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Japanese Salarymen: On the Way to Extinction?

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I. Introduction

Lifelong employment has been an integral aspect to the Japanese lifestyle since the 1950s. However, due to new attitudes among young Japanese that emerged post-war, this tradition is gradually changing. More members of the younger generations are deciding on other career paths that express creativity or individuality instead of the life of a typical "salaryman" or "office lady." The modernization of Japan that occurred during the 1870s has affected post-war Japan in the late 1980s. After 1955, the younger generations of Japan participated in what some scholars, such as Kawasaki, call soft individualism (1994, p. 196). This soft individualism has gradually given way to expressionalism in the 2000s, resulting in a more materialistic, less group-oriented Japan. In addition, Japanese women are contributing to the shift from traditional Japanese work practices. Many women wish to be more independent, and in order to achieve this, they feel as if they must emulate Western practices or lifestyles, where lifelong employment is not as common. This paper will exemplify the reasons why opinions among contemporary Japanese have changed. It will further clarify why the Japanese culture has turned to consumerism and consequently is beginning to reject the rigid routine of the salaryman or office lady. To illustrate this social transformation of Japan, I have surveyed twenty-seven Japanese students that reside within the vicinity of Tokyo concerning their opinions about lifelong employment and their own futures. In addition to this, I will explain my own observances while studying abroad in Japan in 2009. Due to a shift in cultural values from the 1980s to the present, as well as a series of economic recessions, the Japanese salaryman, and the tradition of lifelong employment in general, may be on the road to gradual extinction.

II. Literature Review

Lifelong employment is unusual in most countries, but in Japan, it has been commonplace and was even expected at firms during the latter half of the twentieth century. The practice of hiring employees for life became prominent in Japan during the 1970s after it was established during the 1950s as a negotiation between workers and their administration (Wolff, 2008, p. 63). Along with "seniority-based wages and enterprise unions", the title of salaryman is regarded "as one of the 'three sacred treasures' in Japanese industrial relations" (Wolff, 2008, p. 56). A salaryman, or *sarariman*, is the term used to refer to white-collar company employees that earn salaries "based on individual abilities rather than on seniority" (Robertson, 2005, p. 131). Their unyielding loyalty is a result of the "three sacred treasures" and consequently, salarymen are known for working long hours at the office, sometimes up to sixty hours per week (Shibata, 2007, p. 3). There is not much time for family if one becomes a salaryman. It is thought that the amount of time spent at the workplace correlates to the perceived efficiency of

the employee. Many salarymen even work themselves to death, known as *karoshi,* or become depressed to the point where they commit suicide.   Suicide rates are a problem among the Japanese because of the amount of stress work induces. While studying abroad in Japan during spring of 2009, I experienced many delayed trains due to Japanese salarymen leaping in front of them. Other cases include death by "subarachnoidal hemorrhage, heart failure, cerebral haemorrhage or myocardial infarction" (Palumbo, 1994). The life of a salaryman is arduous and depressing, but they toil on for the benefit of the entire corporation.

Lifelong employment, according to Sullivan, is "the practice whereby large Japanese firms hire many of their employees directly from high school or university, employees who are expected to stay with the firm or its subsidiary companies until at least the time of normal retirement between 55 and 60 years of age" (1991, p. 79, as cited by Woronoff and Billesbach). Wolff claims that lifelong employment in Japan is not a law, as it "never forms part of any explicit contractual promise… [It] is an 'unwritten… guarantee', a 'social norm', or a 'moral imperative'" (2008, p. 56). In return for their adamant loyalty, the company nearly refuses to fire any of its workers unless it is in the "direst set of circumstances" (Sullivan, 1991, p. 79). Lifelong employment is beneficial to corporations because it provides dedicated, steady, previously trained and highly skilled employees (Sullivan, 1991, p. 80).

One of the models used to provide explanation for the Japanese tradition of lifelong employment is social unity. The Japanese are known for strictly adhering to their cultural norms of solidarity. Borovoy states that the ideal Japanese society is one that is "cohesive, protective, and secure, rather than one in which the individual can freely exercise the right to be different" (2008, p. 552). Standing out and expressing oneself is looked down upon; loyalty to the larger group as a whole is paramount in Japanese culture. One should not upset the balance of relationships if one can help it. These cultural norms perpetuate an environment conducive to lifelong employment.

Escaping from the strict cultural patterns of Japanese solidarity can be very difficult. However, a closer examination of Japanese youth during the 1980s to the 2000s shows that some have broken free from these social expectations. Many young Japanese are abandoning the cultural traditions of conformity and cohesion in exchange for a type of individualism or expressionism. As "advanced mass consumer societies progress", Kawasaki asserts, "expressionism adopts more superficial standards" (1994, p. 196). As early as 1955, the younger generations of Japan began participating in a phenomenon called "soft individualism" (Kawasaki, 1994, p. 196).   Soft individualism is less connected

"with the inner or intrinsic self" or with the genuine expression of one's personality (Kawasaki, 1994, p. 196). Instead, it tends to focus more on materialism and conforming to the rest of the population. However, in the 1990s and 2000s, younger generations in Japan have become active participants of expressionism, which is more concerned with self-actualization. Expressionism is an "adaptive lifestyle... [where] what one expresses has a significant meaning and is highly valued" (Kawasaki, 1994, p. 196). Because of expressionism, Japanese youths have begun to actively pursue their wants rather than conforming to the group. In order to exert individuality and independence, they emulate the West and its consumer cultures. They see the United States as a symbol of individuality and independence and thus, try to follow its ways. With soft individualism and expressionism replacing loyalty and conformity, Japanese lifelong employment has become endangered.

The state of the Japanese economy also plays a role in the drift away from the Japanese tradition of lifelong employment. Previously, lifelong employment benefitted the Japanese economy by providing "a stable work force of experienced employers; loyal cadres due to job security guarantees; and better trained workers" (Sullivan, 1991, p. 79). However, with "Japan mired in an economic slump during the 1990s and into the early 2000s, some commentators were predicting the 'death' or deinstitutionalization of lifelong employment" (Wolff, 2008, p. 54). Normally, Japanese employers would make the choice to have the firm suffer rather than let employees go. However, when recessions as difficult as the ones from 1990 to the early 2000s hit, Japanese corporations began to make different decisions regarding their own labor forces. Parry argues that the "salaryman's habitat has deteriorated rapidly since the world financial crisis began but the change began in the early 1990s when Japan's postwar boom faltered" (2009, p. 39). Instead of holding onto each employee, companies hire expendable "dispatch workers" temporarily or part-time, while loyal workers are laid off (Parry, 2009, p. 39). Due to the series of slumps in the Japanese and global economy, Japanese salarymen may find themselves out of the office and onto welfare lines.

Gender issues also factor into the fate of lifelong employment in Japan. Since the late 1800s, Japanese women have also been affected by the process of globalization. They began to adapt to the individualistic, consumerist lifestyle of the West, which ultimately impacts the corporate environment. Hirakawa maintains that

female critics [who support the ideal lifestyle of Japanese women] often encourage [them] to defect to the liberated West, criticizing Japanese

society and the Japanese male as hopelessly mired in tradition (Hirakawa, 2004, p. 424).

Many Japanese women would prefer an American husband over a Japanese one, believing that if they marry a non-Japanese husband, he will treat her with respect as an equal. There is a desire to shift from "feudal relations, associated with obligation and hierarchy, to democratic relations, characterized by choice" (Tobin, 1994, p. 107). They believe that marrying a Japanese man signifies the opposite of modernity and independence.

Consequently, many Japanese women attempt to emulate Western practices or lifestyles in order to exercise more independence. This increased need for independence and expression of individuality infiltrates attitudes in the work environment. However, according to Robertson, many Japanese women do not hold significant or managerial company positions (2004, p. 132). By ultimately segregating women and not allowing them to enjoy the benefits of lifelong employment, the percentage of businesspeople hired for life at Japanese corporations is inevitably going to decrease from now on.

Because of the emergence of a consumer culture, a shift away from Confucian values, a weakened economy, and gender issues, this paper will explain the decline of lifelong employment in Japan since the 1980s.

