

The Early Career Development of High School Graduates

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Special Topic

The Early Career Development of High-school Graduates

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1. Introduction

For over 20 years more than 90 percent of junior high school graduates in Japan have gone on to complete senior high school. The result is that a high school education is now seen as a necessity by most Japanese. High-school graduates have several choices. Over the past 20 years, around 40 percent of all high-school graduates have found employment and about 35 percent have advanced to institutions of higher learning. The number of those attending the special training schools (which were brought into an unified system in 1976) has grown steadily. However, the absolute number of high school graduates has been declining and the economy has slowed down in the 1990s. As a result, only 24 percent of graduates entered employment in 1996, while the percentage of advancing to an institution of higher learning rose.

Meanwhile, the average rate of joblessness among young persons aged between 15 and 24 rose to a record high of 6.6 percent in 1996. Japan's public sector and large private enterprises employ new school leavers each April. These employers are in close contact with secondary schools, and school teacher counsellors and the Public Employment Security Offices have come to

play a key role in the labor market for new graduates. School leavers were able to obtain the most tenurable job through this labor market which sets the date for commencing employment in early April. Given the smooth function of that labor market, the national unemployment rate among new graduates has traditionally been low by international standards. Accordingly, the high unemployment rate among young people in recent years might suggest that changes are beginning to occur in this labor market. On the one hand, many observers have pointed to the changing consciousness of the young generation. The increase in the number of young employees who voluntarily leave their employer might be mentioned in this regard. At the same time, with more of the population obtaining higher levels of education, high-school graduates are finding it increasingly difficult to find good jobs at Japan's more stable enterprises which offer the better working conditions.

In order to probe changes in the work behavior and consciousness of young employees toward work as well as the changing labor market for their skills, a group at the Japan Institute of Labour has been observing the processes through which choices are

made in selecting work and the way in which their thinking about work develops in a number of specific periods starting in high school. A follow-up survey on their initial careers provided an overview of how school guidance and working conditions they got after graduation influence their selection of career course and how their working attitude develop. A questionnaire was administered to about 2,000 10th grade students in high-school in 1985 in six regions. The regions were selected nationwide by taking into account characteristics of the job market. Questionnaires were sent to the 2,000 participants six times in 1985 (in their 10th grade at high school), in 1986 (in their 11th grade), in 1987 (in their 12th grade and final year at high school), in 1988 (the first year after graduation), in 1990 (the third year after graduation) and in 1993 (the sixth year after graduation).

Based on the responses to these questionnaire surveys, we will zero in on those graduates with only a high school diploma who found employment, in order to consider the process by which their careers developed and their attitudes toward work evolved.

2. Differentiated Careers: Looking at the Time of Employment, Employment Status, and Job Separations

Of 962 respondents to the survey in 1993 (the

sixth year after graduation), 614 had high-school diplomas or had dropped out of a post-secondary institution. Ninety percent of the 614 found jobs immediately after graduation in March 1988; of the remaining graduates 8.5 percent had found work by November 1993 and are called "mid-career (*chūto shūgyōsha*)."

The mid-career entrants included entrants who switched from being *rōnin* (high school graduates who continue to study for university entrance exams after failing to gain entry to a suitable university upon graduation) and those who left college or a special training school midway through their course of study. Many found their employers through personal connections, and 35 percent were employed on a part-time or a temporary basis by small and medium-sized companies with employed fewer than 100 employees. This group contrasted to that of the graduates who took employment immediately upon graduating from high school. Nearly all in the latter group were hired through their school's offices as regular employees. One third found employment in the public sector or in large companies. Many of those who did not become employed upon graduation had taken the general course (*futsūka*) at their high school. With male graduates from a general course alone, approximately 30 percent of male graduates were mid-career entrants.

Table 1: The Early Work Experience of High School Graduates Following Graduation By Course of Study and Gender

Employment Type		Regular with Single Employer	Regular with Experience of Job Separation	Experienced Casual Employment	Late Entrants in the Labor Force	Other	Totals	N
All Students	total	40.7	31.6	17.8	8.5	1.5	100.0	614
	males	45.8	27.4	13.0	11.3	2.4	100.0	292
	females	36.0	35.4	22.0	5.9	0.6	100.0	322
General Course	total	31.9	25.7	16.8	24.8	0.9	100.0	113
	males	32.7	20.4	14.3	30.6	2.0	100.0	49
	females	31.3	29.7	18.8	20.3	0.0	100.0	64
Commercial Course	total	39.9	33.5	21.7	4.6	0.4	100.0	281
	males	42.9	23.8	20.6	12.7	0.0	100.0	63
	females	39.0	36.2	22.0	2.3	0.5	100.0	218
Industrial Course	total	50.0	31.2	10.2	5.4	3.2	100.0	186
	males	50.6	30.6	10.0	5.6	3.3	100.0	180
Home Economics	females	25.5	38.2	29.4	2.9	2.9	100.0	34

