such as math, English and Japanese and a personality test. According to my informants most medium to big sized companies did this, and while most of them did it through recruitment sites online, meaning that one did not have to take the test multiple times for multiple companies, some companies had their own custom tests adding the amount of work for the job seekers. There was companies that did not do such tests, however based on what I was told, it was seen more as an exception if a medium to big sized company did not request the applicants to undergo such tests.

Both Masayori and Koemi had to take said tests and a personality test. However the way of dealing with the tests differed greatly. "I and some of my friends divided up the tests, the one of us best with math did everyone's math test, the same with Japanese, I took the English part for everyone. Since we can do them online it's not a big deal and easy to get around" Masayori admitted, and upon learning this and checking with my other friends and informants I learned that this was common as all of them had done it this way, except Koemi. "What? No! I studied hard in advance for those tests, I... Seriously? People do that?" Koemis reaction had been a mix of disbelief and shock when she learned that others had "cheated" on the tests during job hunting. When I had asked Masayori about the personality test, he had admitted that he had answered as much truthfully as he had answered what he believed a supervisor would want in a worker. This had also shocked Koemi, as she had answered everything as truthfully as she managed, fearing

that her answers would not be sufficient. Both Koemi and Masayori expressing a feeling that their personality might be flawed in the eyes of others.

Masayori and the others besides Koemi that I spoke with all retold similar accounts, attributing the style and strategy of preparations and applications to the "common knowledge" passed by word to mouth and learned from books. They all pronounced some sort of fear of being inadequate in the eyes of employers, but at the same time they all modified their behavior and in varying degree faked their personality tests, cheated on the tests to seem more desirable to combat the potential "flaws" in themselves. Koemi was afraid that she would not be seen as good enough just as the others, but while they saw it as issue of not being good enough as a worker, Koemi feared that it was her "japaneseness" that would be questioned. As she had lived abroad before enrolling at a Japanese university, she lacked certain experiences, networks and knowledge that made the period even more stressful for her. She did everything that she felt was asked of her, but in that creating a strategy of not saying more than what was asked for. If the entry sheet did not ask for information that would disclose that she had lived abroad she always chose to not write anything about it, as she feared it would be seen as something negative.

Returning slightly to the previous chapter, the applications and entry sheet never asked for grades, references or field of study, but asked for university and oftentimes department at the university. As I at multiple occasions asked my informants what they believed to be the single most important part of the application process that lead to the next stage of interviews, they all answered the same, "the name of your university". I was retold tales of how prestigious companies would take all the applications that were from less prestigious universities and just removed them without looking further on them. In what degree this is true or has been true is hard to say, but the interviews with recruiters and human resources personnel in charge of recruiting in varying degrees reified the information. Following is an excerpt from an interview between a recruiter from a large company and me:

Mr. Nakamura was in his early fifties and had worked with recruiting his entire life. The current job was his second job as he had changed it in his early thirties. For the past 10 years he had exclusively worked with recruitment and on-the-job training of the new recruits. As I had done in multiple interviews with recruiters, human resource personnel and managers, I asked what the first and most important thing that was noticed with applications were, and as the others he answered "The university". As I asked to confirm what my informants had already told me that grades and field of study was seldom if ever asked for at the entry sheets he confirmed this, but adding that in the case of positions for specialists there would be some

differences. "Why is the name of the university so important?" I asked, "Because the good university produces good workers" he answered almost as if it was a question back. As I humbly asked him to indulge with me, excusing my questions and myself if anything appeared strange.

Students that manages to get into a good university has shown that they were able to study and dedicate themselves through high school in order to pass the exams. They come from good families that can afford the school fee; therefor they probably have been raised well. Japanese companies usually hire the graduates as general workers, training them to fit the companies need as they are hired. We aren't seeking professionals, we seek a blank page with good qualities so we can write on it ourselves. You know the term tabula rasa? [pause as I answer "yes"] Yes? Well, we are looking for competent tabula rasa. The university is just a good indicator that that is what the student is. To be sure, we have the multiple rounds of interviews to decide if the person indeed is right for [company name].