III. Methodological Approach

The method I chose to analyze the changes that are occurring in contemporary Japanese society is a combination of reviewing existing literature, empirical analysis, and personal observation. In order to conduct empirical research, I constructed a survey that asked a number of open-ended questions. I surveyed twenty-seven Japanese contemporaries, ages ranging from eighteen to twenty-four.[1] The questions asked pertained to the opinions of the participant concerning lifelong employment in Japan and his or her future plans after graduating from a university. I also inquired whether or not he or she believed that the practice of lifelong employment has helped or hurt the economy of Japan and if he or she wishes to work for a company in the future that exercises this tradition. In addition, the participant was asked to list the occupations of their

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[1] I sought originally at least fifty respondents. The method of distribution I used was to ask ten friends currently residing in Japan and have them ask five Japanese college-age friends to complete and return my survey to me via e-mail. I received twenty-seven completed surveys and because it was not the volume I anticipated, my results may be skewed or ambiguous. In no way do my surveys represent all of Japan's population; it is merely a sample size of a bigger picture. Surveying college age or entry-level Japanese serves as an indicator for their future career choices and opinions on lifelong employment.

mothers and fathers. I will compare and contrast data collected from other scholars from the 1990s to the information that I have gathered in 2009. Some of the issues I will consider are the tendency of Japanese contemporaries to choose an occupation similar to that of a parent, if the participant thinks that lifelong employment is viable for the economy of Japan, and the reasons to why or why not he or she hopes for lifelong employment in the same profession.

The third method that I have utilized to examine the change in attitudes of contemporary Japanese students is observational primary research. By simply noticing certain happenings or the habits of Japanese people that fell into the college student age or entry-level age, I could gather some information about their behaviors. Passive observance allows the spectator a small glimpse into a part of their daily lives, whether it be on the trains, out on the street, at school, and so on.[2]

To supplement my observational primary research, I will also refer to a number of personal dialogues with Japanese friends or acquaintances during my semester in Japan. These conversations have given me insight into how college-age Japanese students feel about their future and employment post-graduation.

IV. Why Has Lifelong Employment Been Prominent in Japan until the 1980s?

The following models are possible explanations for why lifelong employment exists in Japan. Some scholars attribute it to the distinct culture of Japan, while others believe it emerged due to organizations wishing to exert more control over their employees. Another opinion for the existence of lifelong employment is based on economics.

Collectivist Culture

The fierce loyalty that Japanese businessmen exert is often explained via Japan's unique culture. Japanese society is noted for its solidarity and sense of social responsibility, which most likely stems from a relatively homogenous population. The CIA World Factbook reports that with a population of 127,078,679 as of July 2009, ninety-eight and a half percent are Japanese, while the other one and a half percent is comprised of Koreans, Chinese, and other ethnicities (CIA – The World Factbook – Japan, 2009). Japanese culture expects its members to be obedient, disciplined, self-inhibited, and harmonious towards

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[2] Obviously, there are limitations to observational primary research. I did not talk to the people that I observed while I was in Japan, and while the behavior of one or a few particular Japanese people does not represent the entire population of Japan, I may be able to come to some conclusions based on a few case studies or small details that I picked up between these encounters.

the group (Borovoy, 2008, p. 553). In Japan, people are concerned more for the community as a whole than themselves as individuals. The lower class has a desire to work with others, while the upper class has obligations to help those subordinate to them. There is a certain harmony, peace, and balance between people. These characteristics of Japanese culture facilitate the nature of the corporate environment. Japanese businesspeople devote a large portion of their lives to their respective firms because they are doing so for the benefit of the company as a whole. They put their health, their families, and their personal time aside in order to devote themselves entirely to a larger group. Although Japanese culture places a great emphasis on family, it seems as if some salarymen replace their families with their corporations. Businesspeople "see the firm as a substitute family which, in turn, fosters cooperative, collegiate relationships" (Wolff, 2008, p. 62). Japanese salarymen often neglect their families in order to put in longer hours at the corporation.

Obligations or duties are another important aspect of Japanese political culture. Japanese salarymen carry out their corporate duties on a daily basis; the obligations that exist between social classes are comparable to the ones that are apparent in the firm. Japanese culture is considered to be collectivist on a vertical scale, meaning that it is an authority-ranking culture where there are profound psychological relationships between leaders and followers. For example, instead of a handshake, which is an indicator of equality, the Japanese greet each other with a bow. The lower one bows, the more respect he or she is showing. In most Japanese firms, there is no room for promotions or horizontal mobility. The majority of Japanese corporations are vertically integrated; this organizational pattern "guarantees diligence by employees and the paternal benevolence of employers… The preference for harmony over conflict ensures industrial peace and the humanistic practices of personnel managers" (Wolff, 2008, p. 62).

The emphasis on education also influences culture, which, in turn, shapes the Japanese corporate environment. Post-war Japan became a "diploma society", which entails that "over the course of several decades, educational careers became linked with the lifetime employment system and effectively became a stamp on individuals that is treated as an ascribed status" (Kawasaki, 1994, p. 195). This facilitates the collectivism that emerges in the workplace. Individualism and voluntarism are suppressed, and consequently, relations among the group are in more or less in agreement (Kawasaki, 1994, p. 195). There is a certain order in Japanese society that infiltrates every aspect of life. Lifelong employment is an integral part to the Japanese industrial lifestyle. It enhances its cohesiveness, its offers its members protection, and it is secure (Borovoy, 2008, p. 552).

Political or Control Model

The political or control model states that lifelong employment was first implemented so managers could regulate their companies more easily. This model holds that "social relations and strategic political choices govern the design of the economy" (Wolff, 2008, p. 65). Employment for life was established in order to keep peace within the business environment. By limiting their employees' choices, corporations had much more control over the workforce in terms of pay or switching them to different offices while taking away the option of leaving altogether. Wolff cites Wilthagen and Tros, arguing that with this, companies gained a sense of flexicurity, which is a "balance between security of tenure and flexibility of working conditions" (Wolff, 2008, p. 65).

Economic or Market Model

Another lesser used explanation for the practice of lifelong employment in Japan is the market model. It assumes that workers are self-regarding, rational beings and that the Japanese market demonstrates neo-classical growth theory (Wolff, 2008, p. 61). According to Sullivan, under the economic model, Japanese employees will try to find security in the form of lifelong employment (1991, p. 84). In order to entice skilled workers to join their corporations, managers offered them the guarantee of employment for life.

Japanese Student Surveys

In order to understand how Japanese youth of the 2000s feel about lifelong employment, I constructed and distributed a survey during autumn 2009 to my college age Japanese students. Included in the survey were questions that asked the participant's age, gender, occupations of mother and father; the participant's plans after graduating from college; his or her opinion on lifelong employment; whether or not he or she believed lifelong employment helped the economy of Japan; if he or she wished to work for a company that guaranteed lifelong employment; and the reasons why or why not.
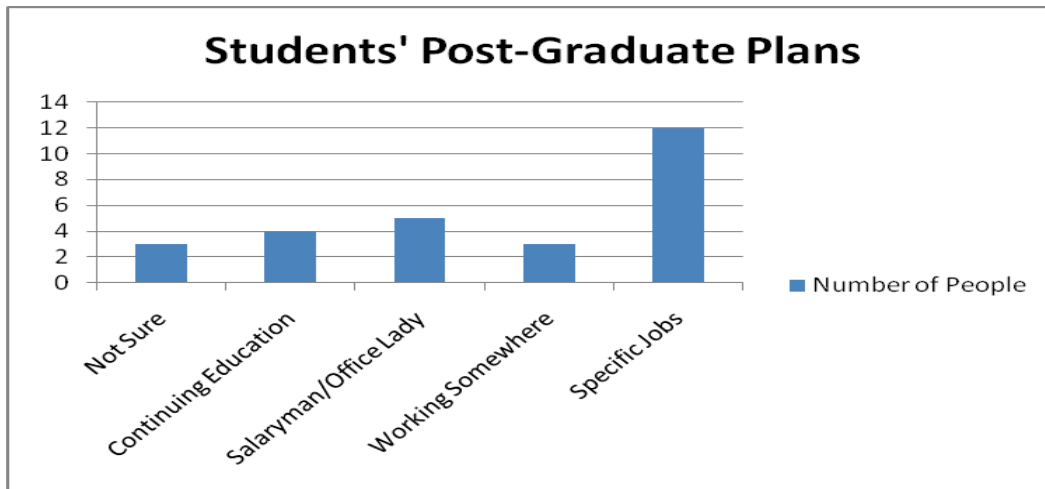
Out of the twenty-six students surveyed, ages ranging from eighteen to twenty-four, fifteen, more than half, had fathers that were salarymen or office workers. Three had fathers that were doctors, and the remaining eight had fathers that were self-employed or owned his own business, were pharmacists, or accountants.