Note: Yardstick (1)= Time the first job was taken(until April of Graduation year–after May of graduation year–other. unknown)

Yardstick (2)="Those entering employment as new high-school graduates" who experienced non-regular employment(yes–no)

Yardstick (3)="Those new high-school graduates experiencing regular employment only" who once left work(continue first job–quit first job)

The Government statistics have not allowed for an accurate estimate of how many graduates gained mid-career employment. They did not reveal how many persons dropped out of school, the number who found work in a given period after graduation, or the number who gained employment after graduating from special training schools. Perhaps it is time for us to have an appropriate means of knowing about trends of young people making the transition from school to work.

Among those who found employment upon graduation (mostly as regular employees) over time a growing number were ending up in non-regular employment as part-timers, temporaries or dispatched workers. At the time the sixth survey was administered, 20 percent had experienced non-regular employees. Furthermore, 53 percent of those in that group had left their employer at least once, and only 41 percent were regular employees and had stayed on at the same company for the full six years following graduation.

The above findings are summerized in Table 1. Below we will examine each of the career paths in more detail and consider the relation between each career path and the development of each student's consciousness regarding work.

3. The Employment Situation Six Years After Graduation

Of the 614 high-school educated persons, 541 (88.1 percent) had worked at the time when the sixth survey was conducted. By gender, 96.2 percent of the 292 males and 80.7 percent of the 322 females had jobs. Among the males, 86.5 percent were regular employees; 5.3 percent were part-timers and temporaries; and 7.8 percent self-employed or family workers. Among the females, 88.1 percent were employed on a regular basis; 8.5 percent were

employed on a part-time or a temporary basis; and only 1.9 percent were self-employed or family workers.

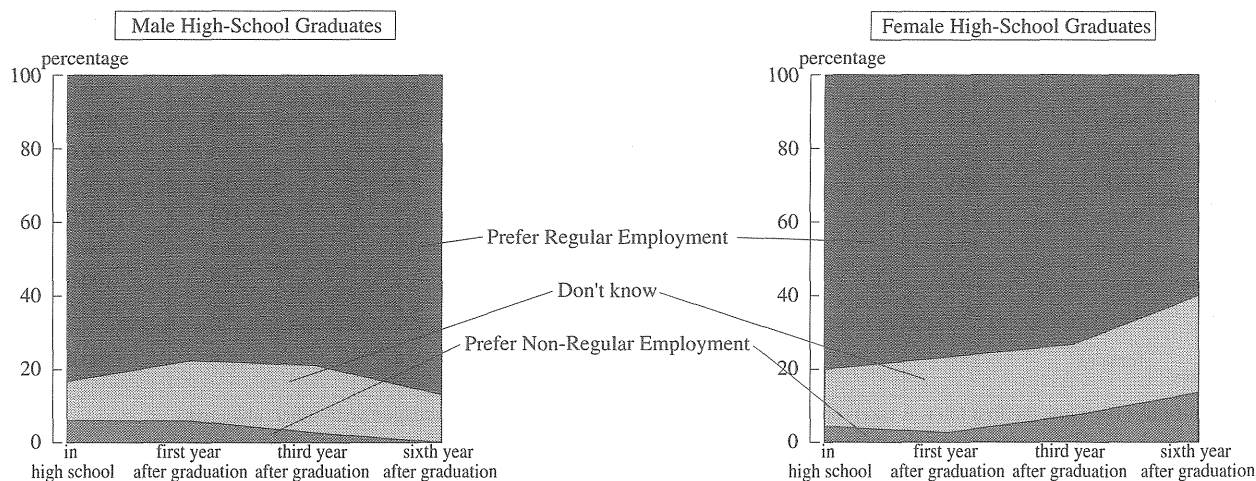
Among the males who had remained as regular employees at the same company, there was a large number of blue- or white-collar workers who were employed by large companies and the public sector. One third of the females who were regular employees with a single employer were in white-collar jobs and worked at large companies or in the public sector.

When asked about the number of years necessary to do their present jobs as a full-fledged worker, the largest number of males said from three to five years and the largest number of females said from one to three years. Many males and females replied that they were fairly well qualified to do their work. However, a good number of males also indicated that they were still training.

As for the experience necessary to do the jobs, over three years was required for "high-skilled jobs" and under three years for "low-skilled jobs." Respondents were also asked to indicate whether they recognized themselves as full-fledged workers. Both male and female regular employees with a single employer were in high-skilled jobs and most perceived themselves as full-fledged workers. Many regular male employees who had experienced job separation and non-regular male employees were training for "high-skilled jobs." It is thus likely that many males were nevertheless trying to acquire certain high skills. For females, however, the picture was not so encouraging. Excepting regular employees with a single employers only about 30 percent of females had found jobs that required over three years of experience. They seemed to have had difficulty acquiring skills.

