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"The Generation Gap" and Its Implications

Young Employees in the Japanese Corporate World Today

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"The generation gap" has been an oft-discussed topic in Japan in recent decades. Popularly depicted generations of "strange" young people include the *taiyōzoku* of the 1950s, who were seen as abandoning the discipline of their elders to pursue their own hedonistic pleasures; the protesters against the US-Japan Security Treaty; the political and cultural radicals of the 1960s, reflecting the tumult of youth around the world in that decade; the *shinjinrui*, the "new breed" of the 1980s, who were accused of being so different from their elders as to be no longer "Japanese"; the *otaku*, technophiles swallowed up by the world of computers and other new media; and, more recently, the *kogyaru*, young women with artificial tans, platform shoes, and hair dyed bright blond, to the uncomprehending astonishment of their elders.[1] In 2000-2001, "17-year-olds" emerged as the new focus of attention, with a number of high-profile crimes attributed to youths of that age, leading to ubiquitous news coverage about the menace posed by today's teenagers.

Linked to these depictions has been a series of popular books decrying the young and their morals, values, work ethic, and intelligence. These books claim, for example, that "young people have lost the ability to use language properly" (Sakurai 1985), that "young people have lost their work ethic and are no longer serious about life" (Sengoku 1991), and that "young people, with undeveloped frontal lobes, no longer know how to relate to others" (Sawaguchi 2000). Recent newspaper and

magazine articles have continued these complaints, as can be seen from the following headlines: "Japan's lost generation: In a world filled with virtual reality, the country's youth can't deal with the real thing" (Murakami 2000); "Spoiled kids [are] reared on expectations, not values" (Kamiya 2000); "Teens [are] 'a generation of head cases'" (Hadfield 2001); and probably more true to reality, "17-year-olds: in adults, in society, they feel no hope" (*Asahi Shinbun* 2000).

Despite this popular outcry, "the generation gap" has not garnered much attention from anthropologists and other social scientists studying Japan, especially those based outside Japan.[2] This is perhaps because they have tended to see the ongoing Japanese generation gap not as a matter of history — youth as the potential vanguard of a Japanese social order in transformation — but rather as a matter of lifecourse: youth rebelling, and then, after a few years, conforming to the adult social order, just as their elders did before them. In considering the workplace, the key arena of the generation gap that is explored in this paper, Rohlen argued 30 years ago that:

> [W]hile generational differences are pronounced in contemporary Japan, we must doubt the underlying implication that each generation retains intact the philosophy, values, and life style it expresses when first entering the adult world. At least at Uedagin [the bank at which he conducted research] it seems that as men pass deeper into adult responsibility, their attitudes about the bank merge with those of preceding generations. (1974:209)

More recently, Gordon (2000) has recalled that when he first went to Japan in the 1960s, he was told that "younger workers are... individualistic.... The old loyalty is disappearing." But these younger workers became the elders of today, against which today's youngsters are rebelling, and about whom the same criticisms are today sometimes made. "*Plus ça change, plus c'est la meme chose* (the more things change, the more they stay the same)," he wrote.

For the period that they discuss, these scholars seem accurate in their views. It has often been noted (for example,

Kotani 1998:98) how the student radicals of the 1960s became the work-obsessed "corporate warriors" of later decades. Indeed, what these commentators say of the young of the 1960s seems to have been more or less true for all male Japanese of the younger generations of the postwar era, up until recently: they have entered the adult world of work and have become like their elders in most respects.[3] Today, however, this may no longer be the case. In this paper, I suggest that today's new employees may truly represent something new under the sun: a historical transformation in the cultural reproduction of Japan. Unlike new employees of previous decades, who had little choice but to conform to the Japanese corporate order and were themselves more or less transformed accordingly, these young people have been granted the leeway to not conform to a corporate order that is crumbling. They are a generation that has replayed the Japanese lifecourse drama of young against old that has taken place with regularity over the past 50 years; but unlike those earlier generations, this younger generation may also have caught the cusp of history in being, largely unwittingly, the vanguard of social change in Japan. Before proceeding to this argument, however, let me discuss in a more fundamental sense "the generation gap" in Japan and its anthropological significance.

"The Generation Gap" in Japan and What It Means

Japan is, of course, hardly the only society to have made much of the idea of a "generation gap." The upheaval of youth around the world in the 1960s drew extensive media attention in dozens of societies. Scores of books were written about the phenomenon, among them Mead's *Culture and Commitment*. In this book, Mead argued that, in today's new world, it is the young who show the outmoded old how to live:

> Even very recently, the elders could say: "You know, I have been young and *you* have never been old." But today's young people can reply: "You have never been young in the world I

> am young in, and you never can be."... The freeing of... [human] imagination from the past depends... on the development of a new kind of communication with those who are most deeply involved with the future — the young.... It depends on the direct participation of those who, up to now, have not had access to power and whose nature those in power cannot fully imagine. (1970:63, 93-94)

These stirring words have somewhat faded, along with the 1960s belief in a worldwide youth revolution; but today, too, "the generation gap" remains a lively topic. In the United States, dozens of books have been published over the past decade on "generation X" and "generation Y" and their values,[4] and on "how to bridge the gap in attitudes between baby-boomers and generation X in the workplace."[5]

Thus, the attention paid to the generation gap in Japan does not seem to be particularly out of the ordinary. What does seem unusual, however, is the distinctly critical tone towards the young that this attention generally takes in Japan. In discussions in American, European, and other Asian societies of "the generation gap" that I have read, the tone is often neutral or even positive towards the young, particularly in relation to their mastery of new technology such as the internet.[6] In Japan, however, books and articles on "the generation gap" typically focus on the inadequacies of the young, often taking an almost apocalyptic tone. Overwhelmingly, young people in Japan are depicted negatively by the mass media. What is the reason for this?

A number of factors contribute to the negative way young people are presented in the media. The age-linked basis of academic and mass-media authority in Japan (on average, Japanese writers on "the generation gap" tend to be older than their Western counterparts), and the extraordinary pace at which Japanese society has changed over the past 60 years, from militarism to pacifism and from utter poverty to unimaginable wealth. As one Japanese university student said wryly to me, "It's like my grandparents came from another planet." But the key factor, I argue, is the nature of the Japanese social order in

postwar Japan, and the potential difficulties in the cultural reproduction of that order.

The most influential theorist of social and cultural reproduction in recent years has undoubtedly been Pierre Bourdieu, in his writings on education and, more broadly, on the concept of *habitus*. Through the workings of *habitus*, the taken-for-granted subjectivities of individual minds and the objectivities of the social world continually reproduce one another (Bourdieu 1977). The symbolic violence of "pedagogic action" — diffuse education, family education, institutional education — infuse individual minds with their society's *habitus*. This leads the young to eventually recreate the society that has created them (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990), in what would seem to be an all-but-inescapable closed loop (Jenkins 1992:82).