Father's Occupation
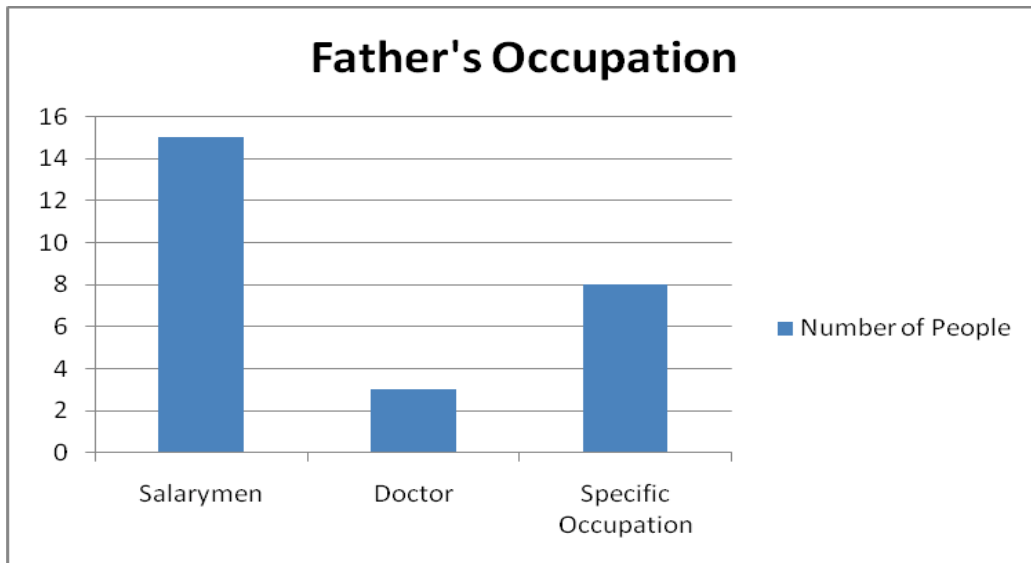
Out of the same group, ten had mothers that were housewives. Four others had mothers that worked part-time jobs in addition to housekeeping. Two had mothers that were secretaries or office ladies. The remaining ten had mothers that had specific occupations, such as owners of insurance companies, pharmacists, or accountants.

Mother's Occupation
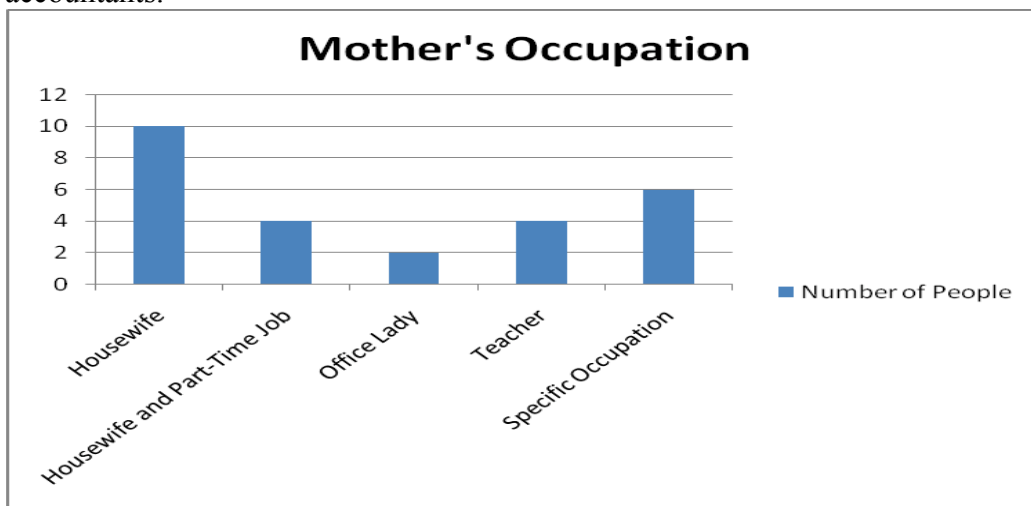
To compare whether or not the younger generations of Japanese were following in the footsteps of their parents, participants were asked their plans post-graduation. Three out of twenty-seven students were unsure, while four planned to continue their education. Four knew that they just wanted to enter the workforce, and eleven had specific jobs or fields in mind. Only four out of the twenty-seven surveyed students, fifteen percent, thought they would become a salaryman or an office lady.

Students' Post-Graduate Plans

(Bar chart: vertical axis labeled 0 to 14 in increments of 2; horizontal axis categories with approximate values)

- Not Sure: 3
- Continuing Education: 4
- Salaryman/Office Lady: 5
- Working Somewhere: 3
- Specific Jobs: 12

Legend: ■ Number of People

These survey results illustrate the change in views between generations. Twenty-two out of twenty-seven students, or eighty-one percent, have post-graduate plans other than becoming salarymen or office ladies. While the majority of mothers were housewives, none of the twenty-two females surveyed planned on becoming housekeepers after graduating from college. Forty-four percent of surveyed students had specific occupations in mind, such as working for a publisher, owning their own company, becoming a banker, or English teacher.
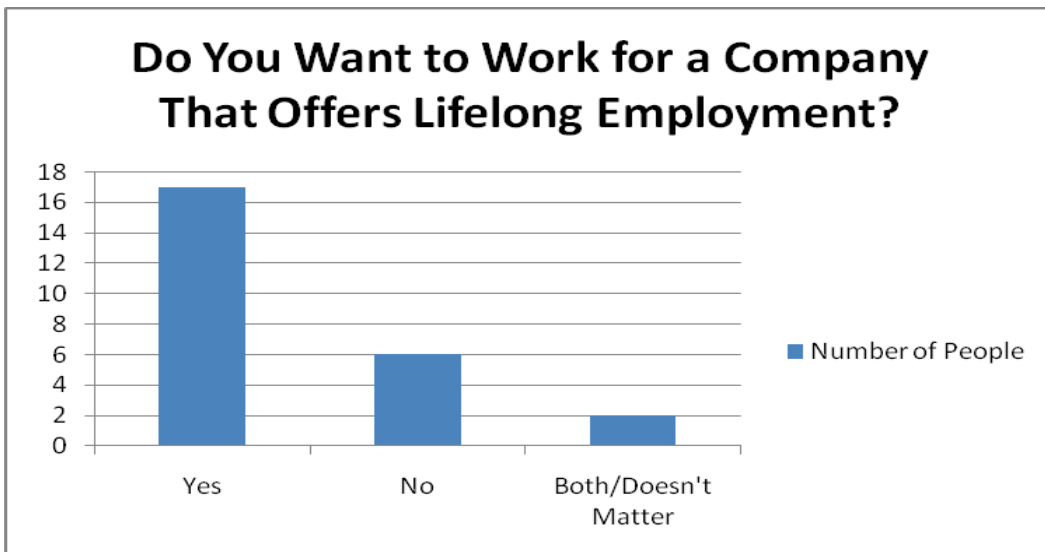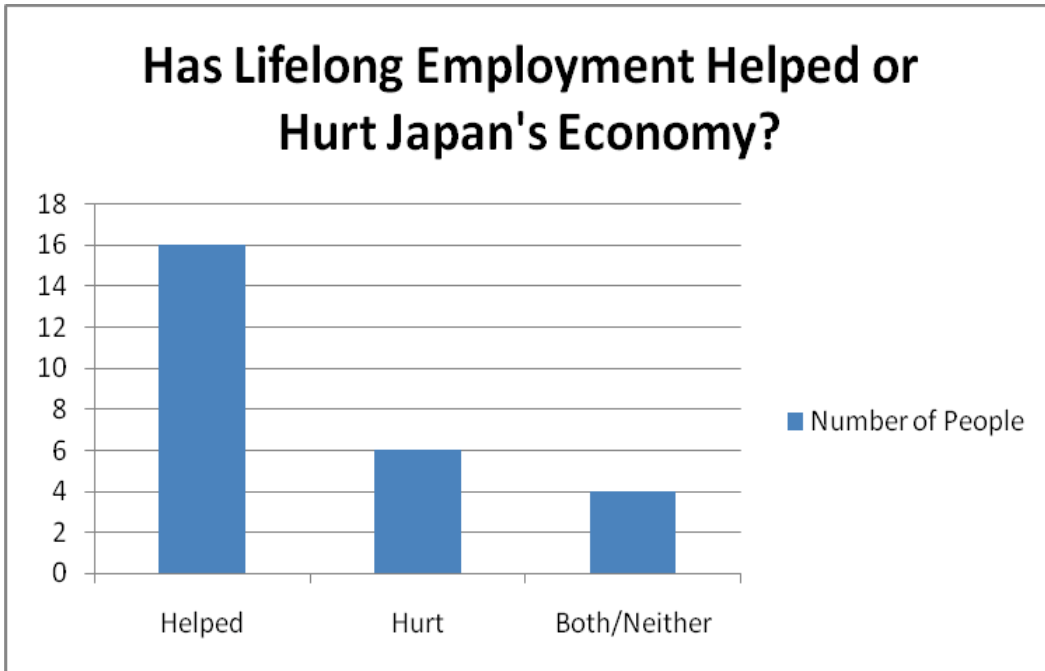
College-age and entry-level Japanese of 2009 have different mindsets regarding careers from their parents and the previous generation. Even during the 1990s, according to Herbig, Japanese college-age students were selecting occupations that "call for some creativity and a degree of independence", illustrating "the desire for more freedom of expression" (1995, p. 51). This trend is continuing during the 2000s, and will probably escalate as even more time goes on, thus threatening the custom of lifelong employment in Japan. The choices of their parents are affecting the decisions of younger generations less and less. No longer do they routinely follow in the footsteps of tradition; instead, contemporary Japanese youth are making choices for themselves, expressing their own wants, and exploring their individuality and independence.

