Section 5: Educational Systems and the Redruitment of Elites

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Education and Elite Recruitment in Japan*

Abstract
Japan's educational system is known as one of the most competitive, efficient, and successful among the industrialized countries. Although meritocratic selection through rigorous entrance examinations should result in the best being chosen, I show that meritocratic recruitment actually leads to class and gender stratification and auto-recruitment. Since Japan has maintained a strict system of educational credentialism, we still find a reasonable link between educational performance and the allocation of elite positions despite the rapid growth of higher education. Networks such as academic cliques created during the years spent at one of the few elite universities tie the elites together and serve as a cornerstone of elite unity and cooperation.

I. Introduction

Within the social sciences, there is a general agreement that formal education is an indispensable prerequisite for filling top positions in a given society. Education is therefore the most important factor influencing the individual life chances. Thus, it has always been elitist in a certain way. In traditional societies, participation in higher education and membership in the elite was mainly hereditary, and noble birth was the rule. During the nineteenth century, the main change that occurred in the way the industrializing societies trained its elites was that meritocracy became the basis for their recruitment, and education and success in exams have become major criteria for selection.

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In Japan, a modern system of higher education was introduced during the Meiji Period (1868-1912),[1] when the Meiji government founded the country's first university in 1877. Until the turn of the century, the overwhelming majority of students came from the former noble samurai class.[2] After World War II, the Japanese education system was entirely revised and democratized under the Allied Occupation (1945-52). By the 1980s, Japan's educational system was praised as the most competitive, efficient, and successful in the world.[3] Entrance in one of the nation's top universities is based on strict entrance examinations and only a few each year succeed in being admitted to those universities, whose graduates are sought after by the big companies and the ministerial bureaucracy. However, as can be shown in dozens of studies on elites and education in Western societies, the limits of meritocracy lie in the links between social class, gender, and educational success, and between social class, gender, and access to higher social positions.

This paper investigates the nature of the relationship between the recruitment of elites and education in Japan. In the first part, I analyze the post-war development of higher education with an emphasis on the rapid growth of higher education within Japanese society, explain the Japanese system of elite institutions of higher education, and examine the process of incorporation of Japan's national universities, which was carried out quite recently. Next, the paper turns its attention to the issue of access to elite education with regard to the variables of "ability", "class", and "gender". Finally, I analyze the links between education and career and the role of education in view of the molding of a national elite.

II. Post-war development of higher education

II.1. Organization of the Japanese school system and the growth of higher education

As a part of the democratic reforms of the Allied Occupation, the Japanese educational system was completely reorganized. The reforms were implemented to overhaul the pre-war nationalist system and to introduce democratic education. Three documents in particular, the Fundamental

[1] Name of the Meiji emperor's reign. The Meiji era began with the Meiji Restoration of 1868, which marked the beginning of the Japanese society's modernization.

[2] See H. R. Kerbo and J. A. McKinstry, *Who Rules Japan? The Inner Circles of Economic and Political Power*, Westport, London 1995, 139.

[3] See for example S. Nobuo, *Adaptation and Education in Japa* , New York 1979 or W. K. Cummings, *Education and Equality in Japan*, Princeton 1980.

Law of Education (Kyôiku kihon hô), the School Education Law (Gakkô kyôiku hô), and the new constitution (Nihon koku kenpô), all adopted in 1947, provided the legal basis of the system. The school system, from elementary schools to high schools, was structurally rationalized and unified into a new educational system. The varying types of higher educational institutions were consolidated into a single four-year university system in 1949, thus making the final changes to the core of the new 6-3-3-4 education system (six years elementary school, three years middle school, three years high school and four years university). Education is compulsory for all schoolchildren from the first through the ninth grades (middle school). The junior college system (two years) was established on a provisional basis in 1950 and on a permanent basis in 1964, following an amendment to the School Education Law. Outside the sphere of universities and colleges, a large number of unregulated, private commercial schools (senshû gakkô) run vocation-orientated courses for those who have completed high school but who are unable or unwilling to gain admission to universities and colleges (see Figure 1).

Grade				
16, 15			4-Year University (daigaku)	Higher Education
14, 13	Private Commerical Schools (senshû gakkô)	2-Year Junior College (tanki daigaku)	4-Year University (daigaku)	Higher Education
12, 11, 10	Vocational	High School (kôtô gakkô)	Academic	Upper Secondary Education
9, 8, 7	Middle Schools (chûgakkô) (compulsory)			Lower Secondary Education
6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1	Primary Schools (shôgakkô) (compulsory)			Elementary Education
	Kindergarten (yôchien)			Pre-School Education

Fig. 1: Overview of the school system in Japan.Source: Own compilation based on: K. Okano and T. Motonori, Education in Contemporary Japan, Cambridge 1999, 43 and MEXT 2008: http://www.mext.go.jp/english/org/f_formal.htm. Note: Figure simplified; for details see MEXT 2008.

On the General Headquarters (GHQ) of the Allied Powers' request, the government decided to establish at least one national university in each prefecture in order to avoid concentrating national universities in large urban areas and thereby ensuring that everybody would have equal access to higher education.

The present education system is characterized by the coexistence of the three sectors of higher education institutions – governmental (national), public (local), and private – with the government making a massive investment in the national sector.[4] While a minuscule one percent of Japanese elementary schools are private, the figure rises to 6% for middle schools, and reaches 24 % among high schools (see Table 1).

2004	**N=**	**%**
Elementary schools	***23,420***	***100.0***
National	*73*	*0.3*
Public	*23,160*	*98.9*
Private	*187*	*0.8*
Middle schools	***11,102***	***100.0***
National	*76*	*0.7*
Public	*10,317*	*92.9*
Private	*709*	*6.4*
High schools	***5,429***	***100.0***
National	*15*	*0.3*
Public	*4,093*	*75.4*
Private	*1,321*	*24.3*

Table 1: Number of schools by sector (in 2004) Source: http://www.stat.go.jp/data/nenkan/zuhyou/y2201000.xls. Note: Percentage own estimation.

Compulsory education through middle school is free for all schoolchildren. If a child attends private institutions, however, tuition fees are charged, varying from institution to institution. According to an estimation of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), the average cost of private institutions from kindergarten to university graduation (except elementary schools) is twice as much as for a student attending only public or national institutions (see Figure 2).

[4] Major changes occurred after the implementation of the university reform in 2004. For details see Chap. 2.3., and C. Schmidt, "University Reform in Japan: A Model for the 21st Century?," in: G. Szell (ed.), *Education, Science and Labour: Perspectives for the 21st Century*, Frankfurt/ M. 2007, 139-170.

57.7% in 1960 to 91.9% in 1975. In recent years, the percentage leveled off at about 96%. The percentage of students continuing on to university has increased steadily to around 42% in 2004, but this has let to an decrease in the number of those advancing from high school to junior college during the 1990s (see Table 2). Compared to other advanced nations, Japan does not maintain many graduate students. In 2004, 11.4% of the students who graduated from a university enrolled at a graduate school.[6]

Year	*Advancing to high school*	*Advancing to junior college*	*Advancing to university*
1960	*57.7*	*2.1*	*8.2*
1965	*70.7*	*4.1*	*12.8*
1970	*82.1*	*6.5*	*17.1*
1975	*91.9*	*11.0*	*26.7*
1980	*94.2*	*11.3*	*26.1*
1985	*93.8*	*11.1*	*26.5*
1990	*94.4*	*11.7*	*24.6*
1995	*95.8*	*13.1*	*32.1*
2000	*95.9*	*9.4*	*39.7*
2004	*96.3*	*-**	*42.4*

*Table 2: Education continuance rate 1960-2004 (in %)Source: Japan Almanac 2003 (Tokyo 2002), 228, and Japan Almanac 2006 (Tokyo 2005), 235. Note: * Figure for 2004 unknown.*

In response to higher education's rapid growth, corresponding changes occurred within the university structure, particularly in private universities. Since the 1960s, the number of private universities and junior colleges has grown markedly. This development has led to a sharp increase in their student enrollment as a percentage of the total student population: Students enrolled at private universities and junior colleges rose from 64.4% for universities and 78.7% for junior colleges in 1960 to 76.4% for universities and 91.2% for junior colleges in 1975.[7] In 2005, out of 726

6 See *Japan Almanac* 2006, Tokyo 2005, 235.

7 See J. Oba, "Incorporation of National Universities in Japan: Reform towards the enhancement of autonomy in search of excellence", in: *Organization Reforms and University Governance: Autonomy and Accountability 11* (2004), 1-29, 4.

universities, only 12% were national and 11.8% were public institutions. The overwhelming majority (76.2%) were private institutions of higher education, where three quarter of all students was enrolled (see Table 3).