As they applied to one company, they would continue to search for other potential companies, attending job fairs and presentations: constantly checking their phones and e-mails for replies. Often they would receive a formal standardized rejection called "*oinori*", where no reasons for the decline were stated. This leaving the applicant questioning what had been their fault for not being called in to interviews. Usually there would be multiple rejections, day after day with waiting resolving in the "*oinori*" letters or e-mails, building up doubt and fueling their insecurity.

If the job seekers entry sheet and application was deemed sufficient by the company the next step would be an e-mail and/or a phone call inviting the applicant to a job interview.

The Interviews

The interviews would, depending on the size of the company, be split up in multiple stages. Most commonly the first round would be a group interview and/or group discussion. The interviews were, despite of all the books and stories of how to properly act and answer questions, the part most people had issues concerning.

I never observed during an interview beside recordings and depictions in media, and all of my data is second hand, but as the main focus in this thesis is how my informants makes sense of things themselves I do not see this as a weakness. The following excerpt is how Masayori described group discussions followed by group interviews from his experience and a turning point based on his realizations.

It depends a bit on the company, but usually I would meet up at one of their offices and wait in the hallway with all the others waiting for interviews. Most places there would be chairs all along the walls, where we would wait in silence. Many believe that the recruitment process starts already during the waiting so people take care to give of a good impression. When it is time, a group of applicants will enter the room and sit facing a desk where recruiters sits facing them. There is usually three recruiters, sometimes more, usually middle aged men, sitting with huge stacks of paper next to them looking at us. They will greet us, we will bow, and then they start with questions. During the group discussion we had to organize the group, discuss the theme and afterwards one or multiple of us would present our conclusions. It feels much like primary school. The recruiters observe us throughout the entire process, making notes if we talk to little, or too much. The group interviews were the absolute worst for me, I do not think I'm good with words in front of others. They would point out one by one and ask questions, all of them the same or similar to those in the job hunting guides. 'What was the hardest period of your life, and how did you overcome it?' was a type of question that was repeated. The story I had chosen for those questions was how I studied hard and managed to get into a good university, but when I heard other people's stories, I felt that my story was not good enough. There was one girl that answered that she had worked multiple part time jobs during her studies to help her sick widowed mother pay the bills and how she had taken the train home twice a week to help her mother and to tutor her younger brother. The recruiters loved the story, and I felt guilty for some strange reason since I never had to do anything like that. I felt that I lost faith in my own answers, and after each interview I went to where I did not get called to the next round I wondered what was wrong with me, why I wasn't good enough. After a while, where at each group interview there was multiple stories like that girls story, I started to recognize the stories. Some I heard multiple times, others I realized I had read in guides. That is when I realized people lied, that they did not just lie on the entry sheets, on the exams, like I had done, but they lied at the interviews. The later into the period it got the more extreme the stories became, and I realized that the more afraid of not getting a job I got the more I exaggerated and lied in my own answers. At some points, I would straight up copy other student's replies from previous interviews. I'm unsure how much it mattered, but after a while it seemed to help as I started to get through to the next rounds of interviews.

Again I was presented during my field with information that seemed counterintuitive based on the original statements my informants had provided. They said that they did not want a traditional Japanese job, they did not want to live for a company and to "succumb" to overtime and stress, yet their actions seemed to illustrate that they would go to extreme lengths to obtain jobs in this form, through hard work, cheating and deceit. As I asked around, all except Koemi confessed that they had lied or exaggerated in varying degrees during their interviews, saying that "You just have to tell them what they want to hear", claiming that the expectations the recruiters had was disconnected with reality and based on outdated ideals anyway so it did not matter in the end. Chie had at the interviews for the job she in the end got exaggerated the amount of part-time jobs, the amount of days and hours she worked and claimed that she had managed to attend all classes and get good grades, as she knew that they were looking for young recruits that would manage much overtime and hard work. When I asked if they were not afraid that they would discover the lies, none of them was. Chie repeated that "When you're in you're safe", Masayori said that "In the big companies there is no chance that they will remember such details, and in really big companies the chance that you meet those you actually lied to is even smaller".