Clearly Bourdieu's theorizing has considerable truth in relation to Japan, as shown through recurrent patterns of Japanese social organization that many analysts have explored. Nakane, in her classic book (1970), discussed the continuity between Japanese patterns of social organization in the Tokugawa period and the corporate structures of companies in postwar Japan. More recently, Steinhoff (1992) showed how the most rabidly anti-establishment student activists of the early 1970s unwittingly created radical organizations that in their social processes mirrored Japanese companies. These examples show how, in a prototypically Bourdieuan sense, subjective consciousness and objective social structure mirror one another over Japanese time and space, as subjects, whatever their conscious intent, recreate common, recognizably "Japanese" patterns of social organization. However, in other aspects of social life — specifically, the individual's relation to the group — the Japanese creation/recreation of social order may involve not the unwitting playing out of *habitus*, but a considerable degree of volition: there is a calculation that individuals may explicitly or implicitly make as to whether or not to participate in the mainstream adult Japanese social order.

Many scholars have discussed how, at different stages of childhood and youth, young Japanese have been socialized to

reproduce this social order both within and beyond the family.[7] A comprehensive view of this process has been provided by Rohlen in an article published in 1989, "Order in Japanese Society." Rohlen wrote of the efforts of adults at various stages in the life of a young person to mould him/her to fit *shūdan seikatsu* (group living). As Rohlen discussed, this moulding takes place from preschool and kindergarten up through to company employment, and entails recreating through discipline and training a familial-like attachment to social groups beyond the family. "The amount of time and money and emotional effort devoted to establishing and maintaining [these]... attachments is monumental in Japan" (1989:31). However, as Rohlen noted, such attachment may not "stick."

The problems of young people so ubiquitously discussed in the Japanese mass media today — the problem of *gakkyū hōkai* (the collapse of classroom discipline, see Kobayashi 2001); the practice by teenage girls of *enjo kōsai* ("compensated dating," whereby schoolgirls receive money for going out with older men); juvenile delinquency among boys (see Ayukawa 2001); the young who become *futōkō* (children who refuse to go to school) and later *hikikomori* (young people who become "shut-ins," never leaving their rooms for years on end, see Shiokura 1999; Kyūtoku 2001); the young adults who become *furiitaa*, choosing not to take regular "adult" jobs upon graduation from school (see Dame-ren 1999), or *parasaito shinguru* (young people who live at home with their parents into their 30s, refusing to get married, see M. Yamada 1999) — all represent, in a sense, rejections of the Japanese adult social order. This, I argue, is the key underlying dynamic of the Japanese concern over "the generation gap": it represents the gap between the guardians of Japanese social order, on the one hand, and the "unsocialized" young on the other. For the parents, teachers, and employers in the former group, the young may seem like aliens threatening to destroy the social order that they have spent their lives building and maintaining. For some of the youth in the latter group, their elders may appear to be trying to socialize them to fit a rigid Japanese adult world that does not seem to be worth entering.

Of course, the above statement may to some extent apply to "generation gaps" throughout the world today. Elders in most societies probably complain that the young lack the capability to reproduce the society that they themselves have made, while the young declare their elders obsolete, unable to comprehend the world today. This is the eternal war of youth versus age.[8] But I argue that there is something especially interesting about the Japanese "generation gap" today. This is that it arises from an adult social order that is particularly demanding in its socialization of the young, but that has recently lost considerable credibility in the eyes of the young. "The generation gap" may be more or less universal today, but Japan offers a particularly fascinating venue in which to investigate it.

All of the different social arenas in which "the generation gap" is played out in Japan — family, school, and workplace — are worthy of extended analysis. In this paper, I focus only upon the last of these.[9] Based on 52 two-hour interviews conducted in Tokyo in 1999-2000 with young people in their early 20s employed at various companies and organizations, and also, where possible, with their corporate elders,[10] I explore in this paper how new employees perceive and interact with their organizational elders and how their elders perceive and interact with them. This is a limited arena for investigation, in that these young people, unlike most of those mentioned in the preceding paragraph, have successfully negotiated their passage through the education system into adult full-time employment. Thus, they are, by definition, well-socialized entrants into the adult Japanese world.[11] However, these young people, too, keenly felt the existence of a "generation gap" between themselves and their corporate elders — a gap that may, at this historical juncture, be of considerable importance. How can we understand Japanese organizations as a locus for training the young to become adult *shakaijin* (full members of society) in an era when those organizations have lost credibility?

Perhaps we can best begin to explore these questions by analysing the generation gap of a slightly earlier era, representing, from the standpoint of today, an altogether different Japanese world.

"The Generation Gap" in the Recent Past and Present

Before the economic downturn of the 1990s, many Japanese salarymen were vociferous about "the generation gap" in their workplaces, just as they are now. To take only one example, a bank section chief in his late 40s, interviewed in 1989, said this:

> Young people in this bank seem to feel that they're being made to work, rather than working because they want to. It wasn't like that before. I get angry at the young workers here. I get angry at them so that they can grow. I tell them that if I stop getting angry, it'll mean that I've given up on them!... Among our young employees... the sense of oneness with the company is fading. Young people seem to feel that the company is only where they earn money; once they're away, they don't want to think about it. My generation was different. We were always thinking about work; that's all we ever thought about. That sense of oneness with the company is essential! We must create that sense of oneness!... We have to educate young workers to become hardworking employees who will be useful for the bank. (Mathews 1996:58, 61-62)

His subordinate, a man in his mid-20s, had a different take on the bank:

> The section chief says that until we've worked in the bank for three years, we aren't adults; until we've learned our work, we're still children. The bank wants to play the role of our parents, but it's none of their business!... I feel that I made a terrible mistake entering this bank — I really hate my work — I hate to think I'll be working for this bank all my life. But since I can't escape it, I guess I'll have to master this work, somehow. Who knows, maybe I will eventually come to live for the bank.... Middle-aged people in this bank say that they'll sacrifice their private lives for this work, but nobody my age would ever say that! The other day I read in the newspaper that the Japanese economy may decline in a few years because young people today won't work as hard in the future as those who are now in middle age. Maybe so....[12]

These words clearly illustrate "the generation gap" in terms of the maintenance of Japanese social order. The senior bank employee emphasizes the crucial importance of training young people to feel one with the bank, while lamenting that so few young feel this oneness. His subordinate resists this training, emphasizing that the bank is not his parent. He repeats newspaper reports saying that the young may, in their laziness, destroy Japan's prosperity;[13] but he also indicates that he too, like his elder, might come eventually to live wholly for the bank.

However, something previously unimaginable has happened since these interviews took place. In 1997 the bank that employed these men went bankrupt and was shut down, an event that sent shock waves throughout corporate Japan. This bank went out of business not because of the fecklessness of the young, but because of the incompetence of their elders in extending loans during the bubble economy that, once the bubble had burst, could not be repaid. The corporate social order into which the senior section chief quoted above sought to socialize his junior was thus itself shown to be inadequate.

This is true not only for this bank, of course, but for the Japanese corporate order as a whole. In 2000, a corporate employee in his 50s explained to me what went wrong in the 1990s:

> The problem was that we worked too hard and generated too much money that had to be ploughed back into the system, into stocks and land, creating "the bubble economy".... If only Japanese hadn't worked so hard, maybe the economic downturn would never have happened.