Year	*Number of universities*	*in %*	*Students enrolled*	*in %*
1985	*460*	-	-	-
1990	*507*	-	-	-
1995	*565*	-	-	-
2000	*650*	-	-	-
2002	*686*	-	-	-
2003	*699*	-	-	-
2004	*708*	-	-	-
2005	*726*	*100*	*2,865,067*	*100*
- National	*87*	*12.0*	*627,851*	*21.9*
- Public	*86*	*11.8*	*124,910*	*4.4*
- Private	*553*	*76.2*	*2,112,306*	*73.7*

Table 3: Number of universities by sector 1985-2004 Source: http://www.stat.go.jp/data/nenkan/zuhyou/y2305000.xls and Japan Almanac 2006, 234. Note: Percentage: own estimation.

The rapid growth of the private school system gave rise to a serious problem of lack of adequate financing for private universities. Governmental financing of private schools in the form of loans began in 1952, when the Private School Promotion Association was established as a channel through which the government invested money on behalf of private institutions. Since that time, the government has drawn up an annual plan to provide financial assistance via this channel.[8]

The costs for national universities are much lower than those for private universities. While the national universities collect standardized entrance and tuition fees for their undergraduate courses (282,000 Yen entrance fees and 535,800 Yen tuition fees in 2006), the costs for private universities vary by university and subject and are much higher than the costs for national universities.[9] In 2004, the private universities collected average tuition fees of 817,952 Yen. Over the years, however, the gap between the costs for national and private universities has narrowed. In 1975 the fees

8 See Oba, "Incorporation", 4-5.

9 The private Waseda University e.g. collects entrance fees of Yen 290,000 and tuition fees between 732,000 (law, social sciences etc.) and 1,069,000 Yen for natural sciences, Keiô University collects entrance fees of Yen 340,000 and tuition fees between 710,000 (law, literature etc.) and 2,870,000 (medicine)The costs for each university in Japan can be researched at <http://passnavi.evidus.com/dai>.

for private universities were five times as high as the costs for national universities. Today, they are only 1.5 times the costs for national institutions (Figure 3).

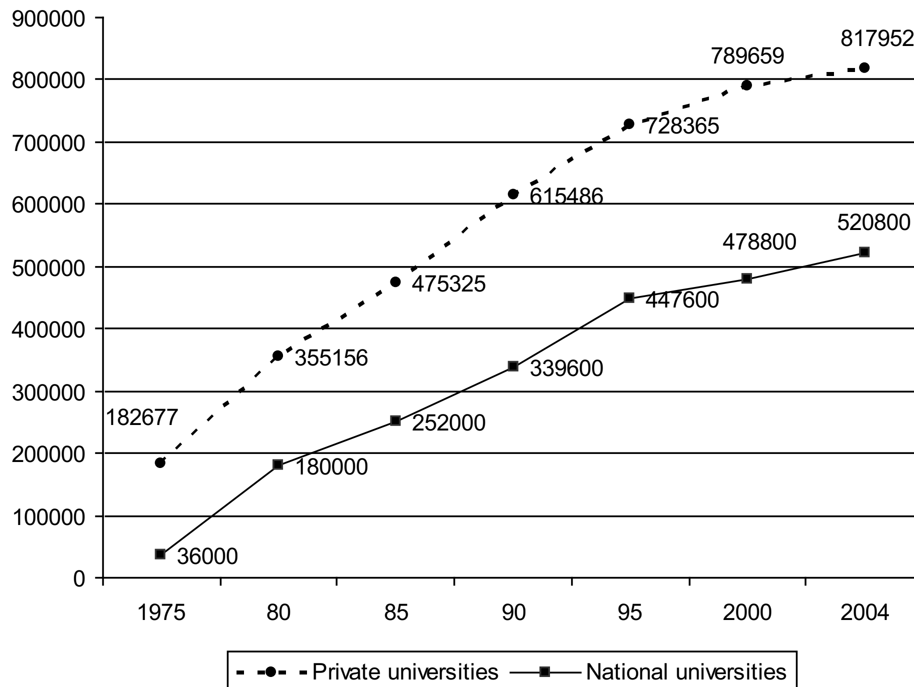

Fig. 3: Tuition fees (in Yen) for national and private universities 1975-2004 in comparison (average) Source: Japan Almanac 2006: 236.

II.2 The system of elite universities

The growth of higher education in Japan is comparable to other advanced societies where universal literacy leads to societies of "compulsory higher education." In many Western societies university degrees are in danger of losing their distinctive powers with respect to access to higher positions.[10] Japan's educational system has, conversely, maintained a strict system of credentialism and there is a rather definite and well-known rank order of universities based on the specific university's reputation. With few exceptions, the most respected universities in Japan are national ones. The three top national universities with regard to status are Tokyo University (Tôdai), Kyoto University (Kyôdai), and Hitotsubashi University. Keiô University and Waseda University head the list of the most respected private universities.

[10] See R. Kreckel, "Education, knowledge and social differentiation: new elites and new inequalities?," Paper presented at the 17th Congress of the European Sociological Association in Torun (Poland), 13-16.9.2005: 1-16: <http://www.soziologie.uni-halle.de/kreckel/docs/elite.pdf>. (17.8.2006).

The University of Tokyo, and especially its Faculty of Law, is by far the most prestigious institution of higher education in Japan. The university was founded and run by the Meiji government in 1877 for the selection and training of a modern elite, which at that time primarily meant the ministerial bureaucracy. During this time, the emperor himself appeared each year to present gifts to stress the university's importance for elite selection.[11]

Kyoto University, located in the Kansai area in western Japan, was founded in 1897 as the second institution of the Imperial University System. From its inception, Kyôdai had a less conventional, conformist, and conservative reputation than its counterpart Tôdai in the Kantô region.

Hitotsubashi University, the smallest of Japan's elite universities, was privately established in 1875 as the Institute for Business Training. The founder of this Institute was Mori Arinori (1847-1889), who was later to become the first Minister of Education. In 1885, the institute came under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and became a national institution of higher learning.

Waseda University was founded by Ôkuma Shigenobu (1838-1922), a prominent Meiji area politician, in 1882. Therefore, Waseda has always been an important source of recruitment for diet members.[12] In 1890, Tsubouchi Shôyô (1859-1935), a pioneer of modern Japanese culture, established the Department of Literature. For this reason Waseda's literature program is particularly famous, and it counts famous authors among its graduates.[13]

Keiô University grew out of Keiô gijuku, founded by an outstanding thinker of the Meiji Period, Fukuzawa Yukichi (1834-1901), in 1858. It was granted the status of university in 1890. In contrast to Ôkuma, Fukuzawa disdained government service and his school has long been identified with the private sector, especially big business.[14]

11 See Kerbo and McKinstry, *Who rules Japan*, 138.

12 Out of 27 postwar prime ministers five are Waseda alumni: Ishibashi Tanzan (PM 1956-1957), Takeshita Noboru (PM 1987-1989), Kaifu Toshiki (PM 1989-1991), Obuchi Keizô (PM 1998-2000), and Mori Yoshirô (PM 2000-2001).