A good number of the males felt they were "full-fledged workers in high-skilled jobs" after three or four

Figure 1: The Preference for Regular and Non-Regular Employment



years of continuous employment with the same employer but after five years the number decreased. Seventy percent of the females came to consider themselves as “full-fledged workers in low-skilled jobs” after three or four years. However, after four or five years with the same employer, a number of the women found themselves in high-skilled jobs, with more sophisticated contents. It seems that there may be a job change after 3-5 years in most companies, and young employees can challenge new or more skilled jobs. The data from this survey points to the importance of staying at the same company in the first six years after graduation.

4. Changes in the Attitudes Toward Work

It is generally told that people's attitudes toward work begin to form while they are in high school and will evolve as they enter employment and accumulate on-the-job experience after graduation. The survey showed that young persons have no clear awareness of employment and careers while in school. Most students wanted to have a regular job and to stay employed at a single company. The survey put to each respondent six questions regarding views of work. The questions were framed in the same fashion in repeated rounds of the survey beginning in the high school years. Below attention is focused on the responses to these questions as they relate to the importance of career and employment.

(1) Between 10 and 20 percent of males and females felt that persons did not need to stick to a regular job (Figure 1). This was true both for high school graduates and for those with higher educational qualifications. Over time, increasing numbers of female graduates did not feel a need to stick to a regular job while the number of males wanting to have a regular job increased. When we trace each one's response through the survey period, more of the men found that their attitude toward work changed. Furthermore, the changing tendency was that many did not stick to a regular job – they experienced non-regular jobs and were once engaged in sales and service jobs at smaller-scale companies.

(2) In response to a question about whether they prefer to work for a company or for themselves, many respondents indicated a preference to work for the company. However, over time a growing number of males was gradually wanting to work for themselves. A look at each respondent's views over time shows that male views of work tended to change after graduation. Many of those who come to want to be independent had gone to special training schools or were those who avoided regular employment upon graduation. Many were gray-collar or blue-collar workers at small or

medium-sized companies.

(3) Asked whether they want to work only for “the same company” or for “more than one company”, the largest number of students answered that they consider it best to work for a single company. However, after they graduated, many changed their thinking, and very few continued to feel they wanted to work only for the one company. Many males who attended special training schools, and took non-regular employment or changed jobs, and many male gray-collar or blue-collar workers in small or medium-sized companies prefer to work for more than one company.

The rising unemployment rate among young persons and the changing consciousness which has accompanied that are reflected in the results to this survey. The report on the survey surmised that the preference for a non-regular job and secure employment germinated in the minds of students while they were still in high school, and was reinforced as they gradually acquired working experience. This pattern was particularly pronounced among men.

Those with this consciousness were particularly numerous in sales and the service industries, and in the smaller companies. Many of these types of employees added to their skill base by changing jobs or by working independently rather than staying with the same company for extended periods of time. One could say that workers were readjusting their expectations for work in order to bring them into line with the realities they were actually experiencing at work. It is quite natural that this thought process would occur mainly outside the normal progression from school to stable long-term employment with a single employer. The research supported the notion that the attitudes towards work held by Japan's youth were shaped to a considerable degree by their life experiences at work and depended upon the opportunities in front of them at any given time.

The views which students have about employment and careers was underdeveloped and remained rather stereotyped while they were in high school. However, once they had graduated, their stereotypes were changed by the environment they experienced after graduation. Many of the graduates who stayed as “continuous regular employees with a single employer” upon graduation found such employment in large companies through the placement service of the career guidance offices at their schools. Many of those who took this path held their views of preferring regular jobs and continued to work for a single company throughout the period studied. On the other hand, those who entered the job market without the intervention of their schools, switched jobs and/or worked at casual jobs acquired more varied work experience and sought

careers which seemed to offer greater opportunity. A similar conclusion could be drawn on which higher education one goes to, many for the other participants in this study: (1) the males who graduated from college and found white-collar employment at Japan's largest companies, (2) the male and female graduates from the special post-secondary training schools who entered small and medium-sized companies, and (3) the few female college graduates who found regular tenured positions. Their views of work and career evolved according to the situation they found at their places of work.

As for the graduates who found employment right out of high school, the sharp drop in the number of positions for high-school graduates is declining sharply. Moreover, the number of positions at large enterprises is also declining. In response to these changes in the labor market, Japan's high school graduates are likely to look harder at their job prospects. More will be changing jobs. The study also underlines the importance of having institutions to help high-school graduates make smooth and stable "career transitions" once they are in the labor market. As society seems increasingly to reward those with more education and higher levels of skill, further discussion will be necessary in society as a whole to enable young people to function smoothly as adult members of society.

【Reference】

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