This man's economic theorizing may or may not be valid, but his words clearly represent a rejection of the earlier ethos of his generation. The problem of the Japanese economy, he told us, is not that young people *have not* lived for work and company, but rather that older people *have* lived for work and company. The older generation of Japanese workers, those now in their 40s and 50s, has suffered a great loss of confidence over the last decade during which Japan has been in the economic doldrums. Many young people, and not a few of their elders as well, now feel that, in its mores, the Japanese corporation is a thing of the past,

increasingly irrelevant in a very different present. The corporate social order has itself been called into question.

"The generation gap" in Japanese corporations today is crucially linked to corporate employment policy. If — and it is a big "if" — Japanese companies are indeed shifting from lifetime employment to contractual employment, and from seniority-based pay to performance-based pay, then the generational balance of power in these companies will also fundamentally shift.[14] To the extent that this is taking place, the corporate young are no longer powerless, and the corporate elderly are no longer all-powerful.

Over the past few years, the Japanese mass media have been loudly proclaiming the demise of lifetime employment and the end of seniority-based pay, in an emerging new era in which elite workers can easily lose their jobs, and in which pay and promotion will be based on ability. Books proclaim "the collapse of the salaryman system" (Utsumi 1999), exhort that "you don't need to be afraid of being judged by your ability!" (Imakita 1999) and advise that "you should live for yourself rather than for your company!" (Y. Yamada 1999) Newspaper and magazine articles discuss with bemusement this strange new era in which "the company doesn't love all its employees but only those who get good results" (Katagiri 2001), consider "how you should behave when your boss is younger than you" (Satō 2000), worry about how workers can find satisfaction in their jobs (Suzuki 1999), and ask whether young people will ever be able to find secure employment (*Asahi Shinbun* 1999b). Underlying this discussion in the mass media is the assumption that the principles governing Japanese companies in recent decades are finished, as Japan enters a harsh new era of globalization and global competition.

There are grounds for scepticism over the extent to which this transformation is in fact taking place. Despite what many Japanese and Western popular writers have asserted, there was never a homogenous Japanese employment system based on lifetime employment and seniority-based pay. Only a minority of workers — male, white-collar elites in large companies —

ever obtained "lifetime employment." In Japanese companies 30 years ago, many young people quit during their first three years of employment (Clark 1987:167-79), just as they do now, as many newspapers have worryingly reported of late (*Asahi Shinbun* 1999a).[15] Pay and promotion 30 years ago were based to some extent on merit as well as age (Rohlen 1974:142-43), just as, it is claimed, is beginning to happen now. On the other hand, even today, laying off career-track workers remains illegal for large companies in Japan — although requesting their "voluntary" resignations is allowed — and seniority remains the primary basis upon which the salaries of career-track workers are determined in almost all large companies. In assessing how much Japanese employment practices are in fact being transformed, Holzhausen writes that "although the seniority rule is further losing its influence on promotion and wage decisions... the core of the Japanese employment system, i.e., the long-term development of human capital *inside* the firm, is not yet subject to change" (2000:221).

However, the mass media reports proclaiming change have not emerged from their authors' imaginations alone. Changes are indeed taking place, if not necessarily to the extent that mass media may claim.[16] If corporate practices are not yet fundamentally altered, the attitudes of young employees do indeed seem to be changing. This can be seen to some extent statistically (as in the various surveys reported in Nitto and Shiozaki 2001), but more dramatically in interviews. The young bank employee from 1990 quoted earlier (among a number of others interviewed) assumed as a matter of course that he would remain at the bank; but none of the young employees we interviewed ten years later made the assumption that they would remain with their current company all of their working lives. A few had already changed companies. Some said that they would learn what they could from their current company and then leave, with no qualms, when the time was right. Others expressed a desire to remain with their company as long as they could, but knew that, given Japan's economic situation, their jobs might not last. Those in the former two groups felt the

generation gap much more strongly than those in the latter group; but all felt that the rules of the corporate game in Japan had changed, a change that they could ignore only at their own peril.

A young man who worked for a distribution company spent his workdays taking orders and delivering greetings to dozens of small store owners. He noted that:

> I have to work from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. everyday, driving around the Tokyo area, visiting our customers. If customers could make their contracts by telephone or by e-mail, there would be no need for me to work these long hours; there would be no need for companies like this one to exist. But that's not the way things are done in Japan: the face-to-face human relationship with customers is essential.... But in the future, who knows? I like working for this company; but if our company disappears, I could probably go to work for a foreign manufacturing company that wants to distribute its goods in Japan.

This man realizes that his customers desire the face-to-face interaction he and his colleagues bring in their daily business rounds. But he also realizes that this is inefficient, and contributes to the high price of his merchandise. In an age of relentless globalization, this system may not last long. Although he himself accepts his company's practices — he said that he feels no generation gap and does not chafe at such old-style "Japaneseness" — he realizes that in a more ruthless business environment in Japan, his company may become obsolete, and thus he must be ready to take his skills elsewhere.

Those who worked in communications, mass media, and high-tech companies were less tolerant of what they saw as their companies' old-style practices, and expressed much more willingness to leave. A recently hired software engineer working for a large telecommunications company said:

> I'll definitely quit this company within a couple of years. I didn't have any particular interest in this company when I entered it. I just wanted to use it. While getting paid, I'm learning all I can about internet technology; then I'll go somewhere else.... The employment system here has changed to accommodate younger people like me. Now we don't lose our benefits when we quit, but can transfer them to other companies. This is what this company has to do if it wants to keep capable workers for a while. It's what it has to do if it's going to survive.

A young woman working for a design company discussed what happens when a company needing capable young workers is not so flexible:

> The really able younger people here all quit... leaving those old managers who have no idea what we need to do to make the company better. The able young people that remain have more and more work to do, and so they too eventually quit.... I'll be leaving within two years, I'm certain.

Because her company is bankrolled by a parent company with deep pockets, it has remained in business. But for how much longer, she asked. How much longer can the company survive if it continues to shed its able young employees, while keeping only its older incompetent employees?

The people we interviewed often linked such complaints to the great difference between young and old in using computers and the internet. Over and over, young people spoke with disdain of their elders' inability to understand computers. A young man working for a publishing company told how the president of the company insisted that all of its computers be bought used rather than new; each morning, the dozen people in his section waited their turn to get their e-mail on the section's one aged computer terminal. A young woman newly hired at an NGO serving some 13,000 teachers and social workers said that the organization lacked even a single computer through which to communicate with its members ("We're supposed to get computers soon, they say, but the date hasn't been decided yet"). The fact that company elders could not use computers, and had no understanding of how computers could be used to make the company more efficient was, these young people insisted, emblematic of just how rigid, old-fashioned and out-of-touch their companies were.[17]

For some companies, this lack of computer knowledge among corporate elders was merely inconvenient. For other companies, however, this was a problem threatening their very survival. Another young worker at the large telecommunications firm said:

> This company's future depends on the internet.... But people over 45 or 50 in this company don't know how to use the internet. They know that they're not doing their share; they know they're a burden.... An executive here made a speech to the new employees recently. He said, "Because we older people don't understand the internet, all we can do is ask you young people to work hard.... If we older people were all to quit, this company would become much better off." All of us who were listening thought, "So why don't you quit?" But of course we couldn't say that.