Although ten out of twenty-six surveyed students saw the tradition of lifelong employment in Japan as a beneficial system, three students saw it as a drawback, and the remaining thirteen students either believed it was neither good nor bad or saw both the benefits and disadvantages of lifelong employment.

Students' Opinions on Lifelong Employment
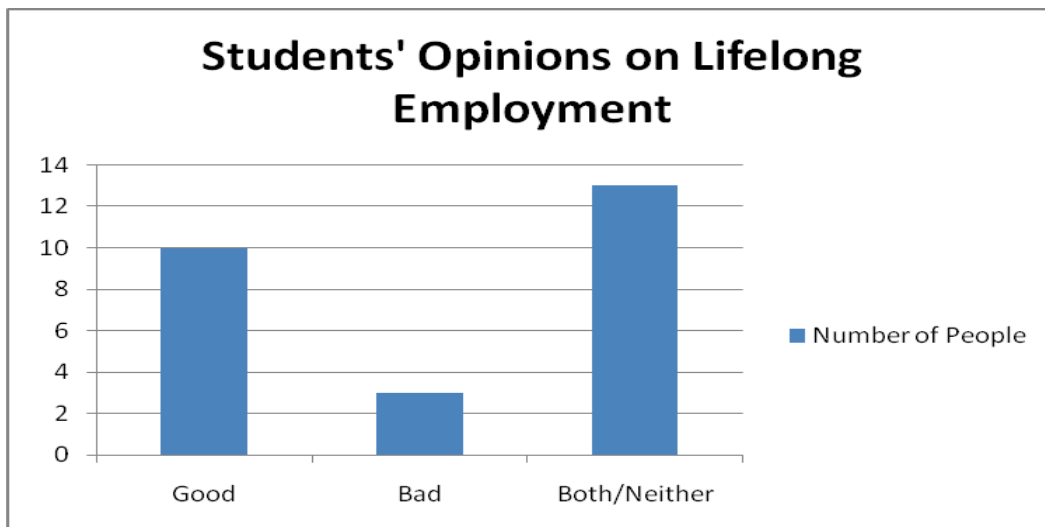
Survey participants believed the lifelong employment system is beneficial because it offers employees security, gives them motivation to work diligently, fosters a sense of unity, and health insurance and bonus systems are based on it. Negative aspects of lifelong employment, according to the students, included the lack of motivation it generates because employees get paid regardless of performance, its dullness or monotony, and its inflexibility when considering the mobility of people or job-switching. At least seven students alluded to changing values, individuality, or changing career paths and stated that employees should not be pressured into staying with one company for their entire lives.

Sixteen out of twenty-six students believed that the tradition of lifelong employment has helped the economy of Japan, and seventeen out of twenty-five participants answered yes when asked if they wanted to work for a company that offers lifelong employment. Most of their reasons included that in the poor state of the economy of 2009, job security is important, if they have a stable career, they can concentrate more on their work, and it will motivate them if they stay with one company for a long period of time. Furthermore, four out of twenty-seven students wanted to work for a company that guaranteed lifelong employment for reasons related to gender issues. Some participants acknowledged that it is difficult for women to find jobs in Japan. In addition, some students believed that lifelong employment would help women who leave work to get married or have children, or would be beneficial for working mothers in general.

Has Lifelong Employment Helped or Hurt Japan's Economy?

Helped: 16
Hurt: 6
Both/Neither: 4

Number of People

Do You Want to Work for a Company That Offers Lifelong Employment?

Yes: 17
No: 6
Both/Doesn't Matter: 2

Number of People

However, nine out of twenty-seven students had reasons why they would not want to work at the same organization for the rest of their lives.

Although my survey results are mixed, suggesting some ambivalence, there are also reasons that uphold my hypothesis that the values and attitudes of Japanese youth culture are changing and are leaning farther away from the occupations of salarymen, office ladies, and lifelong employment. Some of the

reasons for not wanting lifelong employment included wanting to try many different companies. Some students know that they will not work for one organization for the rest of their lives, others wished to be evaluated not by their loyalty but by their actual work, some students are still searching for what they are truly called to do. With more viewpoints such as these emerging in Japan, it signifies the change in the quality of life, thus making the tradition of lifelong employment less desirable to Japanese youth. Many college-age and entry-level Japanese are searching for a career that will suit them, not simply taking a position and working for life for one particular company.

Comparisons Between 1990s and 2000s Japanese Youth

In comparison with the results Lee-Cunin found, Japanese youth of 2009 and of the 1990s have very similar mindsets. Lee-Cunin asked Japanese students their ideal job and the job that they would probably obtain. The most prominent ideal job was civil servant, the second was accountant, and the third ideal job was unknown. Realistically, most students did not know their future occupation.

ideal v real job 1

Dec 1998
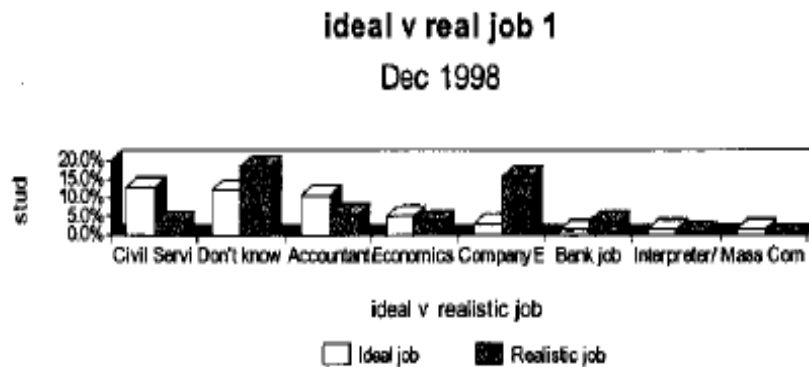
Ideal job: civil service, don't know, accountant, work in economics/business, company employee, bank employee, interpreter, work in mass communications

"Many reflected their awareness of graduate unemployment" due to the recession during the 1990s (Lee-Cunin, 2004, p. 124). Similarly, many students that participated in the 2009 survey expressed concern about finding employment in the midst of economic downturn. Stability and security were important to both groups of students. However, employment for life may not be an option with a poor economy; companies might not even hire students right after they complete their college education.

In regards to following the traditions of the older generations, some Japanese students from over a decade ago wanted similar occupations to those of their parents. Lee-Cunin asserted that the

parental employment status of some of the students could... be an influential factor in these results... Students would be more aware of the advantages or disadvantages of occupations that their parents had" (2004, p. 125).

Compared to the results of the 2009 survey, more and more Japanese students are opting for occupations that are different from their predecessors.

One survey group from the 1990s reflected a level of individuality comparable to that of the 2009 students.

Ideal-real job 5
Dec 1998
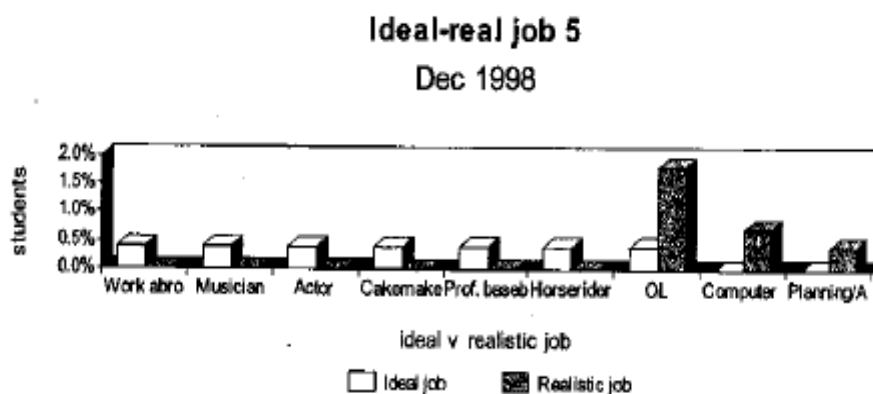
Ideal job: work abroad, musician, actor, cake maker, professional baseball player, horse rider, office lady, computer job, planning analysis job

This group of Japanese students expressed "an individual flair regarding their ideal job" (Lee-Cunin, 2004, p. 125). Similarly, participants from the 2009 survey group expressed individualism not only by aspiring for specific jobs such as working for a publisher, English teacher, or a career using French language skills, but also by stating that they are going to search for an occupation that suits them or that they plan on experiencing multiple jobs throughout their lifetime.