The conversation I had had with Koemi about in which extent she believed others saw her as Japanese or as a *kikokushijo* resurfaced a month or so later as she was going to her first interview.

I'm afraid they will ask me questions so I will have to talk about my time in America. One thing is to refrain from mentioning it on the entry sheet or the application, another thing is to lie during an interview. What if they won't hire me just because I'm 'not Japanese enough'?

Koemi's fear of not being Japanese enough might seem strange, but for her it was above anything strange. She had always been Japanese, when she was a child it was a taken-for-granted fact, as she went to America she was more so a Japanese than she had ever been before. As she returned, she rediscovered Japan, and realized that it had changed for her as she had changed. She was still Japanese in her own eyes, but the period of job hunting challenged and threatened her Japanese identity. The fascinating point is that Masayori and the others expressed doubts about being good enough, or if there was anything wrong with them either based on the personality tests or the effort during the interviews, yet none of them ever though in terms of their "Japaneseness" being challenged. Koemi carried this fear through her job searching.

For Koemi there was another dimension, even if it came in the shadow of her being a *kikokushijo*, the fact that she was a woman. She did mention it, that it was hard being both *kikokushijo* and a woman, as she told me "Many companies are reluctant to hire women as they believe we will end up getting pregnant and leaving the job within the first years. It's hard enough that they might reject me because of my time in America, being a woman just adds another problem".

Getting a job

After a while, Masayori received two offers, not accepting any of them straight away, rather trying to see what choices he could get. In the end, he accepted the one that he believed would work best as a platform to build his future upon even if it paid less than the other one. Koemi on the other hand accepted the first offer she received the very same day the offer came, "I was afraid they would change their mind" she said half-jokingly. The company that hired Koemi was a medium sized company, close to what she would describe as small.

> I think I was lucky with the company. The other interviews I went to were stiff and formal. We had to knock three times on the door before we entered, as we entered we had to bow multiple times, and just all that ordeal with formalities as if they really mattered. The company that gave me the job offer was so relaxed, as I was waiting for the interview to start one of the interviewers came out and got me, small talking on the way to the interview room. He smiled and told me to relax, and I ended up relaxing so much that I started to talk about my time in America. They seemed to find it interesting and asked questions of my thoughts about Japan after I returned. As I left I was sure I had ruined my chances, but they actually called me and gave me a job offer just a couple of days later.

Koemi was smiling as she told me, the stress I had witnessed during the earlier months gone, and the woman before me a relieved and optimistic person. I asked what sort of job it was she would do, and as she as the others were hired as generalists she did not know, and would not know until she started her job training at the company. She could however tell me that the company sold ink to industrial printers.

Seen from the other side

During my interviews with recruiters I asked all of them what the ideal recruit was, most of them answered in accordance with the traditional ideal summed up as "a man from a good

university, from a good family, that works hard, knows his place, is good at communication and follows the rules". Three of them had on the other hand a completely different idea, one saying "I think the best recruits are women, preferably someone with good English skills or one of the other big languages such as Korean, Chinese, German or Spanish". When I asked him why women he smiled saying:

> "For some reason it seems as they have a clearer idea what they want, they know their limits and aspirations better than the men. I don't know why, but it seems as if the men expect that they will get a job without that much effort. They are content with just showing up, leaving and collecting cash. The women aspire to better their situation, they are fighters, the men, not so much.