13 For example Edogawa Ranpo (1894-1965), Kunikida Doppo (1871-1908), Ibuse Masuji (1898-1993) or Murakami Haruki (*1949) are alumni of Waseda.

14 For the history of the universities, see D. B. Ramsdell, *The Japanese Diet: Stability and Change in the Japanese House of Representatives, 1890-1990*, Lanham 1992, 69 and the homepages of the respective university.

The performance of the "Big Five"[15] can be compared to that of Oxford and Cambridge in England, which grant degrees to an average of approximately 5% of all Britain's undergraduates yearly.[16] In the case of Japan's "Big Five," this ratio is around 5.5%. Japan's top university, the University of Tokyo, produces only roughly one percent of all of Japan's university graduates each year, and its Faculty of Law just a mere 0.1% (see Table 4). It is worth noting that with the exception of Kyôdai all of Japan's elite universities are located in Tokyo, which clearly undermines the original idea to ensure equal access to the institutions of higher learning by avoiding the concentration in large urban areas.

University	***Overall****	***in %***
Tôdai (Faculty of Law)	*28,103 (1665)*	*1.0 (0.1)*
Kyôdai and Hitotsubashi	*25,903*	*0.9*
Waseda and Keiô	*100,178*	*3.6*
N elite universities=	*154,184*	*5.5*
N others=	*2,631,894*	*94.5*
N overall=	***2,786,078***	***100.0***

*Table 4: Number and percentage of students at the "Big Five" universities in 2002. Source: Number of students at elite universities (in 2002): The World of Learning 2003 (London and New York, 2002), 940, 953, 985, 1010, 1025. Number of students overall: Japan Almanac 2003: 227. Percentage: Own estimation. Note: * Including students at graduate schools.*

Despite Japan's strict hierarchical order of elite universities, the nation's top universities scarcely appear among the world's top universities. The Academic Ranking of World Universities, compiled by researchers from Shanghai Jiao Tong University, lists only two Japanese universities among the world's top-50 universities in 2006: Tokyo University, ranked 19th and Kyoto University, ranked 22nd. [17]

The Times Higher Education Supplement, an annual report on world rankings, largely based on a 'peer review' system of 1000 academics in

[15] R. L. Cutts, *An Empire of Schools: Japan's Universities and the Molding of a National Power Elite*, Armonk, London 1997, 5.

[16] See M. Hartmann, *Topmanager: Die Rekrutierung einer Elite*, Frankfurt/M. and New York 1996, 167.

[17] The ranks can be researched at: Shanghai Jiao Tong University (ed.), *Academic Ranking of World Universities,* 2006. <http://ed.sjtu.edu.cn/rank/2006/ARWU2006_Top100.htm>. (19.10.2006).

various fields and published by The Times of London, also lists only two Japanese universities among the Top 50 in 2006: the University of Tokyo, ranked 12th and Kyoto University, ranked 29th.[18] The poor performance of the nation's elite universities might have been one reason for reforming the nation's higher educational sector.

II.3. University Reform

Quite recently, the Japanese educational system underwent fundamental changes. In April 2004, all national universities became "independent administrative corporations" (dokuritsu gyôsei hôjin). Even though the majority of persons concerned with universities acknowledge that there was need for reform, there has been criticism of the reform as well.[19]

Since the inauguration of the reform, each national university is responsible for its own budget, staffing, and other matters. The universities are required to file action plans with the MEXT, which will allocate funding according to the performance achieved by each university in relation to this plan. Management methods of the private sector were introduced into the national universities, and a competitive mechanism with third-party evaluation was adopted. Further, a system of outside specialists within newly created administrative councils was introduced to reflect opinions from society.[20] This transformation is expected to increase competition among national, public, and private universities, a situation that should work towards enhancing standards at all institutions. Further, it is expected that industry-university co-operation will be boosted with regard to technological inventions.[21]

18 For the complete list see: The Times (ed.), *The Times Higher Education Supplement* (2006). <http://images.thetimes.co.uk/TGD/picture/0,,157854,00.jpg>.

19 A survey among personnel and students of Hokkaido University in 2000 for example shows that 63 percent of the pollees expressed a need for reform but 70% answered that they opposed the proposed reform package. For details see Hokkaidô daigaku, ed., Dokuritsu gyôsei hôjin mondai ankêto chûkan matome [Mid-term summary of the survey concerning the problem of independent administrative agencies] (2000) http://www.geocities.co.jp/CollegeLifeCafe/3141/dgh/hu-iken/index.html (7.8.2006), Q1/ (3) and Q6/ (3).

20 For details on the reform see: Study Team Concerning the Transformation of National Universities into Independent Administrative Corporations (ed.), *Final Report of 'A New Image of National University Corporations* (2002). <http://www.mext.go.jp/english/news/2003/07/03120301/004.htm> (25.5.2006) and MEXT (ed.), *Legislation of "the National University Corporation Law"* (2003). <http://www.mext.go.jp/english/news/2003/07/03120301.htm> (25.7.2006).

21 See Oba, "Incorporation", 25.

One critical issue is financing, especially with regard of the system of disbursing "operational expense grants" to each national university corporation by the state. Through the application of an "efficiency coefficient" imposed by the Ministry of Education and Science, the "operational expense grants" are in fact automatically reduced every year by one percent. Therefore, some universities may have severe problems in the future, especially with regard to personnel expenses and facility and equipment expenses, and may have to seek to multiply their resources for additional income by increasing donations, developing entrepreneurial activities, including commissioned research and adult education programs, and so on.[22]

In December 2004, the cabinet approved the government's draft of the 2005 national budget that included an increase in the student standard payment amount. Because of this decision, each national university corporation was forced to increase their tuition fees for each student, including that of already existing students, by around 15,000 yen beginning in April 2005. With the exception of a few national university corporations, the tuition increase became compulsory.

In fact, incorporation of public universities and enhancement of institutional autonomy are a worldwide trend. Governments rely more and more on the market to encourage greater responsiveness from the higher education system. In the case of Japan, state financing still dominates, and so does state control over university budgets, even though the universities are "free" to allocate other sources of revenue to avoid financial shortage.

The outcome of the university reform package cannot yet be measured empirically because it was introduced quite recently, but it surely will not blur the boundaries between elite and non-elite universities. As the review of the outside specialists within Tokyo University's Administrative Council reveals, the university can rely on persons such as the Chairman of the Board of Directors of Toyota Motors and former Chairman of the Japan Business Federation (Nihon keidanren), who is often called the prime minister of business, and is perhaps the most powerful corporate leader in the country, if not the most powerful man in the nation.[23] Further, the board includes the president of one of the most important national newspapers,

[22] See M. Iwasaki, *The Deception of the 'Idea of Self-Responsibility' and 'Individualization' – Neo-liberal Rhetoric as Revealed in the Corporatization of Japan's National Universities,* Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 2005, unpublished article, 8, and Oba, "Incorporation", 24.

[23] See Kerbo and McKinstry, *Who rules Japan*, 145.

Asahi shinbun, the president of Japan's national broadcasting corporation NHK, and the president of Sumitomo Chemical Corporation. In comparison with this impressive membership, the outside members of Hiroshima University are, for example, more local elites, such as the president of the local Chûgoku newspaper, the President of the Board of Education of Hiroshima Prefecture, and the Chairman of the Chûgoku Economic Federation.[24] With regard to additional financing and industry-university co-operation, we can assume that Tôdai's situation is better than Hiroshima University's and that the discrepancies between elite and non-elite universities will widen instead of narrowing.