Both survey groups also exemplified gender issues. Some participants in the 1990s group knew they faced gender discrimination and thus expressed concern about obtaining a job as a female. Some female students believed that they ultimately might end up as office ladies, "the gender-specific low status position with few chances of promotion" (Lee-Cunin, 2004, p. 126). Four out of twenty-seven participants in the 2009 group also expressed concern over discrimination in the workplace. However, the difference between the two groups is that the students surveyed in 2009 did not have an overwhelming majority planning to become office ladies post-graduation, whereas the 1990s group did.

The two survey groups illustrate the increasing trend of individuality and expressionism among the Japanese youth. "15.4 per cent" of the 1990s group believed that, realistically, they would become salarymen, the second prominent reality occupation (Lee-Cunin, 2004, p. 126).[3] Meanwhile the 2009 group gave reasons why they would probably not work for only one company for life. The 2009 group showed an increase in not choosing an occupation based on those of their parents. However, both groups exemplified the gender issues still facing women in the work environment and the concern of finding a job in an unfavorable economy.

V. Why the Change?
The Decline of Lifelong Employment and Endangered Salarymen

Lifelong employment was able to thrive up until the 1980s because traditional Confucian values were upheld extensively in Japanese society, namely "loyalty, discipline, and sincerity" (Robertson, 2005, p. 382). One was perceived to possess strength if he or she was able to put others before his or herself. Prior to urbanization in the 1950s, rural values promoted social obligation and harmony, which facilitated lifelong employment in the work environment. As urbanization occurred, however, there was a loss of Confucian values, which were replaced by new ones such as individualism and expressionism in a consumer culture.

About Modern Japan – The Process of Industrialization

Modernization officially began for Japan when United States Commodore Matthew C. Perry and his fleet of black ships opened up the country from a long period of isolation in 1853 (Adams, 2009, p. 37). Since this occurrence, the Japanese have wanted to emulate the ways of the West. "As early as 1858... the only way for Japan to cope with the West was to 'imitate [the] good things which the enemy has'" (Adams, 2009, p. 37). The leaders during the Meiji period already knew that they really had no choice but to imitate Euro-American countries (Robertson, 2005, p. 40). Despite the contempt that the Japanese had for the United States and Europe, they wanted to acquire the technological skills of the West while still retaining their Japaneseness. They may not have liked Westerners, but they, too, wished to benefit from certain aspects of Western culture. Thus, the Meiji Restoration, which took place from 1868 to 1912, "transformed feudal Japan into a nation state" (Adams, 2009, p. 37).

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[3] Although both Lee-Cunin and I found about fifteen per cent of surveyed students in the 1990s and 2009 groups, respectively, that planned or saw themselves as salarymen or office ladies in the future, my data may be skewed due to less participants (2004, p. 126). However, despite my limitations, the data collected from the 2009 group offers a sampling of a larger population of Japanese youth culture.

The Japanese perceived Western ideals, science, and technology, essentially, industrialization, as a symbol of worldly status. The Japanese felt the need to compete with the United States on a technological level almost instantly. They embraced modernization but did so in a way that combined their distinctive culture with the advances that other countries had made during the time period they spent isolated under the Tokugawa. This is how Japan was able to successfully industrialize.

The modernization that occurred in Japan during the late 1800s continued throughout the 1900s. With this, a "global culture of consumption… patterned on American developments" emerged during the early 1900s (Gordon, 1993, p. 242). The time period between World War I and World War II, also known as the interwar period, was integral to Japanese modernization (Harootunian, 2001, p. xi). Accelerated changes occurred especially in 1955 and after; this was when the mass culture of Japan came into being (Gordon, 1993, p. 242). As Japan became more urbanized, cities quickly grew, becoming centers of "machines, speed, and capitalist production and consumption" (Adams, 2004, p. 71).

It was this very era of capitalism that bred the concept of white-collar workers known as salarymen. After Japan underwent industrialization, Japanese companies gave up on intimate, personal ties. "[Intermediating], direct interpersonal relationships" were weakened, thus leading to the competitive nature of the workplace (Shibata, 2007, p. 309). The salaryman's allegiance to the firm

> has little to do with concrete relationships with co-workers, and the target of their 'loyalty' (i.e., the 'corporation') is a discursively constructed and aestheticized object that they imagine to directly belong to without any mediating social relationship (Shibata, 2007, p. 309).

New Values

There were two occurrences that led to a change in values among young Japanese people that has led to a decline in the appeal of lifelong employment and the salaryman career track. The first was the process of urbanization. Once standards of living changed for youth culture in Japan, "it was necessary for urban Japanese to deny rural values", for example, social collectivism, and instead "create new urban values" such as "a new configuration of group consciousness and individualism" (Kawasaki, 1994, p. 189, 188). There was "an inconsistency [that] existed between the students' goals and the necessities of an urban lifestyle" that led to the change in what was important to them (Kawasaki, 1994, p. 189). Urbanization bred the consumer culture that welcomed the youth of Japan into the

world, which has caused the youths of Japan to assess value differently and facilitated the need to express themselves.

The second instance that led to the value shift among Japanese youth culture was the generation gap that was created between the young and the old due to industrialization. According to Kawasaki, there are four waves of Japanese youth culture based on chronology and the urbanization process of Japan. The first group existed before the 1870s prior to industrialization occurring; the second group was the actual urban youth culture that transpired and peaked during the interwar period of 1880 to 1950; the third group of Japanese youth experienced rapid economic growth from 1950 to the 1970s; and the fourth is what Kawasaki refers to as the partakers in an "advanced consumption culture" living in Japan during the latter 1970s and beyond (1994, p. 186-189). These four waves of youth culture had mindsets that differed from their predecessors. Older conservatives saw the process of modernization "frightening" and "could not cope with the freedom and autonomy of the new urban ways" (Adams, 2009, p. 42). They felt that the "new consumerism, self-gratification, and open sexuality were too threatening" (Adams, 2009, p. 42). The combination of urbanization and the generation gap lead to a change in youth values that Japan had never seen before. "Unlike their parents, such individuals find identity not through participation in a pattern of reciprocal obligation, but through the goods they purchase" (Tobin, 1994, p. 108). The older generation, affected by World War II, learned how to save and conserve material goods also how to put others first. In contrast, the younger generations of Japan were not affected by the war directly and feel less compelled to save money or food (Herbig, 1995, p. 54). Brought up in an age of consumerism and capitalism, they take a more self-centered approach to life.

As products of modernization, Japanese youth have forgotten about Confucian values that allow lifelong employment to thrive. Some of the participants of the 2009 survey have exemplified new values of individuality instead of solidarity through their future career choices and reasons for shunning lifelong employment. To some Japanese youth, modernization signifies individualization; self-sacrifice no longer has significance (Robertson, 2005, p. 382). Instead, Japanese youth feel a sense of entitlement without a sense of obligation. Because they were born in the midst of post-war consumer society, they experienced affluence instantly.

> Being lazy, having fun and enjoying life are good things; to sweat and work are not trendy. *Shinjinrui* tend to be practical, easy-going and disturbingly money-minded. They are inclined to work to live than live to work and are much less ready to submerge their personal ambitions and private lives to the success of the company... Japan's youth often wish to

wrap the minimum amount of work around their play (Herbig, 1995, p. 51).

Due to the effects of globalization, jobs have become more flexible, thus Japanese youth feel that they do not need to work as much or as diligently. With the internet, the culture of the workplace has changed, even going as far as to bring work to people's homes. Being raised in an affluent post-war society constantly being shaped by globalization, young Japanese have grown up with a new sense of values from those of the previous generations.

Consumer Culture That Emerged

As mentioned previously, there were four waves of Japanese youth culture that emerged prior to industrialization, during the interwar period, post-war, and post-economic crisis. It was the modernization that took place during the 1800s and the 1900s that laid the groundwork for capitalistic expansion and gave birth to a consumer culture in Japan. During the late 1800s, Japan became more urbanized by establishing a system of currency, by practicing capitalism, and by introducing consumer goods into society (Adams, 2009, p. 37-38). Although the Japanese adapted Western ways of modernization to suit their own culture, they still admired the United States. Later in the 1920s, "traditional ways were being overwhelmed by Americanization, so much that [there was] a 'spread of mass culture and consumption…' (Adams, 2004, p.71). Part of the reason why Japan embraced consumerism is because it represented American ways. For example, Ginza, one of the most popular shopping districts in Tokyo, was known as

the cosmopolitan heart of Tokyo, Ginza has been the quintessential symbol of America since the 1920s and many Japanese cities sought to imitate what in fact was an elite consumer culture. If anything, this consumerist culture was more powerful than the sighting of American warships in the fateful year of 1853 (Delanty, 2003, p. 116).