Another one said that he believed that the best workers might even be foreign women that has fought their way through Japanese university, explaining that the spirit they showed to master the Japanese system while also knowing their own culture and language was the perfect bridge many Japanese companies needed to connect with the international markets.

For those three recruiters Koemi was the ideal recruit, showing that the beliefs and fears Koemi carried were not necessarily based in reality, at least not the contemporary one. I had asked the same recruiters what they thought about *kikokushijo's* receiving similar answers from all of them "they are a resource that we need in our companies", but some of them added "there is often a risk connected to hiring a *kikokushijo*, as they often have problems following rules and end up questioning everything". Their replies illustrating that even if some of the recruiters saw potential issues with *kikokushijo's* they all agreed that they were a valuable resource for companies.

Concluding reflections

Despite what my informants had told me, and so vividly expressed and exemplified, that they did not wish to get a job like their parents, they seemed to fight hard to get one when it all came to it. They would lie, cheat and manipulate in order to present themselves the way they believed that the companies would like them. Not as who they were themselves, but as an ideal graduate that would make an ideal worker. During this battling their own insecurities and fears, conforming in appearance and behavior, but still expressing an un-conformed mindset. Why, after all that I had seen, read and been told, did they go to these lengths? And, what about those that did not even do job hunting? The next chapter will explore the strategies

behind these choices and might in turn provide some answers as of why they went such lengths for a job "just like their parents".

Strategic life course progression.

Among my informants, I came across three different "main" strategies used to handle and renegotiate their life situation. The first being delaying which was covered in the chapter "University: Playing and delaying", but this strategy was just to postpone the future choices. The main choice was if one were to follow the model for job hunting or not, and the strategies played out in accordance with the choices.

Following the stream?

Despite his reservations and fears of ending up as his father, Masayori had in the end cheated on his exam, lied on the personality test, copied other people's answers, and generally done what he felt he could in order to secure a job through the traditional system. In the process he had taken some very conscious choices, eliminating the big companies that traditionally were seen as the more prestigious and promising career paths as irrelevant to his wishes. He had focused on medium sized companies doing business inside his field of study and his interest, believing that a medium sized company would permit more hands on experience with multiple aspects of business. He wanted the all-around experience, instead of ending up in a branch solely in charge of one aspect of business such as sales. He told me he was open to the idea of staying at this company for a while, but his preliminary idea was to stay for three years before looking for a new job, preferably an international company as his current job had turned out to have more of the "traditional company norms" than he had expected or wished for.

The plan to look for a new job after 3 years was not uncommon, and as the recruiters I interviewed had reported it was common for 33% of new recruits to quit during the first 3 years. As I was explained, the job-training period at a company was seen as a three-year period, and upon finishing those three years many engaged in job hunting for a second time, this period referred to as second graduation. This explained why so many were set on getting a job, no matter what kind of job as long as it enabled them to look for a better job in three years. Entering career track employment in Japan was described as next to impossible outside of job hunting, but it seemed that if you entered once and managed to stay long enough at the company you were relatively free to look for new jobs in the future. Again, it seems to be as Chie had explained, how "once you're in, you're safe". Three of my informants, Ichi , Nichi and Sanchi, all men, were at this turning point; as Nichi explained to me "*Ishi no ue ni mo san nen* (sit also on a rock for three years), so now we can look for jobs we actually want".

Ishi no ue ni mo san nen: To sit on a rock for three years (waiting for it to get warm).

The proverb to also sit on a rock for three years basically boils down to patience, if you give up before you give the rock a chance to warm up you will never know if the rock actually would feel nice with time. The way Nichi and the two others used it was with a different focus than the proverb usually has. For Nichi working three years somewhere he did not like was to prove that he was not a quitter. It was not a matter of "I waited and the rock got warm", but rather "I waited and it's still cold and hard". The waiting was used to justify looking for another job, but as they told me, they had disliked the job even before they got it; it was just the means to get "on the inside". As they got hired they were in the word of one of the recruiters seen as "competent tabula rasa", after three years of job training and guidance by the company other companies would be able to hire them as "ready", instead of having to spend time and resources on training them from scratch. All three of them had saved up money over a longer period before quitting their jobs and started focusing solely on finding a new job.