These words indicate a recognition that, at least within this company, the real work is done by the young.[18] The elders who in an earlier era had imparted to the young their corporate wisdom are now, it seems, useless but well-paid onlookers. But while this state of affairs may be widely recognized today, the balance of power remains as before, with seniors more powerful than juniors. After all, no new employee ventured to say out loud to the senior executive what many were apparently thinking.

The structures of most Japanese companies today very much continue to favour age over youth. However, in order to survive, many Japanese companies now need the new ideas and expertise in information technology that apparently only the youth possess. Given this contradiction, how is "the generation gap" negotiated within Japanese companies?

"The Generation Gap," Social Negotiation, and Social Control

Most of the young people we interviewed complained about the inefficiency of the companies they worked for, and chafed at

how old-fashioned and hidebound those companies seemed. In one new employee's words, "I really worry that I'll lose the sense of how strange this company is — that I'll start thinking that these ways of doing things are common sense!"[19] However, almost as a rule, no new employee ever spoke up within these organizations. "Until you've worked for the company for three years, you have no right to say anything. All you can do is obey," I was told. New employees often complained among themselves after hours, I was told; beyond this, if the situation seemed sufficiently unsatisfactory, the new employee could quit. But it was out of the question to actually voice one's complaints within the company.

These new employees did have power, the power to quit: a power that was considerable, especially in smaller and less prestigious companies. But this power did not extend to speaking up within the company. Even when they were asked by their superiors why they were leaving, none of the young people we interviewed who had quit their companies spoke openly, but only offered unthreatening and untruthful responses, they said (a point also made in *Asahi Shinbun* 1999a).

Despite the fact that young employees felt that they could never state their opinions to their superiors, they nonetheless linguistically negotiated their relation to their superiors. There are numerous Japanese books advising young workers "how to use proper language in the company." "At work, you won't be allowed to talk with your co-workers in the same way that you spoke with your classmates in college," one book states. "Toward your boss, your customers, and all the people you deal with as a member of your company... you must think very carefully as to exactly how you should speak" (Suzuki 1991:20). You must use *keigo* (respect language) in the proper way and, while not necessarily wholly suppressing your own opinion, nonetheless always remember your very junior place in the hierarchy, the book teaches. Many of the people we interviewed did indeed think carefully about how to speak, particularly in terms of how to balance their own sense of autonomy with the need to express appropriate respect to their seniors.

To take just one example, a young woman who worked for a non-profit social welfare organization said this:

> Japanese organizations are too formal. In language usage, the rank of people in the organization is always expressed, and this really affects human relations. If this practice were changed, younger people like me could begin to express their opinions.... When I first began to work here, I called my seniors, for example, "Shimizu-san" [Mr/Ms Shimizu] instead of "Shimizu-sensei" [Teacher Shimizu], as the other people here did. I didn't think I should have to lower myself before them; I just wanted to speak in an ordinary way. But I was told, "You'd better not speak that way. Once you know the history and principles of this organization, you won't be able to be so fearless [*kowaimono o shirazu de wa irarenai*]." Now I alternate usage: when there's just the two of us, I'll use "-san," but in meetings where other people are present, I'll use "-sensei" [teacher] or "-kaichō" [chairperson] or "-buchō" [section head].... I've just begun this work. From these elders' perspective, I'm no more than a child. They might think they can't depend on me. So, within group situations, I'd really better not use "-san"; I'll use it only in private.

This woman — more independent in her thinking than many of her co-workers — nonetheless adjusts her use of language to fit her organization. She told me that a complete refusal to call her superiors "-sensei" would probably have little tangible effect on her advancement in the organization, but might make human relations more difficult. Thus, she decided to conform in public by addressing her older colleagues in terms indicating subordination to them, while expressing her own sense of equality with her seniors in her more private conversations with them.

A similar balance was sought by young employees at the large telecommunications company, but their resistance was more overtly subversive. One young man spoke to me of the "voice training" (a term he used in English) that he had received in his initial months in the company. This training was largely concerned with how he should deal with customers (as he said, "like a typical Tokyo University graduate, I had great deal of

self-respect, but I've had to learn to apologize to customers, even if the problem wasn't my responsibility"). However, it also, at least implicitly, involved teaching him how to speak to his superiors in the company. He has learned this lesson: "In formal situations, of course I'll use respect language to my superiors. Of course I'll speak very, very carefully." But he also has learned an alternative lesson:

> Younger people in this company, in daily interactions, often don't call their bosses by their formal title. They might say, in response to an older person's question about computers, "*Ossan, nan dakara,*" or "*Ossan da naa!*" ["You're acting just like an old guy, aren't you!"] The older people say, "Please don't say that!"

Young people like this man may pay obeisance to their corporate elders through their formal speech, but in their informal speech invert the status hierarchy. They thus indicate their lack of respect for their elders, and perhaps sour the obeisance of their formal speech. As this young man said, "These older people don't have the flexibility to catch up with the new technology. All they can do is hold on to company loyalty" — a loyalty that he himself seemed to feel very little respect for.[20]

I could not arrange a meeting with any older employee at this telecommunications company. Thus, I understand this generation gap only through the comments of the younger employees. However, in speaking with older employees at other companies, I heard complaints about younger employees similar to those I had heard ten years earlier: (1) young employees were not devoted to their companies as much as their elders had been, and (2) "young employees don't have common sense.... They don't know anything about human relations, about how to deal with people in the company" — they do not grant their seniors sufficient respect.

When I reported such comments to a young employee at a publishing company, he commented as follows:

> Between young people and old people in the company, it's like a kick-boxer fighting a judo wrestler.... The older people

> criticize the young for their lack of ability to speak respectfully to them. The younger people criticize the old for their technological ignorance. So there's not much communication.

A recent Japanese book proffering advice to young people makes a similar point, although drawing a different implication from it:

> Today, because of advances in... technology, experience has no role to play. The reason why today is "an age of suffering for the middle-aged and older" is because they can't catch up with the new technology.... Still, there are lots of things that older company workers can teach young people.... Seniors in the company are seniors not just in work but in life. (Akiniwa 1998:85-86)

But does this life experience of elders hold any meaning in today's world of work? Many of the young employees we interviewed claimed not, and thus did not feel the respect for their elders that this book advises them to feel.

Within the company, the consequences for those young people who fail to show full verbal respect to their elders and superiors were not generally clear to the people we interviewed. The exact procedures through which promotion is attained are often not fully known to most people within Japanese companies: promotion is based on a combination of age and ability (including test scores) and is decided in a closely guarded way by the personnel department, something as true today in many companies as it was 30 years ago (see Clark 1987:112-25). In this situation, with formal rules for corporate advancement not fully known, informal social control may take on great power, particularly in terms of one's "reputation." I interviewed a woman in her late 20s who told me how devastated she had been to find out that her colleagues had once regarded her as *namaiki* (stuck-up: expressing one's own views too clearly, without showing proper respect for others, particularly one's seniors):[21]

> I was told by a colleague when we went drinking, years after I'd entered this company, that in my first year here I'd had a reputation for being *namaiki*. I was shocked: I'd never known that; I couldn't believe it.... I was depressed for quite a while after that.