As the population of Japan migrated from the rural areas to cities during the early 1900s, they were targeted as consumers, most notably Japanese women (Adams, 2004, p. 71). Because Japan industrialized and adopted a consumer culture, there has been a shift in Japanese attitudes. By placing more emphasis on consumer goods, the Japanese were making decisions for themselves based on wants and beginning to express individualism. The Japanese saw consumption as a symbol of status.

For many years, Western-style has been associated not only with status and individuality but also with *goritekisa,* rationality and functionality. In the postwar period, the emphasis was on improving life by supplying each home with 'necessary goods – a small refrigerator, a vacuum cleaner, a water heater, a small black-and-white television set. Although efficiency and rationality are still highly valued in contemporary Japan, 'style' and

fulfillment' are increasingly the focus of consumer desire (Tobin, 1992, p. 115).

Products fashioned like their American counterparts or goods imported from the West gave the Japanese a sense of individuality. After World War II, especially, the Japanese wanted to obtain the feelings of independence that emanated from American culture. As a result, they participated in this modern life of "mass consumption of commodity culture" (Harootunian, 2001, xx). With such emphasis on independence and material wants, especially during the 1980s, there emerged "a new, feeling-based individual sensibility" (Gordon, 1993, p. 253).

From my observations while in Japan, I saw that much of this is still the same. Japan is still a country largely based on consumerism and material goods. Many of the stores in Japan are for convenience, but the majority of them are for shopping. Many members of the younger generations of Japan are highly materialistic, following fashion trends and shopping often for leisure. I saw this in both males and females from the teenage to college age group, although probably more so in females. There is little distinction between needs and wants; Japan, with its consumer culture, has changed its people into believing that what they want is really what they require.

Shinjinrui

Perhaps the most significant reason why attitudes towards lifelong employment in Japan have changed is due to what some scholars refer to as *shinjinnrui*. *Shinjinrui* represents a new youth culture in Japan that emerged during the 1980s, literally "a new human species" or "new breed" in comparison to older, existing traditions (Kawasaki, 1994, p. 191; Robertson, 2005, p. 141). The goal of the *shinjinrui* is to "be different from everyone else, to do what you want" (Herbig, 1995, p. 53-54). Its members were born into an "affluent, wealthy, powerful, influential, arrogant Japan" after the growth in the post-war economy (Herbig, 1995, p. 49). Many older generations perceive this new youth culture in a negative light, saying that they have "become removed from traditional Japanese values" (Robertson, 2005, p. 160). *Shinjinrui* are remarkable due to three characteristics. The first is strong adherence to individualism and "selfish behavior patterns, in which youth tend to place highest priority on individual benefit or values", the second is partaking in a consumer culture, and the third is expressionism, or "the tendency to insist on presenting oneself and the individual's attachment to such presentations" (Kawasaki, 1994, p. 191).

The Japanese youth culture of the 1980s was different from previous generations of Japanese people because they had begun to experiment with individualism, but it was not a complete change. Although it was during this time

that differences in attitudes developed a rift between the older and younger generations, Japanese youth culture only practiced what Kawasaki calls "soft individualism" during the 1980s, meaning that most of their decisions still tended to be conformist in nature (Kawasaki, 1994, p. 196). It was difficult to break out of the "longstanding traditional culture" or "highly patterned culture" of harmony and amenable relationships (Kawasaki, 1994, p. 196).

The next generation of Japanese youth culture, the *shinjinrui* of the 1990s, was similarly brought up in environments that facilitated "group mentality"; for example, home and school (Kawasaki, 1994, p. 197). However, during this decade,

> group consciousness began to change... [it became] narrower in scope... At the same time, their consumer life and lifestyle reflect an individualistic side... Their behavioral patterns and thoughts weaken their uniformity and orient them in multidimensional directions (Kawasaki, 1994, p. 197).

Shinjinrui of the 1990s were further along in the practice of true individualism; instead of following the group, members of the younger Japanese generation were making decisions for themselves and expressing their individual personalities. They were able to exceed and go beyond the traditional patterns of Japanese culture of "conflict avoidance" and "peer conformism", resulting in "preferences representing a shift from the formalized and large scale to the more individual and small scale" (Kawasaki, 1994, p. 196). Because of the distinct characteristics *shinjinrui* of the 1990s exerted – individualism, consumerism, and expressionism – they have paved the way for a change in perception of the Japanese tradition of employment for life. The adaptability of expressionism has given more flexibility to the youth of Japan. The emphasis placed on individualism and expressionism induces less concern for something larger, such as a corporation. With a generation that has begun to focus largely on his or herself rather than the benefit of a bigger group, the age of the salaryman and office lady have begun to decline. Once seen as a hard-working, devoted businessman, salarymen are perceived are now seen as "nothing more than latter-day kamikaze pilots in business suits" (Robertson, 2005, p. 141). More and more young Japanese have begun to "reject the constraints of being a *sarariman* in a corporate society" (Robertson, 2005, p. 136). The students that participated in my surveys exerted some of these characteristics through their reasons why they did not prefer lifelong employment at one company.

In addition, many *shinjinrui* live in the moment and think only of short-term problems rather than think of what is best for their futures. They possess "narrow and short-sighted perspectives" (Herbig, 1995, p. 52). This change in mindset and values is reflected in the following statistics:

> The percentage deriving pleasure from work dropped from 29 per cent in 1970 to less than 20 per cent in 1980 for those aged 20 to 25. Among those under 20, only 25 per cent claim to be prepared to sacrifice their lives to a company, compared with 45 per cent of 50 year olds. In 1940, 20 year olds wanted above all to 'lead a temperate and honest life to work for the good of society'; in the 1980s onwards, young peopel believe that the main aim in life is personal pleasure (Herbig, 1995, p. 51).

The 1980s marks a period in time when attitudes among the Japanese youth began to shift. Ever since then, young Japanese people are becoming more and more individualistic. Rather than work themselves to death, Japanese youth from the 1980s and after are thinking about how to enjoy themselves. There is an evident disparity between the attitudes of salarymen and that of the *shinjinrui*. The object of import has changed from the firm to the individual. The culture of Japan is transitioning from one that was "anchored in fixed [Confucian] values" to one of "fantasy and desire" (Harootunian, 2001, xix).

With a change in values, attitudes of Japanese students concerning education have also changed. The *shinjinrui* generally do not place as much emphasis on achievements or accomplishments. Although *shinjinrui* are mostly "wealthy and well-educated university students", not all of them "have high educational attainment or a strong success orientation" (Robertson, 2005, p. 160, Kawasaki, 1994, p. 191). In fact, when prompted to list things that brought them anxiety, most Japanese students said, "education, educators, school, university, other students, home, parents and personal problems" (Herbig, 1995, p. 52). Furthermore, Kawasaki analyzes that for Japanese youth culture, "university is like an amusement park" (1994, p. 193).

To this, I can personally attest. While attending Sophia University, a private, prestigious school located in Tokyo, I took classes that were mixed with exchange students and Japanese students. On several occasions, I would look around the classroom and see that some of the Japanese students were blatantly sleeping in class.

Without education being stressed as much as before among the youth of Japan, the aforementioned diploma society that the country once had is now weakened. *Shinjinrui* do not take school as seriously; they are not concerned with obtaining an established career path, and thus they are "ill-equipped for the stresses of corporate life in an economic superpower and yearning for escape" (Herbig, 1995, p. 50). This is not to say that all working people of the *shinjinrui* generation are lazy; they work just enough but never more than they should. They are "increasingly reluctant to go beyond the call of duty and turn a good-

enough performance into a superb one", states Herbig, describing them as the "goldfish generation" for the reason that they "have to be hand-fed everything" (1995, p. 50). All of this then forces change upon the corporate environment and the system of permanent employment.

Lifelong employment has become threatened with modernization ultimately leading up to the birth of this new type of Japanese youth and its new set of values. The "doctrine of self-sacrifice" has been defied by the *shinjinrui* that do take positions in corporations since the 1980s (Robertson, 2005, p. 141). Working *shinjinrui* have no qualms about changing their occupations multiple times throughout their lives or altering management operations. The quality of life in Japan has changed from wanting to work hard for one company to devoting more time for oneself. How can lifelong employment possibly survive if the unwavering loyalty and diligence that the Japanese once displayed towards one company is vanishing?