One night as I was hanging out with Ichi and Nichi, we started to talk about what sort of jobs they were looking for, both of them mentioning Yahoo, Google, and different international or foreign companies. Common for most of them was that they were more or less IT and technology companies, and as Ichi eagerly added had a "google-style working environment". They wanted jobs that gave the possibility to travel, to maintain free time, spend time on hobbies and, a job that was "fun". Relaxed business culture, no uniform, videogame consoles in the breakroom, little to no overtime was some of the traits they repeated about the companies they applied at. Within a couple of months after quitting their original jobs all three of them managed to get jobs in the type of companies they wanted. Ichi landed a job at an international IT-company, Nichi in a European company that was opening a branch in Japan, and Sanchi as a programming instructor in an international company; but at a branch in one of Japans neighboring countries. Ichi reported that he loved the work environment, and even if it was busier than he had expected it was a fulfilling job with a social workplace, turning overtime into something he said he almost enjoyed. Nichi was thrilled, as his job sent him to Europe to attend training, meetings and seminars. His wish to travel was realized through his job, and as it follow a European office culture he reported that he had never been more relaxed. When I left the field I lost contact with Sanchi, but based on Ichi and Nichi he is enjoying his time as an instructor.

This seemed supply a potential answer to the question I had asked all along, why follow the road towards something you do not want? What they proved was that they were resourceful, determined and in the end for those that managed the transition from their first job into a meaningful and/or enjoyable job were capable of renegotiating their future on terms that made sense for them. As some of the big companies such as Sony (Firkola, 2011) are changing their recruitment process and hiring procedures to meet the demands of the new generation of workers it seems as the actions of people such as Ichi, Nichi and Sanchi are having its effect.

The road not taken: the floaters that refused to float no more.

Among my friends and informants there were some that lived as *furitas*, having chosen to not attend job hunting and rather work as irregular workers at multiple places, often in some sort of service industry. Instead of floating with the mainstream, they fought their way onto the banks and set off to follow their dreams.

One of these was the 21-year old women named Yume. I had met her through one of her co-workers from a restaurant she worked part-time at besides her studies. "She's a *ronin*" our mutual friend joked, explaining that those that chose not to do job hunting was in varying seriousness labeled as "*shukatsu ronin*", the word *ronin* originally being what masterless samurais were called. "People say they are like headless bodies" she added, as they have no company to follow, like the samurai without a master, she explained. For Yume this was no joke, and she confessed it had been hard to dedicate herself to the idea of going her own way instead of doing job hunting. Her parents had not been pleased, but they had accepted her choice. Yume had studied music, and specialized with a certain type of piano, and she told me that her studies were more than just studies; it was her passion, her interest, her hobby, and she had enjoyed every moment of learning and playing. Through job hunting, few jobs or positions would actually let her continue playing for a living. She had in the end decided that she would skip job hunting and through part-time jobs earn what she needed, then spend the rest of her time playing where ever people would let her and try to make money teaching the instrument to others. As she told our common friend and me, her dream, I applauded her for her commitment and courage to follow her dream, causing our common friend to add with her own praise. Yume seemed confused and taken aback at first, but finally thanked us confessing that we were the first to openly support her and encourage her.