Being thought *namaiki* had had, apparently, no effect on this woman's career path, from what she told me; and the fact that she had not had any idea at the time that some of her colleagues had a less-than-flattering view of her reveals the lack of immediate social power of such an opinion. Nonetheless, she was devastated in retrospect by that opinion. Since this woman planned to remain at her company for years to come, any hint of being less than positively regarded by others in the company, any hint of not fully fitting in, was terrifying to her.

Other young people we interviewed claimed to feel no such fear. The woman working for a welfare organization who refused to consistently address her seniors by their honorific titles said this:

> Maybe people in this organization think I'm *namaiki*, but I don't care. If they think I'm *namaiki*, maybe they're a little jealous. They too have things they want to say about this organization, but because they're afraid, they can't say them.

Perhaps being thought of as *namaiki* is a form of social control whose power this woman yet to learn, but will, to her future regret. But perhaps not: this woman had no plans to stay with her organization for more than a few years. In this sense, the fear of being thought *namaiki* had little hold over her, since for her the organization was a temporary stopping place rather than a long-term home. To the extent that one's company or organization is felt to be one's long-term home, "reputation" may be a matter of great concern. But if one is not fundamentally committed to one's company or organization, and feels prepared to leave it, then one's "reputation" becomes less important: the web of informal social norms that is central to Japanese organizational control may thus lose much of its constraining power. The young employees we interviewed generally felt little commitment to the companies and organizations that employed them. Whether they will develop such commitment in the years

to come, as their generational elders did, or whether they will remain uncommitted, given the changed economic climate of today's Japan, very much remains to be seen.

"The Generation Gap" and Other Gaps in the Japanese Organization

"The generation gap" is only one of several "gaps" in the Japanese organization: it is linked to the gender gap and the nationality gap and, indeed, cannot be fully understood apart from these other gaps. The centre of power in the Japanese organization is occupied by Japanese male elders: the young, the female, and the foreign do not, in common, belong to this group, and may sometimes share a common resistance to it.

In recent years, the power structure of Japanese companies has been opening up to some extent. Japanese companies such as Softbank and Sony are allowing talented young people to leapfrog into positions of great responsibility. Some women in Japanese companies today, no longer barred from the executive track, enjoy new opportunities for advancement. Japanese companies such as Nissan and Mazda, because of their merger with foreign companies, now have foreign chief executives. Change is afoot; nonetheless, as of the time of this writing, it remains fair to say that the young, the female, and the foreign generally remain outsiders at the corporate gates, and older men remain the defenders and watchdogs at those gates. Of course, the structural positions and prospects of the young, the female, and the foreign differ: some of the male young may eventually inherit leadership of their companies, as the female and foreign probably will not. However, at least for the time being, what the members of these three groups have in common is that they are outsiders.

Japanese commentators (for example, Miyadai 1998:142) have written of how the generation gap is really a gender gap. Some of the young women we interviewed felt this strongly. In the words of one woman: "Lots of young men think about gender relations very much as my father's generation did.... But

none of the young women I know think that way."[22] In terms of the company, the most disaffected views were those of young "office ladies" on the "non-career path,"[23] who were expected to remain with their companies for a limited period only, and who often had little reason not to feel detached from the company that employed them. A non-career-track woman who worked for a finance company was scathing in her scorn for her male corporate elders: "Many of the men who are senior to me here... really have no common sense at all.... They lack a basic foundation as human beings." She attributes this to the fact that they were hired in the 1980s, during the "bubble years" of the Japanese economy, when "companies hired anybody, even those without any ability." Today, because of lifetime employment, they are entrenched above her, to her frustration.

She let her irritation show in numerous subtle ways, she told me, such as working much less diligently, but within the bounds of acceptable behaviour, for men whom she felt lacked that "basic foundation as human beings." Ogasawara, in her insightful ethnography of Japanese company life, analysed the acts of resistance of "office ladies" to their male bosses in considerable detail (1998:114-38). These included "not taking the initiative," "declining to do favours," "refusing to work" overtime, and "telling tales to the personnel department." She sees this resistance as due to the fact that "office ladies" can leave the company; while men, expected to support their families, cannot. "Office ladies," like the young as a whole, may remain corporate outsiders, comparatively powerless but also comparatively free.

I interviewed a young woman in 1990 and again in 2000 who illustrates the transformation that may take place as one moves from being an "outsider" to "insider" in the company. In 1990, this woman was incensed by the fact that despite her high scores on the company examination, the company refused to place her on the career track. In response to this, she made a conspicuous ritual of leaving the company precisely at 5:30 p.m. everyday, in front of her bemused male colleagues and fellow female workers. This was an ironic ritual of resistance, in that

she was simply following the formal rule, although definitely not the informal norm, stating that non-career-track workers could go home at 5:30 p.m. By 2000, this woman had entered the career track, and had been promoted several times, and now worked until late most evenings. The company, for all the faults she saw in it, had become *her* company, not merely a place where she worked, as she had seen it in 1990, and she now harshly criticized the new generation of young who threatened to destroy it: "Today's new employees weren't raised to think for themselves; all they know how to do is wait for instructions!... [The company] can't survive if people like them ever become in charge!" As this woman has grown older and more successful in the corporation, she has become, albeit still somewhat ambivalently, a defender of the corporation against the incursions of the young.

As the above example shows us, the young, both male and now female, enjoy at least the possibility of becoming "symbolic older men" in the company. Foreigners remain less likely to become part of the company core in most Japanese companies.[24] In this sense they may be likely to retain an ongoing alliance with the young, by virtue of their common outsider status. A young European man, working in Japan for five years, said this:

> Every Japanese young person I know says that the company he or she works for is old-fashioned; all the foreigners I've met who work in Japanese companies are frustrated, as a rule.... Foreigners and Japanese young people are allies in the companies I've worked for. The foreigners can do things that the young Japanese workers would like to do but can't. They often tell the foreigners that they support them, but that they themselves can't oppose their bosses because they're Japanese, and with lifetime employment and all, they're in no position to oppose.

The young foreigners tend to be more frustrated than the young Japanese, he said, in that the latter could more easily adjust themselves to Japanese corporate ways. But by the same token, the foreigners could behave in ways that Japanese young could not, and could thereby directly subvert the company's

order. Most often, he said, this took place when foreigners refused to stay overtime when there was no real work to be done, but simply left — breeding both resentment and envy among the young Japanese who, given corporate norms, had no choice but to remain.[25] But this also happened in other areas: for example, once again, computers:

> For at least five years in my company, we'd been using the same computers: it took years to send e-mail. But the young Japanese employees wouldn't bring up the subject to the boss. I don't use the computer much myself at work; but when a new girl, a foreigner, came in, she immediately went to the boss and said, "Look, I can't do my work on this computer. I need better e-mail; I need internet." She showed him her computer, and the boss was amazed. He said, "I didn't realize how bad our computer systems were. Why didn't anyone tell me this before?" Within a week, we had completely new computer equipment.