III. Access to elite education in Japan

III.1. Exam Hell and the Importance of Private Institutions

As mentioned earlier, entrance to one of the prestigious universities is based upon strict achievement tests. Each spring, entrance examinations are held in all universities during the same weekend. Thus, a student must decide which university he or she has a chance to enter. Usually students prepare for these examinations at private cram schools (juku) well in advance, which can cost from $2000 to $20,000 a year – or more.[25] If a student fails in his first attempt he becomes a rônin, the old term for a leaderless samurai, and can study at private cram schools for next year's exam. About one quarter of those taking the exam for major universities are rônin, some for even a second or third year. Thus, becoming a rônin is not uncommon and the process requires money and much family support.[26]

The elite universities do not even accept all applicants for their entrance examinations. In the case of Tôdai, in spring 2005 14,274 persons applied for entrance examination. Among these persons 9,422 were selected for participation in the examinations (66 %) out of which 3,102 examinees

[24] For a complete list of the outside members of the Administrative Council of Tôkyô University see: <http://www.u-tokyo.ac.jp/gen01/b02_05_j.html>. For Hiroshima University see: <http://www.hiroshima-u.ac.jp/top/uneijyoho/p_bb3544.html>.

[25] See Kerbo/ McKinstry, Who rules Japan, 149. We should bear in mind that around 40% of the students advance to four-year universities for which reason about half of the Japanese youth go through „exam hell". However, the remaining half makes no preparations for university entrance examinations and is less achievement-driven and more practical. See S. Yoshio, *An Introduction to Japanese Society*, Cambridge 2003, 118-119.

[26] See D. Lee Stevenson and D. P. Baker, „Shadow education and allocation in formal schooling: transition to university in Japan", in: *American Journal of Sociology 97* (1992), 1639-1657.

were successful (20.1% out of all applicants) and made their way into Tôdai.[27] Much depends on the students' curriculum before applying for the examinations, which means that university entrance begins much earlier in life. Thus, the examinations for entering the "right" high school are almost as important as the university entrance exams.

As a result of universities' hierarchical order, Japanese high schools are ranked according to their record for sending students on to prestigious universities. Every spring, the weekly magazines publish a list ranking high schools according to their number of students entering each of the top universities.[28] Today the overwhelming majority of high schools with a good reputation are costly private institutions. As can be seen from appendix A1, in 1957 seven out of the top ten schools with the best record of sending pupils to Tôdai were public. By 1965, their share shrank to five, and in 1985, only one out of ten was public. Since the 1990s, no public school has been found among the top ten. Furthermore, in 1957 eight of the top-ten high schools were mixed schools for both sexes while in 2005 only one mixed school and one girl's school (Ôin High School in Tokyo) are represented. The others were for boys only.

In 2005, the private Kaisei (boys) High School in Tokyo heads the list of those who passed the entrance examination for Tokyo University with 166 persons (out of 3102). In Western Japan the private Nada (boys) High School in Kobe was most successful, sending 100 students to Tôdai.[29] Given that in 2004 there were 5,429 high schools throughout Japan the predominance of this limited number of elite schools is extreme even though they do not dominate the education system like Eaton or Harrow in Great Britain.[30] Nevertheless, it is also quite clear that parental strategy in avoiding a school with a poor reputation is most important. Much depends on the question of whether the parents are motivated to get the son or

[27] Own estimation based on <http://www.u-tokyo.ac.jp/stu03/e08_01_e.html>.

[28] In case of 2005 see e.g. Shûkan asahi, "Zenkoku 1000 kôkô no shuyô daigaku gôkakusha kazu"[Number of successful candidates from 1000 high schools who passed the entrance examinations for leading universities], 4/ 15 (2005): 37-56, for 2006 see Sandê mainichi,"Zenkoku yûmei 1470 kôkô shuyô daigaku gôkakusha kazu" [Number of successful candidates from famous 1470 high schools who passed the entrance examinations for leading universities], 4/ 16 (2006): 94-140.

[29] Source: Figures for schools: <http://www.gakkou.net/cgi-bin/koukou/src.cgi>. Figures for Tôdai: <http://www.u-tokyo.ac.jp/stu04/e09_01_e.html>. Percentages: own estimation. See also appendix Table A1.

[30] Out of all successful candidates who passed the entrance examination of Tôdai their share was 5.4% for Kaisei high school and 3.2% for Nada high school.

daughter to the prestigious institutions of higher education and have the money to do so. In the case of Nada's 149 candidates who took part in the entrance examination for the school in 2006, only 16 came from Kobe, the location of the high school. The others came from other prefectures, esp. from Eastern Japan (see Appendix A2). Those students from other regions live away from home in costly apartments.

Similar to the university entrance examinations, students also prepare for schools' entrance examinations.[31] In 2002, 15.1 % of elementary school second year students and nearly 50% of lower secondary second year students attended a private cram school. Even though a simple comparison between the data of 1993 and 2002 is not possible, as the methodology changed in 2001, the increase in the percentage of students attending cram schools is quite remarkable (see Figure 4). This gave rise to an enormous increase in the costs of children's education. The costs of higher education are borne by parents to a greater extent in Japan than in most other industrialized countries, and scholarship support is less extensive in Japan.[32]

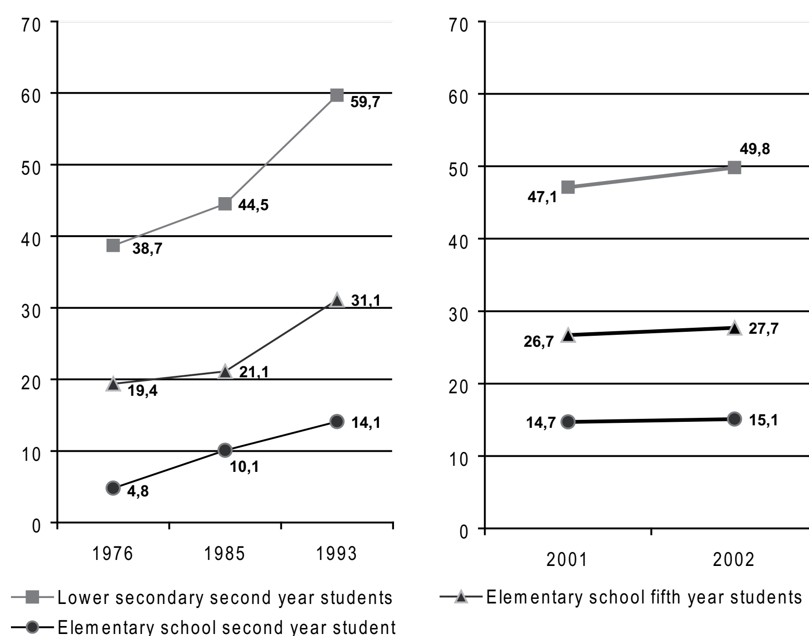

Fig. 4: Trends in percentage of students attending private cram schools (7, 10 and 13-year-olds). Source: MEXT, Japan's Education at a glance, 15. Note: A simple comparison is not possible as the methodology changed in 2001.

31 In fact "exam hell" can start earlier. There are private preschools with reasonably good reputations, which are attached to private institutions. Thus, there are examinations to get into preschool as well as preschool cram schools to prepare for the examinations. If a pupil gets in such a preschool, the track is set through university. See Kerbo/ McKinstry, Who rules Japan, note 348.

32 See M. C. Brinton, *Women and the Economic Miracle: Gender and Work in Postwar Japan*, Berkeley, Los Angeles 1993, 196.

Money is therefore the most important requirement for entering a prestigious university. As the Tokyo University Students Survey reveals, the average yearly income of students' families falls between the top 10 percent of the entire population and the next 10 percent. It can be safely claimed that the majority of Tokyo University students come from the country's wealthiest families (see Table 5).