Many of the young Japanese I met and befriended during my fieldwork had chosen the same path as Yume, all for varying reasons. Some following dreams, others simply doing it to

avoid a nightmare of "overtime and stress". Even if looks can be deceiving, many of the *furitas* I met seemed to be the most content and happy, but an uncertainty hung over them and would from time to time surface in our conversations "I don't know if I will have money for that" might have been the most common expression of this uncertainty. As irregular workers many of them did not know how much they would work and thus how much they would make the coming month, making planning hard. In a longer perspective, those that did not have an as explicit dream as Yume, were unsure about the future, "I don't think I will be able to work at 4 different restaurants as a waiter the rest of my life" one confessed. In ways it seemed as if living as a *furita* was a form for delaying much as university was, to prolong the period of self-exploration, for many of them. When I asked what they would do in the future, few had any clear answers; only those with articulated dreams would tell me how they hoped they were "running my own restaurant", "living of my music", "designing cloths", "making videogames" etc. For those that had no clear dreams and where the main encouragement to work as a *furita* was to avoid working the type of job their parents had, seemed more resigned while talking about their future. "I guess I will end up getting a full-time job somewhere. Where I most likely will make less money, but have more overtime than if I just got a job during job hunting" a 27 year old working as a bartender and as a DJ told me. Later adding that "at least I got 5 more years of playing than many of my friends, and I guess I'll get at least 3 more".

In common for those that chose to skip job hunting was a wish to live and work in a way they did not believe they would be able to combine with the sort of positions for career track employment available through job hunting. Even those that believed that they in the future would have to conform back into a similar life style, but with less benefits than if they had done it through job hunting, justified it with "at least I got 5 more years of playing", or saying that "at least I tried to make something for myself". Among the people I met, few were old enough for me or themselves to judge if they had made it or not, but many seemed well off, some had opened their own restaurants, bars or shops with the experience many years of part-time jobs had earned them. Still, occasionally cases with people such as Hibiki that had succeeded by creating their own path would be encountered, and it seemed many knew and shared such stories, reproducing an "alternative Japanese dream".

The curious incident of Erai-kun

Among all the people I met during my field, one person had somewhat combined the two strategies. His name was Erai-kun, and I met him through one of his part-time jobs at a bar. He

was on his last year of his masters studies at one of Tokyo's top universities, but had chosen not to do job hunting, something many had trouble understanding saying that "you could have gotten any job you wanted". That was partly the point, as Erai-kun did not want any of the jobs available, and had even decided that working in Japan was not for him. He was working hard besides his studies to save up enough money for when he graduated, and the ultimate goal was moving to Europe or U.S.A to work. He had decided that no rock in Japan would ever get warm enough, and thus would work as a *furita* until he could land a job abroad. He figured and reasoned that instead of working three years or so at a job he did not like just too hopefully find a better job he would rather go abroad and find the type of "better job", walking around the rock. He did want to live in Japan, but he hoped that he could move back to Japan in the future and find a different and better Japan waiting for him.

As I spoke with the Mr. Nakamura working with recruitment and human resources in a large company he told me of a trend where many of the best students from the bets universities was either going abroad or straight into foreign companies. There was no numbers to point at, but he believed that as much as half of the best and brightest were lost for the Japanese companies during the recruiting period. Mr. Nakamura shook his head as he concluded "The system wants to and needs to change, but the best and brightest that could have caused the changes leaves Japan instead".

Concluding reflections: A matter of logic and the value of time

In the beginning of this thesis I posed the research questions "How is the transition from student to worker (adulthood) affected by traditional ideals and contemporary realities (generational gaps)" and "What strategies are used to renegotiate the traditional life course progression in their own favor?" In my opening chapter, I introduced the *Seijin Shiki,* the coming-of-age ceremony celebrating those that had reached the age of majority in Japan. Based on the conversations outside the ceremony and the interviews with Gen-chan and Natsui, it was however clear that none of these saw themselves as adults, rather as children or something between. Masayori out right saying, as many others, that he simple did not want to become an adult, but it turned out it was a matter of not wanting to become the same adult(s) their parents had become.