The young Japanese employees did not speak up because they were junior subordinates, and felt that they should keep quiet, given the hierarchical nature of the organization. They also kept quiet because of the positive valuation the Japanese put on *gaman* (perseverance), whereby one endures a difficult situation rather than complaining. This situation required a foreigner, unversed in the norms of Japanese company life, to be so culturally insensitive as to complain to the boss. We may conjecture that this foreigner served both to reduce company harmony and also to increase company efficiency: something that, from a Japanese standpoint, may not be a worthy trade-off. And we may conjecture that the young Japanese employees were hesitating between what they may have seen as hidebound Japanese corporate norms on the one hand, and insensitive foreign insouciance on the other. In this case, their behaviour indicated loyalty to the old order, although their sympathies may perhaps have lain elsewhere.

This tension in values is particularly acute for young Japanese who have obtained university degrees abroad and then returned to Japan to enter the Japanese corporate fold, as

described by Mori (1994). He quoted a corporate personnel manager as follows:

> The main problem with *ryūgakusei* [in this context, students educated in universities overseas] is that they lose their Japanese identity. They lose their Japanese social and cultural norms and begin to question and violate the foundation of management.... Japanese management is based on Japanese culture, so if he/she does not share the culture, he/she cannot be controlled by the Japanese management system. (1994:103)

That a mere four years overseas should be seen as sufficient to cause young Japanese to lose their Japanese identity and become uncontrollable by the corporation attests to the fragility of that corporate order, and the rules and norms that hold it together.[26] In the general absence of many formal rules, informal norms, based in common understanding, are what bind the Japanese corporation together, but these norms can operate effectively only if all members of the corporation share them. *Ryūgakusei* may not share them, and this is why they have been perceived as such a threat to the Japanese corporation.

In recent years, however, a sea change in attitude has been taking place, with *ryūgakusei* regarded by some not as problems but as solutions for the woes of the Japanese corporate world. Mori quotes two of "the new wave" of Japanese personnel managers as follows:

> The macro economic situation has forced Japanese corporate personnel managers to change their image of Japanese... *ryūgakusei* from dropouts to new candidates for international business. (1994:143)

> Corporate managers expect *ryūgakusei* to function as agents of organizational change. Many corporate executives express the hope that *ryūgakusei* can stimulate Japanese university graduates, who tend to be conformist, and much less creative. (1994:147)

By 2000, this trend has very much expanded, according to many of the people we interviewed. *Ryūgakusei* are now often

seen as more readily employable than graduates of elite Japanese universities, because of their knowledge of English and computers, and also because of their individualistic and free-thinking ways, I was told by a mid-level corporate manager. Some of the people we interviewed said that Japanese university students were becoming more and more like *ryūgakusei* in their individualism: the line between the two categories was blurring. One middle-aged manager bluntly proclaimed that, "Today's young people are so individualistic: they don't behave like Japanese anymore, but like foreigners." Others — such as the manager of a *ryūgaku* preparatory school — insisted to me that the Japanese educational system and its stringent examination system so thoroughly destroyed all creativity and initiative in young people that the only hope for Japan was rely on its young people who go overseas to study. But virtually everyone we interviewed, of whatever age, agreed that the Japanese corporate system that had existed over the past 40 years, based, purportedly, on lifetime employment, and on the individual's long-term moral commitment to the company and willingness to subordinate self to company, was on its way out.

As earlier noted, I am more sceptical than the people we interviewed as to whether the Japanese corporate order really is changing. If the Japanese economy recovers in the next few years, then their current dismissal of the Japanese corporate order may be forgotten. Nonetheless, the legitimacy of that order does seem to have been fundamentally shaken. Ten, 20, and 30 years ago, Japanese corporations and organizations had their fierce critics; but because of the phenomenal success of the Japanese economy, the Japanese corporate order did seem fundamentally legitimate to most Japanese. Today, this seems increasingly to be no longer the case. The "unJapanese" barbarians at the gates — the improperly socialized young who may not pay proper deference to the company that employs them, along with their female, foreign or foreignized allies — are increasingly seen by at least some Japanese not as threats to the Japanese social order, but as potential saviours of that order.

Conclusion: The Corporate "Generation Gap" and Its Implications

I have argued in this paper that "the generation gap" has long existed in postwar Japanese perceptions, because of the stringent requirements of the adult social order and the adult fear that young people may not reproduce that social order; but that this order is today being challenged — at least to a degree. This is particularly true in Japanese corporations during an era of economic downturn. I have argued that "the generation gap" in the Japanese workplace of decades past was a matter of lifecourse, a process by which young employees learned to conform to and believe in company norms, just as did young employees of earlier eras; but today it may perhaps be a matter of history. Elite young employees today may represent not simply the callowness of youth versus the maturity of age, but more: Japanese corporate capitalism's future versus its outmoded past.

We have seen evidence in this paper of a shifting balance of power between the young and the old in the corporation. This shift is manifested in the apparent willingness of computer-savvy young people to abandon their companies to what they see as their incompetent elders, in terms of young people's negotiation of levels of speech, allowing them room to informally mock their elders to their faces, and in terms of the subtle complicity of the young, the female, and the foreign against the realm of "symbolic older men." This shift is not taking place through any organized resistance on the part of the young. The elite young people whose voices we have heard in this paper intend no revolution; rather, they are only seeking to strategically shape their own careers within a newly expanding field of possibilities, a field created by the ongoing structural shifts in a Japanese economic order facing relentless globalization. But they may be both responding to and in turn helping to shape a revolution in which Japanese organizational norms of the past four decades are transformed.

This is not necessarily something to be celebrated. From the perspective of the young, the organizational wisdom of their elders may appear not as wisdom but as obsolescence. However, from the perspective of the elders, this attitude of the young may threaten the ethos of teamwork and group loyalty that have characterized Japanese companies since the older generation rebuilt Japan from ashes to affluence. To the extent that the young do not come to accept the implicit assumptions of their elders as to the norms of the organization, organizational harmony is lost, and indeed, "Japaneseness" itself may be seen as threatened or abandoned.[27] In the recent past, the young did not have the power to contest these norms, but today, to some extent, they do. If they cannot easily contest these norms within the workplace, they can walk away and work elsewhere; and because they, unlike their elders, may have full comprehension of computers and the internet, their companies must do everything possible to keep them. This may lead in the future to more efficient but less harmonious Japanese corporations, in which the group ethos of an earlier era gives way, at least to some extent, to an ethos of "looking out for number one."[28]

All of this is linked to the erosion of lifetime employment as the standard practice of elite Japanese companies. The elite young can afford to show disrespect within the organizations that, at least for the time being, they belong to; and their elders have lost faith in the organizations they once thought would sustain them. An older employee we interviewed ruefully conveyed his newfound cynicism:

> Living for the group in Japan has always been emphasized: living for one's company... and never thinking about yourself. In return,... the company would take care of you. But, today, that's no longer the case. The person who works with all his might to sustain his company might, in return, only get fired.

If lifetime employment gives way, then the ethos of living for one's company may come to seem hollow, even ridiculous.