Year	***Average yearly income of Tokyo University students' family***	***Average yearly income of decile groups of the whole population in Japan***		
		top 10%	***next 10%***	***following 10%***
1987	*872*	*1163*	*842*	-
1988	*911*	*1340*	*879*	-
1989	*916*	*1448*	*911*	-
1990	*1016*	*1530*	*962*	-
1991	*1073*	*1655*	*1023*	-
1993	*1049*	*1728*	*1088*	-
1994	*1092*	*1768*	*1103*	*919*
1995	*1095*	*1757*	*1101*	*921*

Table 5: Yearly income of the family of Tokyo University students (unit: 10,000 Yen) Source: M. Watanabe "Class Differences and Educational Opportunities in Japan," Hitotsubashi Journal of Social Studies 29 (1997): 49-71, 65. Note: Calculation based on Tokyo University Students Survey and the Family Income and Expenditure Survey.

The examination-oriented culture of the Japanese educational system gives priority to pupils' capacities to memorize facts, numbers, and events and solve mathematical and scientific equations and attaches little importance to the development of creative thinking. Rote learning and repeated drilling are therefore the predominant characteristics of Japan's education.[33]

Inside Japan, criticisms of the excessive nature of the highly competitive entrance examinations and concerns about related problems like the increasing incidence of bullying, school refusal, and suicides among youngsters grew steadily during the 1980s and 90s.[34] As a result, there has been a call for school reform.

The Ministry of Education has been working since 1995 on developing concepts for an "education of the 21st century." After years of deliberating, the Ministry introduced new guidelines in 2002 that established, for

[33] See Sugimoto, An Introduction, 120.

[34] See Kaori Okano and Motonori Tsuchiya, *Education in Contemporary Japan: Inequality and Diversity*, New York, Melbourne, 1999, 194-238.

example, a five-day system with no classes held on Saturdays or Sundays, with the intention of providing pupils with more free time outside school. The guidelines further emphasized that pupils' achievements should be measured not only by terms of "results" but also "processes." This change, however, has provided the cram schools with an opportunity to expand their lessons to the free weekend. Thus it simply produced a shift from the formal school system to the commercial sector.[35]

III.2. Gender and education

It is not only a family's income that determines educational opportunities in Japan but also gender. Even though the high school continuation rate is equally distributed between the sexes, college and university education differ markedly. Table 6 shows the distribution for male and female students at two-year junior colleges and universities in comparison. Women are dominating at junior colleges, which are seen as a good opportunity to "bridge the time until marriage",[36] while male students dominate at four-year universities.

	Advancing to junior college			*Advancing to four year university*		
Year	***Overall***	***Male***	***Female***	***Overall***	***Male***	***Female***
1960	*2.1*	*1.2*	*3.0*	*8.2*	*13.7*	*2.5*
1965	*4.1*	*1.7*	*6.7*	*12.8*	*20.7*	*4.6*
1970	*6.5*	*2.0*	*11.2*	*17.1*	*27.3*	*6.5*
1975	*11.0*	*2.6*	*19.9*	*26.7*	*40.4*	*12.5*
1980	*11.3*	*2.0*	*21.0*	*26.1*	*39.3*	*12.3*
1985	*11.1*	*1.7*	*22.2*	*26.5*	*38.6*	*13.7*
1990	*11.7*	*2.1*	*24.6*	*24.6*	*33.4*	*15.2*
1995	*13.1*	*1.9*	*17.2*	*32.1*	*40.7*	*22.9*
2000	*9.4*	*1.8*	*15.8*	*39.7*	*47.5*	*31.5*
2005	*-**	*-**	*-**	*42.4*	*49.3*	*35.2*

*Table 6: Participation rates of males and females at junior colleges and universities in comparison Source: Japan Almanac 2003: 228 and Japan Almanac 2006: 235. Note: * Figure for 2005 unknown.*

Due to an overall value change among women in Japan in recent times, we can see a change in this trend. Particularly since the beginning of the

[35] See Sugimoto, An Introduction, 21, 130.

[36] See I. Teruoka, „Gedämpfter Optimismus: Frauen auf dem Weg zur Gleichberechtigung", in: R. Linhart and F. Wöss (eds.), *Nippons neue Frauen*, Reinbeck 1990, 93-103, 93-94.

90s, the percentage of female students continuing on to university has increased markedly, but this has let to a decrease in the number of those advancing from high school to junior college. Nevertheless, there is still a gap between the ratio of male and female students continuing to four-year universities.

Gender stratification in higher education occurs not only at the level of the institution (junior college versus university) but also within the ranks of universities. Figure 5 shows the proportions of women in the faculty of law of selected elite universities in 1984 and 2002 in comparison. As it is shown, the proportion of female students has increased over the time, but men dominate the law majors at every university, with Tokyo University demonstrating still the highest degree of sex segregation where male students still make up 82% of law graduates. These figures for the top universities show the extent to which men are still overrepresented, especially at the most prestigious Faculty of Law of Tokyo University, even though we observe an upward trend in the number of female students attending law courses at the nation's top universities.

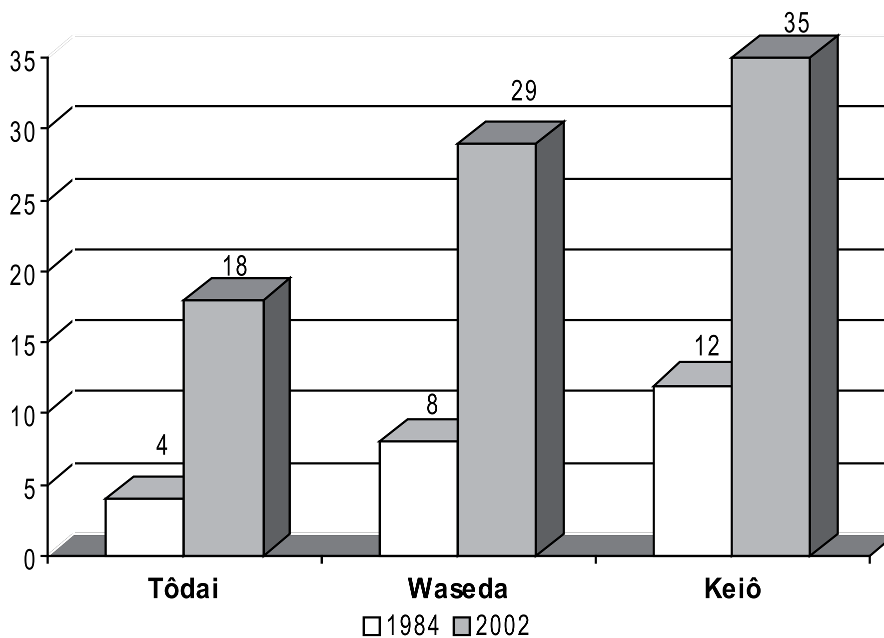

Fig. 5: Share of female law graduates from major Japanese universities 1984 and 2002 in comparison (in %). Source: 1984: Brinton, Women and the Economic Miracle, 203; 2002: Own estimation upon information from the universities.

In Western societies, where a spectacular expansion of women in secondary and higher education has taken place over the past century, the question of whether gender inequality will be reduced over time or whether gendered inequalities in filling top positions will continue to operate remains controversial among social scientists.

In the case of university professorships for example, the rate of women varies between 10% and 21% in the European Union, with an average of only 14% in 2002.[37]

IV. Education and elites

IV.1. Education and career

Large corporations – particularly prestigious ones – only consider applications from students from the most prestigious universities, thus ignoring those from mediocre universities. Corporations begin recruiting Tôdai, Kyôdai, Keiô, Waseda and Hitotsubashi students even before their graduation. Unlike with Oxford and Cambridge graduates in Great Britain, attending an elite university in Japan says very little about the quality of the education. Time spent at university is largely regarded as a holiday, and very little academic work is required to graduate. It is assumed that if students got that far on exam abilities, they have already shown the skills required to adapt to whatever their chosen career may be.[38]

Candidates for elite public service jobs and future politicians are usually also recruited from these universities. Those entering the ministerial bureaucracy, however, must pass entrance examinations. Among those who successfully passed the entrance examinations for the higher civil service, Tôdai graduates clearly head the list, followed by graduates from Kyoto University and Waseda University (Table 7).