The way they conceived adulthood was hard enough by itself; on one hand, they expressed more objective markers/criteria like independence through work. To get there they needed to graduate, find a job, and during the same time move out. This way of conceiving adulthood was similar to the way social science often conceptualize and measure adulthood through the five markers. My informants putting most weight on the first three: having moved out, left school, started to work full time (Birkeland, 2013). The women added the final two, married/cohabited and had children, but this was expressed more as what defined a "full adult" rather than an adult, adding a "degree of adulthood" to the way of conceptualization. However, as the conversation with both Gen-chan and Natsui pointed out, there was a matter of self-management. Also as the men at the Seijin Shiki had spoken about a sense of responsibility. In this thesis, I have nonetheless focused on the process or aspect of getting financially independent as this was the most discussed and expressed aspect of adulthood in their day-to-day lives. Still, through the way they spoke of it and about it, the way they distanced themselves from the adulthood of their parents or the adulthood "learned" through school it seemed as the "inner them" was managing the outer, thus also being expressed through the thesis.

The generation gap was often expressed as a difference and a distance between them, as being young Japanese, and the older generation as their parents and grandparents. As Oji in the prolog and Hiroshi both illustrated, the focus in life had changed and the narrative was less a discussion and more an argument. Hiroshi illustrating it as if they spoke different languages and lived in different worlds. In addition, my informants expressed the gap through the differences in society, between how their parents lived and how they wanted to live, the reasoning behind life choices presented to them and the reasoning they had themselves.

So how was the transition from studying into working for my informants affected by traditional ideals and the contemporary realities? Moreover, in what sense did it lead to adulthood?

Takahashi was by the three criteria an adult, but he was less sure by himself if that was something he could identify himself as. Similar to Gen-chan he identified himself more as a *shakaijin* than an adult. The reasoning behind this expresses the generational gap, as he did not feel as if he met the personal criteria for being adult nor that his lifestyle was that of an adult. On the personal level, it was a matter of the adult ideal he himself had, of responsibility, self-management, knowing oneself. On the other hand, it was that of criteria and markers he felt that others expected in adults, the way of life he had experienced and observed through his parents, criteria he did not feel as if he really met. In other words, he did not feel as if he fitted the ideal adulthood he had been socialized into through family education and school education. Gen-chan was probably the most critical and outspoken on the matter, but they [my informants] all expressed how they had come to learn a certain way to act and behave, even to dress, through their upbringing and education. I see this as their understanding and conceptualization of the Japanese adult social order, and the picture they paint amongst themselves is not of a future they wish to take part in, to live by nor to raise children under. Through contemporary realities, as seen as their lives and the society they feel a part of, they had discovered alternatives that were more tempting than the life of their parents. The way these alternatives came to them varied between them, a common source was media in general, but what was similar for them was a wish to spend time differently.

The connotations and concepts of leisure, labor and love was presented as if different from that of their parents, of the way they were conceptualized at school and "enforced" by elders. The logic behind the "Japanese dream" of climbing the prestige ladder until full-time employment, preferably life-time employment, could be secured at a company with the same prestige as their university. As my informants presented it; this was, by the men, was done to be able to carry a family on a single paycheck, for the women it was a way to find a suitable husband that could provide financial security. However, for my informants getting a job was never presented as the means to marry and get children, but for some it was presented the other way around; marriage and parenthood was potential means to avoid work. Work was just something you "had to do" in order to be independent, but as long as you had to do it, they all wanted to find something "fun" and meaningful to work with. Work was not something they wanted to do for others, it was for themselves. Love was to find someone to share hobbies and

interest with, not someone to share their economy with. Leisure was, for some, the alpha and omega, Takahashi talking about the only way he would accept losing his "me-time" was if it changed into "us-time" with a women. As the value coupled with progression through life was altered, the logic behind decision-making had changed with it. As it was observed and presented, it seemed that the traditional ideals and norms stemming from the "other side" of the generational gap "lost" to the ideals of their contemporary realities. It does then seem as if the adult social order in Japan is experienced as something illegitimate, thus they are by breaking the pattern/the order discontinuing the reproduction needed to sustain the adult social order as it is. Through Masayori, Gen-chan, Natsui, Takahashi, Hibiki, Koemi, Ichi, Nichi, Sanchi, Erai-kun, Yume and the rest, we have been provided with examples of how the idealized path has been challenged as they seek to either carve out or manipulate forth new alternatives. I am tempted to call all of them "alternadults", as it seems it is not a matter of refusing adulthood as they are responsible for themselves and for those close to them, they are simply refusing to reproduce and re-live the lives of their parents and seniors.