Near the start of this paper, I discussed Rohlen's *shūdan seikatsu* (group living) as the goal of Japanese processes of socialization. Through Japanese social and cultural reproduction,

each new generation of young has been trained, to some degree, to sacrifice the self to the group: to be transformed, stage by stage, from selfish children to unselfish adults. In fact, "groupism" in Japan should not be exaggerated. There have long been voices in Japan proclaiming that one should live not for one's group but for oneself (Yamazaki 1994; Mathews 1996:12-26), and a significant minority of Japanese, those who have made their lives outside mainstream institutions, have done that. However, in terms of the training of the young, *shūdan seikatsu* has been the dominant goal of socialization, one that continues into the present. The young may resist this training, a resistance that, as we earlier saw, is one of the roots of the Japanese "generation gap"; but their resistance has been largely futile, given the overwhelming power and legitimacy of the mainstream Japanese adult social order. However, if lifetime employment gives way, then a pillar of that adult social order comes crashing down, and *shūdan seikatsu* is shown to be, in this realm anyway, a lie. In the corporate world, surrendering self to group increasingly seems to be merely a route to betrayal and to failure; while not surrendering self to group is the path to success, or at least, to survival. (As the business consultant Ohmae Ken'ichi has recently said, "We have no loyal army of company men in Japan anymore.... Those who know how to swim are trying to jump off the boat" [*The Economist* 1999:16].) It is the young, those who have been least socialized in Japanese corporate ways, who are seen to be in the most advantageous position to be able to survive in this new world.

It is ironic, however, that the elite young people whose voices we have heard in this paper have thus far in their lives been extremely well-socialized by the Japanese adult social order. They are not the societal delinquents and dropouts at various stages of youth mentioned near the start of this paper. They are, for the most part, graduates of highly reputed universities who have gone to work for highly reputed companies. These are the young people for whom the training into *shūdan seikatsu* should presumably have been most effective, and upon whose shoulders the task of reproducing the Japanese adult social order

should have fallen. Instead, within the corporate realm, they are increasingly being asked not to adapt to the old order but to help create a new one. Rhetorically anyway, if not yet in actual fact, "the struggle between generations" is over, and they have won. But having been well-trained by the old order, do they have the cultural adaptability to help to create a new order? Their elders, of the Meiji Restoration and the aftermath of World War II had such adaptability and creativity. Whether they do too will be seen in the decades to come.

Of course, it is possible that none of this will come to pass. It is possible that the older corporate Japan, buoyed by an economic revival and a revival of Japanese confidence, will eventually prevail once more: that corporate *shūdan seikatsu* will indeed return, in all its earlier success. (It is also possible that Japan, unable to change, will simply continue indefinitely in its downward economic spiral.) But the evidence, with each passing month, points toward the ever-greater necessity for fundamental transformation in Japanese corporations and in the structure of Japanese capitalism, a transformation that younger employees must lead. If any of the leaders of the Japanese corporate world are readers of anthropology, one suspects that they are praying that Margaret Mead was right.

Notes

1. See Sakurai (1996) and Kotani (1998) for profiles of recent Japanese "generation gaps."
2. But see, as exceptions, the brief discussions of Sugimoto (1997:64-73), Kelly (1993:197-203), and Henshall (1999:116-21).
3. This statement applies to men more than to women, given the gender-role division that has characterized Japan in recent decades, of men devoting themselves to work, and women quitting full-time work upon marriage or the birth of their first child, to devote themselves primarily to their family. This division does seem, at least to a small extent, to be eroding today.

4. See, among the best-known of these books, Howe and Strauss (1993) and Holtz (1995).

5. See, for example, Muchnick (1996).

6. See Tapscott (1998) and *The Economist* (2000) for discussions of how the technologically adept young in the United States and throughout the world may lead their ignorant elders into a glorious new information age, thanks to their mastery of the internet.

7. See, to cite just a few of many examples, Caudill and Weinstein (1986) on the caring of infants, Hendry (1986) and Ben-Ari (1997) on preschool socialization, Rohlen (1983) on secondary school socialization, McVeigh (1997) on college socialization, and Rohlen (1974) and Dore and Sako (1998) on corporate socialization.

8. The ongoing struggle between comparatively powerless youth and their powerful elders in traditional societies was well described by Foner (1984). It is a struggle that modernity has by no means overturned, she maintains.

9. I chose the workplace over family and school as a site for investigating "the generation gap" in this paper because (1) the workplace, more than family and perhaps school, is the area of Japanese adult social life most under challenge today, due to Japan's economic downturn; and (2) in the workplace, more than in school and in the family, young people have a degree of power in relation to their elders, and thus can negotiate "the generation gap," as those who are younger and more at the mercy of their elders perhaps cannot.

10. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed into Japanese. The extensive quotations throughout the remainder of this paper are translations from passages in these interview transcripts. The interviews were conducted as part of a project on the meaning of "the generation gap" in Japan today.

11. The majority of the young people I interviewed for this paper were university graduates. In this sense, there is a middle-class bias. "The generation gap" is generally portrayed as a middle-class phenomenon: one sees little media discussion in Japan of working-class youth and the gap they feel with their elders, although that "generation gap" exists, too, judging from my interviews with working-class young people. The media outpouring about "the generation gap" in Japan in recent decades may represent, in part, worries about social class: the fears of middle-class elders that their rebellious or lackadaisical offspring will sink from their middle-class status into the depths of the working class below. (I thank Lynne Nakano for making this point to me.)

12. This quotation is from the unpublished transcript of a 1990 interview.

13. See Sengoku (1991) for a similar book-length claim.

14. It is impossible to know the extent to which companies and organizations are in fact turning away from lifetime employment in Japan. Because abandoning this policy remains shameful in the Japanese context, accurate statistics concerning lifetime employment and its abandonment cannot be found. However, it does seem certain that lifetime employment as a system is eroding in Japan today; and that if the Japanese economy continues its downturn, this erosion will only accelerate: "Big companies [in Japan] are thought to be holding on to 2 million-4 million people in-house who are employed for life but have no real job to do" (*The Economist* 1999:14). One measure of changing corporate attitudes is provided by a Ministry of Labour survey showing that in 1990, 27 per cent of Japanese companies claimed to emphasize the importance of lifetime employment (*shūshin koyō o jūshi suru*), while in 1999, less than 10 per cent did. In 1990, 36 per cent of companies claimed not to emphasize the importance of lifetime employment (*shūshin koyō ni kodawaranai*), whereas by 1999, this figure had grown to 45 per cent (Suzuki 1999). What the no-doubt deliberately vague wording of this survey does not indicate, however, is the degree to which lifetime employment is or is not actually being abandoned by these companies.

15. It is ironic that at the same time that full-time employment has become more difficult for young people to find, they are voluntarily quitting their full-time jobs with somewhat greater frequency than in the recent past (but see note 16 below).

There is great concern in Japan today over the *"furiitaa"* phenomenon: young people who choose not to enter full-time employment, but to work at part-time temporary jobs instead (Hagi and Ihara 2000). I interviewed a number of such *"furiitaa,"* but because they were generally able to tell me little about "the generation gap" within established companies, I have not included their comments here.

16. To take up one topic of mass media consternation partially unsupported by facts, in late 1999, Japanese newspapers (see, for example, *Asahi Shinbun* 1999a) published many stories about the "753 phenomenon": the fact that some 70 per cent of middle-school graduates, 50 per cent of high-school graduates, and 30 per cent of college graduates were quitting their career-track jobs within three years of assuming them. These stories generally neglected to mention that these numbers have grown only by a few percentage points since 1989. These stories also do not explore what may be the changing composition of those who quit. More than in past decades, those who leave their companies today may be a particularly able and elite group, drawn to more challenging work environments than their companies can provide. Their less-able co-workers, afraid of being unemployed in Japan's current dismal economic conditions, are apparently not quitting, but remaining. This, in any case, is what I was told over and over again by the young employees I interviewed.