	1985-2000			2005	
Rank	University	Persons	Rank	University	Persons
1	Tôdai	7459	1	Tôdai	454
2	Kyôdai	3147	2	Kyôdai	191
3	Waseda	1450	3	Waseda	128
4	Tahoka	1232	4	Hokkaido	74
5	T I T	1217	5	Keiô	73
6	Hokkaido	1184	6	Tôhoku	59
7	Nagoya	855	7	Kyushu	54
8	Kyûshu	838	8	Nagoya	47
9	Keiô	785	9	Osaka	46
10	Osaka	768	10	T I T	45

Table 7: Educational background of persons who successfully passed the entrance examinations for higher civil service between 1985 and 2000 and 2005 in comparison (rank 1-10) Source: http://www.toshin.com/daigakuranking/any_shikaku.html.

[37] See Kreckel, „Education, knowledge and social differentiation", 4, and R. Kreckel, "Mehr Frauen in akademischen Spitzenpositionen: Nur noch eine Frage der Zeit? Zur Entwicklung von Gleichheit und Ungleichheit zwischen den Geschlechtern", in: *Transit. Europäische Revue* 29 (2005): 156-176.

[38] See Cutts, An Empire of Schools, 18.

As a result of the lifetime employment system, the overwhelming majority of Japan's employees spends their entire working career within the same institution or organization and is promoted according to seniority. Only a few percent move from a top position in one sector to a comparable position in another.[39] Persons who fail to move to a top corporation or the ministerial bureaucracy after graduation therefore have no chance to do so thereafter, despite individual achievements in a middle- or small-scale corporation, or as a self-employed businessperson. Thus, education is the most important selection criterion for a future elite position. Exceptions to this are the Japanese politicians. Most of them come to politics late, after other careers, especially in economy and bureaucracy, which is why they reflect the career patterns of these sectors.[40]

IV.2. Educational background of Japan's positional elites

Even though the links between elite education and elite recruitment in Japan are well known, there is no recent empirical study which clearly confirms these assumptions.

The following investigation of the educational background of the Japan's elites is based on a sample of 231 individuals who held 243 positions in five important sectors (politics, bureaucracy, business, [economical] pressure groups, and media) in January 2003.

In accordance with the positional method, which identifies elites as persons who occupy important positions, the members of Japan's elite were defined as the incumbents of powerful positions within the society.[41] Since the most power resides at the very top and the top is most closely interlinked, only the incumbents of top positions within each sector were included to elucidate the link between elite education and the distribution of top positions (Table 8).

39 For details see C. Schmidt, *Japans Zirkel der Macht: Legitimation und Integration einer nationalen Elite*, Marburg 2005, 207-210.

40 See Schmidt, J*apans Zirkel der Macht*, 183-188, and C. Schmidt, „Japan's Circle of Power: Legitimacy and Integration of a National Elite", in: *ASIEN* 96 (2005), 46-67.

41 Even though this method has its shortcomings, it is the one most widely used in determining national elite samples in complex industrial societies because it is the most reliable method and the easiest to apply in practice, since it neither presupposes expert guidance nor requires lengthy decisional studies. See U. Hoffmann-Lange, "Surveying National Elites in the Federal Republic of Germany", in: G. Moyser and M. Wagstaffe (eds.), *Research Methods for Elite Studies*, London, Boston 1987, 27-47, 29-30.

There is broad consensus among scholars that the political, administrative, and economic elites, as well as the pressure groups, are the most influential national players due to their power over the allocation of political, administrative, and monetary resources. The media elite was included as they have the ability to channel information, influence the setting and framing of political and social agendas, and to legitimize or delegitimize certain political, economic, or social groups and ideas. Given the fact that interviewing the incumbents of top positions within Japanese society isn't easily achieved, the data were derived from a wide range of Who is Who publications in Japanese.[42]

Sample	***Positions***	***in %***	***Persons***	***in %***
Politics	*69*	*28.4*	*65*	*28.1*
Bureaucracy	*73*	*30.0*	*72*	*31.2*
Economy	*54*	*22.2*	*51*	*22.1*
Pressure Groups (Economical Pressure Groups)	*21 (18)*	*8.6 (7.4)*	*19 (16)*	*8.2 (6.9)*
Media	*26*	*10.7*	*24*	*10.4*
N=	***243***	***100***	***231***	***100***

Note: In each sector the following positions were included: Politics: positions within the executive power (Prime Minister and cabinet), legislative power (heads of the Lower House committees, the speaker of the Lower House), political parties (the president and secretary general, three top officials of the LDP, LDP faction leaders). Bureaucracy: Heads, aids and chiefs of secretariat within the ministries and offices on ministerial level (jimu jikan, shingikan, kanbô chôkan), heads of the external agencies and commissions (chôkan and iinchô), heads of the National Personnel Authority, the Chief of the Cabinet Legislative Bureau, the President of the Bank of Japan. Economy: Presidents of the 50 most important corporations, including banks (according to firm size by capital); most important insurance companies with a capital higher than the lowest ranked corporation. Pressure Groups: Chairmen of major business organizations (Nihon keidanren, Keizai dôyûkai, Nihon shôkô kaigisho), and in the case of Nihon keidanren, all top executives, the Chairman of the Japan Medical Association, the National Agricultural Co-operative Association, and the most important labor federation, Rengô. Media: Presidents of Japan's core print media (Yomiuri, Asahi, Mainichi, Nikkei, Sankei) and their five affiliated media conglomerates, quality papers Bungei shunju, Sekai, Chûô kôron, the National public service television station NHK, Private TV stations (WOWOW, Sky Perfect), major radio networks (Japan Radio Network, National Radio Network), major press agencies (Kyôdô Press, Jiji Press), major advertising companies (Dentsû, Hakuhôdo).

Table 8: Sample For details on the selection see Schmidt, Japans Zirkel der Macht, Chapter 3.

[42] These were largely: Seikai kanchô jinji roku [Handbook for politics and bureaucracy] (Tokyo 2003), Yakuin shiki hô – jôjô kaisha 2003 [Annual report on the board members on the stock listed top companies] (Tokyo, 2002), Yakuin shiki hô – tentô (jasudakku), mijôjô kaisha 2003 [Annual report on the Jasdaq-listed companies and candidates for stock listing] (Tokyo, 2002), and Zenkoku dantai meibo [Nominal list of interest groups in Japan] (Tôkyô 2003).

As a result of gender inequalities within Japan's educational system, women are largely underrepresented in higher positions; only 3% of the Japanese positional elite (7 out of 231) is female, which shows the harsh reality of gender inequality in Japan. It is worth noting that all of these women are found within the political sector.

Considering the educational background of Japan's positional elite, it is not surprising that the overwhelming majority (96.5%) of those persons regarded as Japan's top elite attended university and just a tiny minority (2.6%) had only a high school diploma (Table 9).

Educational level	***N=***	***in %***
High school	*6*	*2.6*
University without exam	*1*	*0.4*
University	*223*	*96.5*
Unknown	*1*	*0.4*
N=	***231***	***100.0***

Table 9: Educational background of Japan's positional elite. Source: Own compilation.

Out of these 96.5%, approximately 80% visited one of the "Big Five" universities. More than 41% were Tôdai graduates, with the majority of those graduates from Tôdai's Faculty of Law (28.3%). The percentage of graduates from Tôdai's Faculty of Law among Japan's top elite is therefore 280 times higher than the average percentage within society. This demonstrates the outstanding role of Tokyo University and especially their Faculty of Law for the recruitment of the national elite (see Table 4 and 10).