Growing Individuality

Due to modernization, the advent of *shinjinrui,* and changing values, the Japanese youth have been exerting more individuality. Soft individualism during the 1950s gave way to expressionism during the latter years of the twentieth century. Instead of suppressing their differences, young Japanese have begun to pursue their own wants, caring more for their own happiness or attaining self-actualization. During the 1990s, *kojinshugi*, meaning individualism, was "a word heard more and more, and almost always in reference to young people" (Herbig, 1995, p. 51). One study showed that Japanese students placed great value on "individual pursuits – such as exercising, pursuing personal hobbies or being with friends" (Herbig, 1995, p. 51).

Similar to the emergence of *shinjinrui*, a phenomenon known as freeters developed in the 1980s. A freeter is one that holds a series of part-time jobs, never obtaining a genuine career, and is more concerned with hobbies or independence (Robertson, 2005, p. 136).[4] Related to freeters are NEETs, which is an acronym that stands for "No Education, Employment, or Training" (Robertson, 2005, p. 136). Members of this Japanese youth culture refuse to work at all. In 2003, there were at least 400,000 NEETs that fell between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four; this figure is five times the amount from 1997 (Robertson, 2005, p. 136). This symbolizes how the attitudes of Japanese youth culture are quickly changing. Just from the 1980s to the 1990s, and then another comparison of the late 1990s to the 2000s shows that young Japanese people are caring less about

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[4] The term freeter is the result of combining "free" and "*Arbeiter*". The Japanese use the term "*arubaito"* for work. It is a loan word from German.

working hard and more about their own freedom. Contemporary Japanese youth feel less shame if they do not secure stable employment. They are more concerned about their own happiness and comfort.

Japanese society overall puts significant pressure on the youth, especially with entrance exams, parents, and gender dichotomies (Kelly, 1993, p. 530). Perhaps Japanese high school and college students want to get away from societal pressures such as these. Such pressures lead to emotional distress, which can influence how Japanese students function at school, in public, and ultimately, in the workplace. Borovoy emphasizes *hikikomori,* which translates to "withdrawn" and refers to those that cut themselves off from society (2008, p. 552). In a culture that "has historically prioritized inclusion and mainstreaming as key elements of democracy, over the expression of individual rights", *hikikomori* "would, in a freer society, be designing computer games, handcrafting furniture or launching small software startups" (Borovoy, 2008, p. 553). Such activities require ingenuity and freedom of expression. What provides an escape for this young generation of Japanese is partaking in activities that bring them happiness instead of doing what others want them to do. However, the anxiety from social pressures leads many *hikikomori* to refuse school attendance as well as later "failing to find a compelling job" after completing college (Borovoy, 2008, p. 554). The poor work ethic exemplified by these disturbed youths has contributed to the decline of the salaryman. With less Japanese students working diligently in school, there are less that go on to work for companies for the rest of their lives until retirement.

The need to express oneself has influenced other Japanese that do choose to obtain a career path. More and more Japanese are choosing specialized occupations that "call for some creativity and a degree of independence" (Herbig, 1995, p. 51). There is a possibility that the Japanese youth culture is exerting more individuality because they gain no fulfillment following in the footsteps of their parents, particularly concerning occupation. They have noticed that they are only making decisions because their parents did it or they are carrying on a tradition blindly. It has become simply a custom to fall into the occupation of a salaryman or an office lady, and young Japanese people do not know why they do it. It is only done out of habit, and now they are breaking out of it.

Japanese entry-level students also feel that they have more choices regarding career paths, which leads them to explore their own creativity and exercise their individuality in college and also after graduation.

The student attitude towards graduate school and employment reflected their awareness of the realities of life outside of university; with a

significant number of them stating that they did not know what they would do after graduating" (Lee-Cunin, 2004, p. 138).

One particular Japanese college student I know replied that she did not know what to do when I inquired about post-graduate plans. She had studied abroad in the United States. Globalization, plus new attitudes and values among her peers and having many more career choices, probably affected her answer. "Japanese international youth have become a new privileged group. Together, these trends have begun to break the uniformity that formerly characterized Japanese youth culture" (Kawasaki, 1994, p. 199).

Even Japanese that have secured employment for life wish to exert more individuality and creativity. Recruit Research Corporation conducted a survey that came to the conclusion that "more than half of salaried Japanese workers say they would switch jobs or start their own business if a favorable opportunity arose" (Tanikawa, 1995, p. 11). Some salarymen feel "imprisoned by the concept of 'masculinity'"; they wish to leave the workforce to pursue personal interests instead (Fujimura-Fanselow, 1995, p. 247). The ability to switch occupations and the feeling of wanting to do so among the working class has increased in Japan since the 1990s, and will probably continue to increase as time goes on. The Japanese have begun to worry less about losing face when they leave a company to find a new job. Globalization has also had an effect on some Japanese salarymen, especially those that have attended schools in other countries, showing them that workers in other nations do not always stay loyal to one company (Tanikawa, 1995, p. 11).

Due to urbanization in the mid-1900s, the perception of the salaryman has become tarnished. The rigid life of a salaryman, full of sacrifice as he neglects his family by working to death, no longer appeals to the Japanese youth of the 2000s as they aspire to achieve personal goals that reflect feelings of growing expressionism. Consequently, the tradition of lifelong employment in Japan has been on the decline since the 1980s and will continue even past the 2000s.

VI. Economic Downturn

There seems to be much worry among Japanese college students stemming from the state of the economy. Participants of my survey, in addition to college-age and entry-level Japanese in general, would probably be more willing to fully reject the tradition of lifelong employment if the economy of Japan were in a better state.

Increasing Amount of Layoffs

When considering the state of the economy, lifelong employment, and individualism, what we see is a paradox. Japanese youth wish to express themselves freely and choose their own paths with regards to their careers, but at the same time, some are concerned with security in a weak global environment and welcome employment for life. However, those that wish to obtain stable jobs may be out of luck as the lifelong employment system of Japan is sustaining a significant amount of pressure. Many companies, who have guaranteed their employees jobs for life, are increasingly letting more and more of their workers go due to economic hardships. According to Wolff, cited by Jackson, an

> international comparative study of listed companies with more than 2000 employees found an increasing proportion of Japanese firms downsizing their workforce by 10 per cent or more during the recession. In 1991, the proportion was 2 per cent; in 2001, it had tripled to 6 per cent; and in 2002, it had peaked at close to 11 per cent (2008, p 67-68).

When companies stated that they would only let their employees go during the direst of times, this may have been to what they were referring. In order to survive economically, Japanese organizations are making significant changes to their management practices.

> Only companies that are able to implement a rigorous and impartial procedure of "selection and concentration" will survive the next couple of years. Companies are only just beginning to understand the dangers of maintaining large inventories and are beginning to scale back. In this new corporate reality, businessmen are increasingly subject to demotion and firing, making wage labor an unstable source of masculine identity and human dignity (Robertson, 2004, p. 141).

The one that bears the impact of these managerial changes is the salarymen. Their perception of loyalty has been shattered with corporations making such decisions.

The Disintegration of Devotion

As a result of more employees being laid-off by their corporation or "substitute family", they have less motivation to be loyal. Companies that had "aggressively sought experienced workers as well as entry-level college seniors" during the 1980s had no other choice but to "cast off many employees… through buyouts and dismissals" when the state of the economy fell during the decade after (Tanikawa, 1995, p. 11). Feeling betrayed and disillusioned due to "midcareer hirings and midcareer dismissals", Japanese thus had "a weakened national attachment to one job for life" (Tanikawa, 1995, p. 11).

In addition, difficult economic circumstances were one of the primary reasons that the aforementioned freeters came about during the late 1990s.

> The declining chance of coming across a permanent job to which a young person can commit themselves undermines their commitment to a job in which they are currently engaged, and results in a rash of unemployment and job-switching" (Robertson, 2005, p. 136).

Japanese companies are also turning to a new source of labor: part-time and temporary employees. Expendable "dispatch workers", making up nearly a third of the work force in the 2000s, are hired temporarily while loyal employees are laid off (Parry, 2009, p. 39). Hamada points out that the "hiring of temporaries and female workers is considered a desirable cost-saving strategy" (Robertson, 2004, p. 140). However, since these workers know that they will not be with a particular company for the long term, let alone the rest of their lives, there is much less dedication for their impermanent employer.

Due to the economic downturn, forcing many companies to lay off their dedicated employees and hire new ones that will be around only for so long with no real stake in their firm, in addition to those independent Japanese youth that have already shunned the tradition in exchange for expressionism, do lifelong employment and salarymen stand a chance of surviving?

VII. Gender Issues in Japan

Gender discrimination has always been a prominent issue in Japan with a society dominated by men. Women are often treated as lesser citizens in regards to work, pay, and social status.