I asked myself throughout my fieldwork and also in this thesis, why did they conform as much as they did with the normalized path if they did not want to follow it, and it seems as if the major effect the generational gap had on their lives was that society was not modelled after their "value" system. To be able to become "free" first from their parents, then from the stereotypical *salaryman* lifestyle they needed to follow the institutionalized path towards adulthood. Given there was other and easier alternatives, it is possible that the generational gap would not have had such a big effect on their life course.

In terms of the final part of my research question the strategies used seemed to be plentiful. Some of them seem confusing and risky not just from the outside but also from their own perspective. By either refusing to follow the path by living as a *furita* or to cheat and manipulate ones way through the job-hunting period in order to later seek out jobs in international or foreign companies were some of the most common shared by my informants. There was with no doubt a risk to live as a *furita*, potentially leading them to take a job similar to that which they tried to avoid, but with less pay and potentially longer hours. The risk was no less for those that follow job-hunting, as they could end up finding themselves unable to secure the preferable jobs and either have to live as a *furita* or go back to the sort of *salaryman* position they feared. Nevertheless, for those that succeeded as a *furita* as Hibiki and those that found better jobs through the "second graduation" like Ichi, Nichi and Sanchi, the reward was considered worth the risk. As the recruitment practices and the job-hunting season changes,

perhaps to meet the values of the Japanese youths of the coming generations, this thesis might seem redundant and foreign in the future, and I hope that it will rather do that than it ends up standing as an reminder of where "Japan" became divided.

This thesis has tackled a topic of great complexity by looking at it from my informants own viewpoint and narratives, and through that only barely painted a part of a bigger picture. I hope it at the very least has illustrated how my informants experienced and understood their progression in life towards becoming fully independent and responsible adults. As the pictures might have appeared dark, I have experienced them as bright and energetic. Despite a feeling of doom, of futility, my informants carried on to fulfill their dreams. As some of the elderly called the young for spoiled and weak, my impression was of something different. They did not ask for anyone else to fix their situations, not something I would imagine a spoiled person would abstain from, nor did they give up, as someone weak is believed to do. For me, those that dared to dream, dared to challenge the adult social order of the "past", risking much in the process, were not weak, but strong, determined and probably far more responsible for themselves and their future than they realized.

They wanted to spend time differently than those before them, and in many ways that became my final conclusion, as simple as it is. They told me this from the very beginning, despite this I spent a long time to arrive at the same conclusion. Time was to be spent with that which one enjoyed, things that mattered. If time was to be spent at something else it would have to be for a greater purpose, something that made sense. As mentioned, it seems as if this based in how logic behind key points in life had changed, concepts of love, labor and leisure as mentioned, but also of family, friendship, and perhaps self. The adult social order of Japan was built on concepts and symbols that no longer made sense in their contemporary realities, and as they started to choose the old "order" away, they have started to create a "new order" that might take its place. In the end, it might become a gradual change, the new values being taken up and the "re-produced order" of the future might encompass new ideas and more alternatives for every generation that comes of age. If the situation in Japan is a break, a matter of historic changes in society, or as Foner (1984) described as a matter of a normal life-course is still too early to say. This thesis has given insight and described the experience of multiple people on their road towards independence, both mentally and economically, this has been their conceptualization of self and society. The generation gap was real for my informants, and the strategies in order to negotiate forth alternatives expressed as a necessity.

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