Place of education	***Elite***	***in %***
Tôdai (Faculty of Law)	*92 (63)*	*41.3 (28.3)*
Kyôdai and Hitotsubashi	*32*	*14.3*
Waseda and Keiô	*51*	*22.9*
N „Big Five"=	***175***	***78.5***
N other universities=	***48***	***21.5***
N overall=	***223***	***100.0***

*Table 10: Place of education of Japan's positional elite. Source: Overall number of students at elite universities (in 2002): The World of Learning 2003, 940, 953, 985, 1010, 1025. Number of students overall: Japan Almanac 2003, 227. Percentage: Own estimation. Elite: Own compilation. Note: * Including students at graduate schools.*

Due to the reputation of the respective elite university, we find some variations of the educational background among the elites. Tôdai graduates are most numerous among the bureaucratic elite because the university was found to be the training ground for such. More than 60% of the leading bureaucrats in Japan had attended Tôdai, while nearly 53% graduated from their Faculty of Law. Among the elites of the other sectors, the percentage of Tôdai graduates varies between a low of 21.7% for media elites and a high of 41.2% for top managers. Graduates from the private elite universities are most numerous among the media elite and the political elite. The high percentage of Waseda graduates among the media elites is because their literature program has a very good reputation and many famous Japanese writers are alumni of Waseda. Despite this internal variation, the outstanding role Tokyo University holds not only for training and selection of the Japanese ministerial bureaucracy, but for other areas of national leadership is clearly confirmed (Table 11).

As noted earlier, students have to pass strict entrance examinations to enter Tokyo University or one of the other elite universities. Having passed the test of meritocracy gives these elites great legitimacy, because there are considered to be the brightest in the country, no matter what their class background may be.

Sector	***Politics***		***Bureau-cracy***		***Economy***		***Pressure groups***		***Media***	
Educational background	*N=*	*in %*	*N=*	*in %*	*N=*	*in %*	*N=*	*in %*	*N=*	*in %*
University	*60*	*92.3*	*72*	*100*	*51*	*100*	*17*	*89.5*	*23*	*95.8*
Others	*5*	*7.7*	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*	*2*	*10.5*	*0*	*0*
Unknown	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*	*1*	*4.2*
N=	***65***	***100***	***0***	***100***	***51***	***100***	***19***	***100***	***24***	***100***
Place of education	*N=*	*in %*	*N=*	*in %*	*N=*	*in %*	*N=*	*in %*	*N=*	*in %*
Tôdai	*17*	*28.3*	*44*	*61.1*	*21*	*41.2*	*5*	*29.4*	*5*	*21.7*
- Faculty of Law	*12*	*20.0*	*38*	*52.8*	*11*	*21.6*	*2*	*11.8*	*0*	*0*
Kyôdai	*1*	*1.7*	*15*	*20.8*	*6*	*11.8*	*2*	*11.8*	*0*	*0.0*
Hitotsubashi	*2*	*3.3*	*2*	*2.8*	*2*	*3.9*	*2*	*11.8*	*0*	*0.0*
Waseda	*10*	*16.7*	*2*	*2.8*	*5*	*9.8*	*0*	*0*	*8*	*34.8*
Keiô	*14*	*23.3*	*3*	*4.2*	*1*	*2.0*	*3*	*17.6*	*5*	*21.7*
Others	*16*	*26.7*	*6*	*8.3*	*16*	*31.4*	*5*	*29.4*	*5*	*21.7*
N=	***60***	***100***	***72***	***100***	***51***	***100***	***17***	***100***	***23***	***100***

Table 11: Educational background of the sector elites Source: Own compilation.

If we look at the academic department of graduation, nearly 50% graduated from a faculty of law. The next highest totals come from faculties of economics, trade, or management (22.4%). Overall, nearly two-third of Japan's positional elite graduated from one of these faculties. Graduates from other faculties are quite rare among Japan's elite. Law is a common area of undergraduate specialization at major universities and is seen as most prestigious, which is why many civil servants and future managers in the major private enterprises are recruited from law faculties. This leads to an overrepresentation of law school graduates among the Japanese elite (Table 12).

Department of graduation	***N=***	***in %***
Faculty of law	*110*	*49.3*
Faculty for economy/ management/ trade	*50*	*22.4*
Faculty for natural sciences/ technology	*7*	*3.1*
Faculty for engineering	*12*	*5.4*
Faculty for politics and economics	*11*	*4.9*
Faculty of letters	*14*	*6.3*
Faculty for educational sciences	*3*	*1.3*
Faculty for agriculture	*4*	*1.8*
Faculty for medicine	*3*	*1.3*
Others	*5*	*2.2*
Unknown	*4*	*1.8*
N=	***223***	***100.0***

Table 12: Department of graduation of Japan's positional elite. Source: Own compilation.

A comparison of the department of graduation of the sector elites reveals significant discrepancies only in a few categories (Table 13). Over 70% of elite bureaucrats were students in law faculties and only a minority graduated from a faculty for economy, management, or trade. The (economic) pressure group officials usually hold an honorary position within the given organization. As a rule, they serve as chairperson of the board of a major company and their careers resemble the top managers' career patterns. Therefore, persons who graduated from a faculty for economy, management, or trade are comparatively numerous among the chairpersons of the pressure groups. Nevertheless, the overall figure of persons graduating from law or economy fits into the two-third pattern. The media elites are somewhat outstanding. Over 30% graduated from a faculty of letters, while only a minority (17%) graduated from a faculty of law.

As the Table 11 shows, most of them graduated from Waseda University, which is quite famous for their Faculty of Letters.

Sector	***Politics***		***Bureau-cracy***		***Economy***		***Pressure groups***		***Media***	
Department of graduation	*N=*	*in %*	*N=*	*in %*	*N=*	*in %*	*N=*	*in %*	*N=*	*in %*
Faculty of law	*29*	*48.3*	*52*	*72.2*	*20*	*39.2*	*5*	*29.4*	*4*	*17.4*
Faculty for economy/ management/ trade	*13*	*21.7*	*7*	*9.7*	*15*	*29.4*	*9*	*52.9*	*6*	*26.1*
Faculty for natural sciences/ technology	*2*	*3.3*	*2*	*2.8*	*3*	*5.9*	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*
Faculty for engineering	*1*	*1.7*	*3*	*4.2*	*6*	*11.8*	*1*	*5.9*	*1*	*4.3*
Faculty for politics and economics	*5*	*8.3*	*0*	*0*	*2*	*3.9*	*0*	*0*	*4*	*17.4*
Faculty of letters	*3*	*5.0*	*2*	*2.8*	*2*	*3.9*	*0*	*0*	*7*	*30.4*
Faculty for educational sciences	*2*	*3.3*	*1*	*1.4*	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*
Faculty for agriculture	*1*	*1.7*	*2*	*2.8*	*1*	*2.0*	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*
Faculty for medicine	*2*	*3.3*	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*
Others	*2*	*3.3*	*0*	*0*	*2*	*3.9*	*1*	*5.9*	*0*	*0*
Unknown	*0*	*0*	*3*	*4.2*	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0*	*1*	*4.3*
N=	***60***	***100***	***72***	***100***	***51***	***100***	***17***	***100***	***23***	***100***

Table 13: Department of graduation of the sector elites Source: Own compilation.

IV.3. Academic cliques

As shown in previous chapters, the overwhelming majority of Japan's elite who attended university graduated from one of the few elite universities, especially from Tokyo University. This exclusive educational experience creates common values and morality as well as a network of elite college graduates (gakubatsu), which enhances elite unity and cooperation. The bonds created at university normally last a lifetime and continue to influence decision-making, business, and politics.

An average graduate, once he has begun working, will be expected to confine his professional as well as personal life to his work group with its hierarchical forms of social relationships and will have little chance of forming personal relationships outside his workplace. The years spent

at university therefore offer a rare chance for creating mutually advantageous relationships with peers.[43] Such networks are not only formed by studying at the same faculty, as memberships of various clubs, which provide students with opportunities to network across faculties, are regarded as more important.