> The conventional male response to the women's movement and the demands expressed by women for change up until now has been to suppress, ignore, and ridicule them and to dismiss them as a troublesome minority (Fujimura-Fanselow, 1995, p. 248).

The majority of Japanese women do not enjoy the benefits of lifelong employment or have the privilege of holding executive positions. According to Herbig, "few become managers – only 1 per cent of section chiefs are women" (1995, p. 56). Generally, Japanese women receive less training than their male colleagues, thus decreasing their chances of advancing within the company. Japanese women have little opportunity for growth in the corporate realm since many Japanese firms hire them solely for tedious, administrative purposes (Hirakawa, 2004, p. 431). Known as office ladies, their male managers refer to them as "girls", indicating their superiority and the incompetence they perceive females to have. Japanese women are greatly hindered from reaching managerial

positions by the "system of lifetime employment, the seniority system, and the bureaucratic, tightly knit nature of industrial policy" (Robertson, 2004, p. 132).

Japanese women have become tired of the gender discrimination that has existed for years. With the turn of the century, the "stagnated, male-centered economy and society [of Japan] have come under attack" (Robertson, 2005, p. 316). Japanese women, influenced by the West, see how American woman are treated as equals and wish for the same. The system of lifelong employment, dominated by males, is fading as women strive for more equality and independence. With women increasingly making up more and more of the workforce in Japan, yet not being included in the lifelong employment system, firms will have to rethink their strategies or be forced to eventually give up the tradition altogether. More Japanese men are also realizing that they cannot treat their female counterparts as pests. As a result, a select number of Japanese husbands are assuming more feminine roles and exerting their own expressionism.

Breaking Down the Gender Dichotomy

Many proponents of gender equality in Japan have encouraged Japanese women to consider evaluating Western or American society. Female

> critics, in discussing women's ideal lifestyles, often encourage women to defect to the liberated West, criticizing Japanese society and the Japanese male as hopelessly mired in tradition" (Hirakawa, 2004, p. 424).

Modernization between world wars facilitated the notion that "the symbol of all that was appealing… in this new, Westernized world, was the modern women – an individual who transgressed social boundaries and questioned her dependence on men" (Adams, 2009, p. 41). Some Japanese women actually prefer American husbands because they believe that a non-Japanese man will treat them as an equal and let them have more independence and mobility. Revisiting the consumer culture that has infiltrated Japanese lifestyles, some Japanese women believe that "western styles and goods hold the promise of western-style relationships. Westernization of the home indicates a move from feudal relations, associated with obligation and hierarchy, to democratic relations, characterized by choice" (Tobin, 1992, p. 107). Hirakawa asserts that "a considerable number of middle-class Japanese women do desire to live beyond the prescribed role of homebound mother/wife" (2004, p. 435). They want to be free from the obligation of bearing children and taking care of the house. Instead, more Japanese women want to find self-actualization beyond mere maternal roles.

> …the latest research findings also indicate that the image of the self-sacrificing, nurturing mother may no longer fit a majority of young

mothers now in the middle of their childbearing years… research on young mothers in their twenties and thirties indicates that this new generation does not necessarily subscribe to the believe that *kodomo ga ikigai* (my child is my *raison d'être)* (Robertson, 2005, p. 133).

By rejecting traditional feminist roles women are straying from conventional Japanese ways. They wish for the equality and independence that the West gives and because "Japanese masculinity has become more and more directly linked to corporate employment", the conventional custom of having one career for the rest of their lives probably would not appeal to them (Robertson, 2005, p. 131).

When I observed Japanese girls during my time abroad, I saw that some were still financially and socially dependent upon their boyfriends, most likely stemming from Japan's consumer culture. However, I did have Japanese friends that were independent; they were living on their own in Japan or have studied abroad by themselves in the United States. Perhaps the dependency is beginning to dwindle with the combination of individualism and a growing need for equality.

Furthermore, although my surveys indicated that most mothers of the Japanese youth culture of the 2000s were housewives, it is important to remember that it is difficult for people to break out of the highly-patterned culture of Japan. In Japan, society expects people to abide by "the security of group-belonging, and men and women are relegated to separate spheres – men to the workplace, and women to the home" (Hirakawa, 2004, p. 428).

A Salaryman's Version of Expressionism?

As the number of Japanese women wanting to be more independent increases, Japanese men are beginning to heed to their wishes. In addition to this, the burdensome life of a salarymen exhausts them. As a result, the traditional custom of lifelong employment has become weakened.

> The growing expression of dissatisfaction on the part of women has resonated in the hearts of many men precisely because so many issues that need to be dealt with have been building up among men themselves. One such issue is that of *karoshi*, or 'death resulting from overwork' (Fujimura-Fanselow, 1995, p. 249).

Japanese husbands were beginning to reevaluate their lives during the 1990s. A number of salarymen, civil workers, and teachers who wanted to redirect their lives while breaking down gender stereotypes founded an

organization called Men Concerned about Child Care (Fujimura-Fanselow, 1995, p. 250). Instead of allowing their wives to assume the traditional feminine role in the house, these men took on household responsibilities such as raising the children or doing chores. Similar to the Japanese youth culture and their need for freedom and individuality, for these Japanese working men, "spending time with family and friends and doing what they personally enjoy is more important to them than work-related activities. Thus, they rarely put in overtime at work and do not hesitate to take vacations" (Fujimura-Fanselow, 1995, p. 251).

These salarymen seem to be exerting their own type of expressionism. By making choices based upon their own wants, the company has come second. With a gradually-growing loyalty for one's family, and the rejection "of a gender-based division of labor", the male-dominated system of lifelong employment will fall by the wayside (Fujimura-Fanselow, 1995, p. 251).

Although the men that share these views are still a "small minority within Japanese society… they are beginning to have some impact on [others]" (Fujimura-Fanselow, 1995, p. 253). As time progresses with more women's movements and more Japanese men becoming aware of human rights and equality, perhaps the society of Japan will give women more sovereignty in the home as well as the workplace.

VII. Conclusion

Is the tradition of lifelong employment on the road to extinction? Will the once-venerated Japanese salarymen die out along with it? With all of these factors going against them – consumerism, individualism, expressionism, new values and attitudes among the Japanese youth culture, a poor economy, and gender issues – it seems very possible. Through various literature and my surveys, it is evident that there are attitudes among some young Japanese that conflict with the Confucian values that perpetuate the tradition of lifelong employment. Furthermore, the global economic crisis has forced many Japanese companies to rethink their hiring strategies, thus contributing to the change.

Some scholars such as Wolff believe that the system of lifelong employment will soon be wiped out altogether. He cites Moriguchi and Ono, who concluded with a survey in 2002 that more than half of eight hundred Japanese companies could no longer guarantee lifelong employment for their workers (Wolff, 2008, p. 67). From the 1960s to the year 2000, Japanese corporations were able to sustain the system of lifelong employment via deployments to other office branches (Wolff, 2008, p. 68). However, it was around the 1990s that Japanese firms became more reluctant to offer their workers employment for life,

thus marking the "'death' or deinstitutionalization of lifelong employment" (Wolff, 2008, p. 54).

Although some may say that the tradition of lifelong employment and the salarymen of Japan will stay alive with a few conservative firms, this is debatable; if those companies want to stay alive and grow, they will probably have to make a few changes along with many other Japanese corporations that downsized their labor force. With a depressed economy, employees with dwindling dedication, an individualistic youth culture lacking Confucian values, and Japanese women rejecting traditional gender roles, the gradual extinction of the lifelong employment and the age of the Japanese salarymen are imminent.

VIII. Epilogue

The decline of the traditional employment system, despite its gradual occurrence, represents a significant shift in Japanese culture and society. Essentially, this shift illustrates a change in the Japanese population; an increasing amount of Japanese are leaning toward values pertaining to global citizenship. The younger generations of Japan, who are interested in pursuing career paths that are meaningful to them, have the opportunity to exercise more freedom compared to the restriction of one company. With this, they have more flexibility, creativity, and consequently, a greater proclivity to diversity. This mindset allows Japanese youth to find motivation to explore other cultures or languages. One of the students I surveyed in 2009 had a great interest in the German language. It was not for the purpose of Japanese nationalism or for her company, but for her own pursuit. By delving into the German language and culture, she was being a global citizen. Increased intra-cultural communication among the Japanese youth overall compared to older generations illustrates an increased inclination towards global citizenship.

Haffner, Klett, and Lehmann capture Japan's post-modern situation regarding global citizenship perfectly by saying, "The Japanese people - in the sense of 127 million individual Japanese, as opposed to the "one nation" Japan - would be on the whole much happier, more self-fulfilled... They would also be far better globally integrated" (2009, p. 14). With the Japanese youth considering more career options and individualism, the result is more global Japanese citizens to foster better connections with other nations in the international community.

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