17. It is a contemporary universal that older people tend to know less about how to use computers than their juniors. However, this problem seems particularly acute in Japan. Why elders in Japan should be so computerphobic is unclear, but one reason may be that in computer operating systems in Japan, English (as written in the Japanese phonetic script *katakana*) is dominant, and many older people may be baffled before such terms as *"purinto"* (print) and *"kurikku"* (click). Beyond this, while the computer keyboard is familiar to any Western typewriter user, it may seem wholly foreign to older Japanese, even if they use *kana* (Japanese script) rather than *romaji* (Roman letters) to input their messages. See Chang (2000) as to "why Japan and China don't take kindly to PCs."

18. The most pivotal work in the company was done, I was told, by employees in their late 20s or early 30s — those who were experienced enough to know how the company worked, but young enough to understand the internet, and not so immersed in the corporate culture to have become "stiff" and "inflexible."

19. Miyamoto's celebrated account (1994) of his failure to adapt to the Japanese bureaucratic world parallels this informant's view of the danger that the seemingly bizarre collective "common sense" of Japanese organizations will gradually and unwittingly become one's own "common sense." But this, of course, is only one side of the equation. From the standpoint of the organization, outsiders such as these may be selfishly refusing to acquire organizational "common sense"; they are morally deficient in their lack of comprehension of the norms of their group.

20. Levels of speech and forms of address have been negotiated in Japanese companies for decades. Rohlen noted how in the bank he studied in the late 1960s, the official bank policy was for workers to address one another as "-san" regardless of age and rank (1974:27), although this policy was apparently not much followed in actuality, and by no means lessened consciousness in the bank of rank. Today, some companies have adopted similar policies in an effort to create greater equality, which foreign publications claim are a new reform (*The Economist* 1999:13). And yet, despite this evidence that "the more things change, the more they stay the same," the degree of insouciance shown by the young toward the old in this example seems remarkable, even when taking into account the possibility of exaggeration on the part of my informant.

21. The term *namaiki* is partially gender-specific, with young female employees more likely to be denigrated as *namaiki* than young male employees: hardly surprising, given the subservient roles that many older male employees still expect them to play. Discussions about being thought *namaiki* arose far more frequently in interviews with young female employees than with young male employees.

22. Iwao (1993:17-18) makes a similar argument, claiming that Japanese women in recent decades have changed more rapidly than have their male counterparts: that young men have followed their fathers' paths more readily than young women have followed their mothers' paths in life. However, some recent surveys of young woman's attitude toward work and marriage (Sugihara 2000) challenge this view.

23. Japanese women entering companies were once automatically relegated to the *ippanshoku* (non-career) track, but today may enter the *sōgōshoku* (career) track, giving them opportunities for advancement indistinguishable, at least in theory, from those of men. It is to women on the former track that the label "office lady" is given.

24. The majority of foreigners working in Japan at present are blue-collar labourers from Asian or Latin American countries. I refer here not to them, but to the privileged minority of white-collar foreign workers, largely European or American in background. My statement about these foreigners as "outsiders" does not, of course, hold true for foreigners who work for foreign companies in Japan, or for Japanese companies that have been merged with foreign companies such as Nissan and Mazda. It does hold true for Japanese companies that young foreigners may work for on a contractual white-collar basis.

25. Henshall's comment supports my informant's view: "Many westerners who have worked in Japanese companies are of the view that the workload itself is not usually that great. Rather, it is a question of simply being there, putting in the hours... and always being at the company's beck and call" (1999:125).

26. These *ryūgakusei* were seen as threats to the Japanese corporate order not only because they had left Japan for four formative years, but also because they had circumvented the ordeal of Japanese university entrance examinations. In this sense, they were viewed by many of their corporate elders as "cheaters" for opting out of a key ritual of Japanese socialization into adulthood. I thank Mori Shunta for this insight.

27. Some Japanese scholars claim that the erosion of lifetime employment signifies the erosion of "Japaneseness" itself, as signifying the values of harmony and group cooperation. Arai wrote that "there are no Japanese people today who would claim that this Japanese system [of lifetime employment] does not have problems.... But the lifetime system is suited to the Japanese people" (1997:137-38, 183). Lifetime employment is fundamentally linked to "Japanese culture," he claims. Opposed to this view, a young employee I interviewed said: "'Japaneseness' is nostalgia.... We've entered an age of global standards, when there's no need for 'Japaneseness' anymore." Because Japanese management practices such as lifetime employment have been key in defining "Japaneseness" for many Japanese in recent decades, the abandonment of these practices is and will continue to be a matter of great cultural difficulty in Japan. If they are discarded, then what, indeed, is "Japaneseness"? Of course, from an anthropological perspective, Japanese culture clearly remains: the broad structurings of culture described by Lebra (1976) and Smith (1983) are probably as true today as they ever were. But cultural identity is more fragile and volatile. If lifetime employment and other aspects of Japanese management give way, then where is "Japaneseness" — Japanese people's own sense of what it means to be Japanese — to be found?

28. This shift in corporate ethos also took place in the United States. Whyte's celebrated book *The Organization Man* (1957) described the group ethos of American corporate employees of the 1950s, an ethos that had wholly vanished by the time the children of these men reached adulthood and middle age in the 1980s (Leinberger and Tucker 1991). In Japan, because of the ongoing cultural emphasis given to this group ethos, and the intensity of the training given to the young to fit them into this ethos, the potential corporate shift toward "looking out for number one" may be much more culturally wrenching than it was in the United States.

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"The Generation Gap" and Its Implications

Young Employees in the Japanese Corporate World Today

Abstract

The Japanese mass media have long emphasized conflict between young people and the adult social order, but today in the Japanese corporate world the "generation gap" takes on particular importance. The young elite are empowered vis-à-vis their elders, as was not the case in earlier decades, because of the loss of legitimacy of the Japanese corporate order, the erosion of lifetime employment, and the growing importance of computer expertise. In this paper, I examine how new employees perceive and are negotiating their positions vis-à-vis their corporate elders. The shifting generational balance of power, reflecting global economic shifts and the Japanese economic downturn, may be helping to transform Japanese corporate practices and perhaps Japanese life.

「代溝」及其涵義
日本企業世界的年青員工

Gordon Mathews

（中文摘要）

對於年青一輩與成年人社會秩序之間的衝突，日本媒體一向都重視。在目前的日本企業世界中，代溝問題更形嚴重，主因在於傳統的企業秩序已失去合法性、終身聘用制面臨崩潰、電腦專業技能則愈來愈受重視，年青的精英因此比長輩同僚擁有更大權力，情況與以前大相徑庭。本文探討新進員工怎樣看待長輩同僚，以及如何理解和調整自己的位置。不同輩份之間的權力關係變化，除反映全球經濟轉型及日本經濟下滑外，亦可能提供機會，令日本的企業運作及生活模式得以更新。