The analysis of the university background of Japan's elite clearly shows that only graduates of Tokyo University are represented in all sectors in considerable numbers. In the political sector, 17 persons (20.0%) graduated from Tôdai, in the bureaucratic sector44 persons (52.8) are Tôdai graduates, for the economic elite the figure stands at 21 (21.6%), and for the leadership of the pressure groups and the media at 5 persons in each sector (11.8% and 21.7%).[44]

We can conclude that the "Tôdai connection"[45] is the most important academic network tying the elites together (Figure 6).[46]

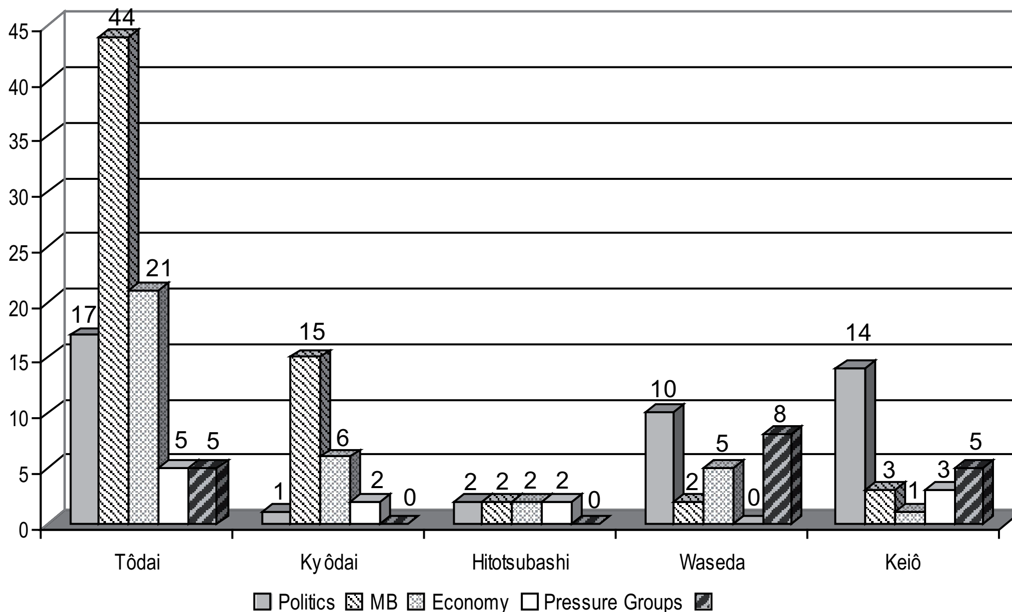

Fig. 6: Distribution of graduates of elite universities according to sector (in persons). Source: Own compilation.

Figure 7 demonstrates this network as based on year of graduation and graduates by sector. The numbers represent the individuals who graduated

43 See Cutts, An Empire of Schools, 19.

44 In contrast to the previous chapter, where the percentages refer to the number of university graduates, the percentages given in this chapter refer to the overall number of elite members of a given sector.

45 Kerbo and Mc Kinstry, *Who rules Japan* , 140.

46 It is worth noting that academic networks are also found among the graduates of elite high schools, e.g. in the case of Nada high school.

from Tôdai, while the lines illustrate the potential relationships that can connect them. Given the fact that students in Japan study for four years, persons who graduated in intervals of three years had at least one year in which to get to know one another and are therefore connected with such a line. The outcome is a map of the structure of the Tôdai gakubatsu. Only one graduate (1938) is not connected with such a potential line, while all the others are linked to potential relationships. We find a gap between political sector graduates who graduated after 1976 and the other elites. We expect this gap to be filled when the elites of the other sectors move into an elite position. This emphasizes the fact that a network is steadily maintained with the passage of time and can thus be regarded as self-perpetuating.

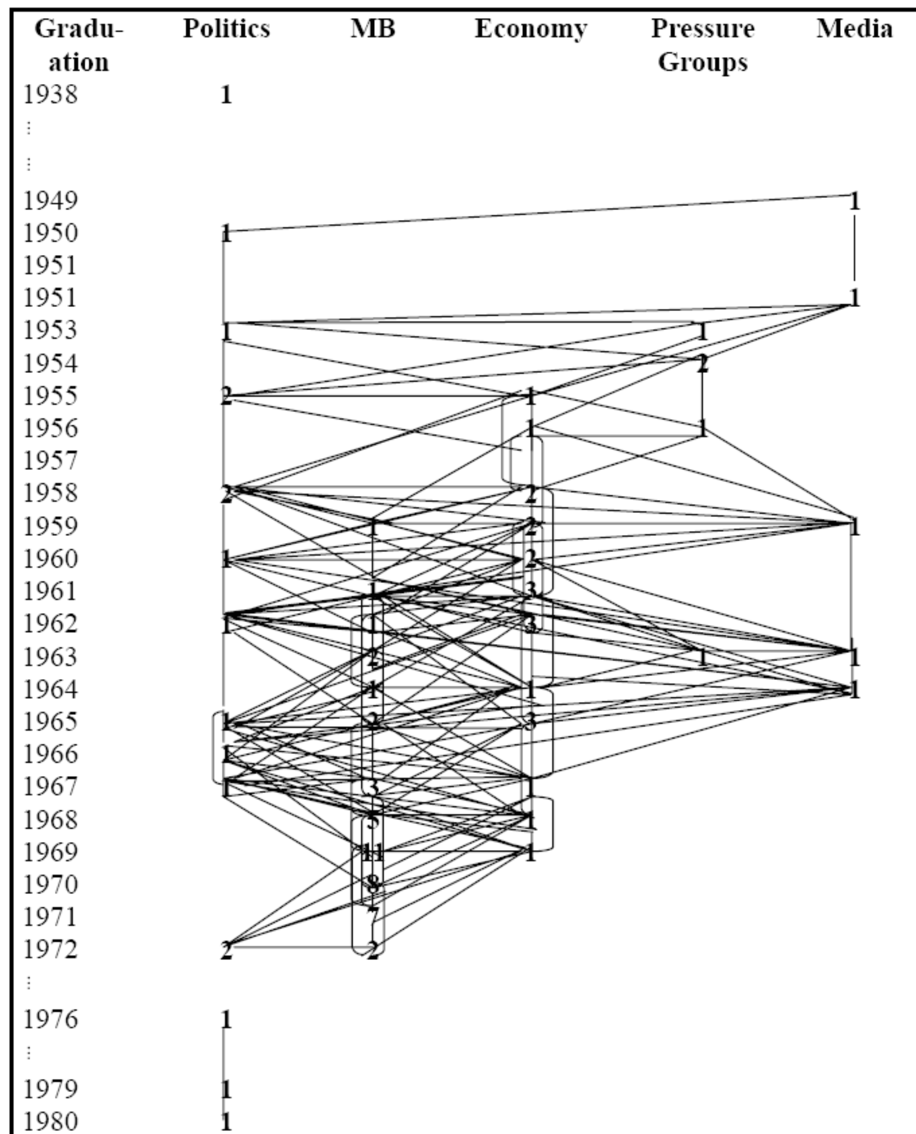

Fig. 7: Network of Tôdai graduates among the sector elites . Source: Own compilation. Note: MB= Ministerial bureaucracy.

V. Conclusion

This paper has highlighted the relationship between the recruitment of elites and education in Japan. After Word War Two, Japan has witnessed a rapid growth of the higher educational system. Today, the educational system provides a high level of education for the whole population and Japan can take pride in its achievement in high literacy. The ratio of pupils advancing to high school increased as steadily as the percentage of students continuing on to university. Nearly the entire student population advances to high school and about half of the high school graduates go on to some kind of college or university.

Despite this rapid growth of higher education, Japan has maintained a strict system of credentialism, and there is a rather definite and well-known rank order of universities, based upon the reputation of the respective university. The fact that Japan has incorporated its national universities will surely not blur the boundaries between old-established elite and non-elite universities. Entering such a prestigious university requires strict entrance examinations, and only a few persons per year are admitted to one of the universities that guarantee a future career in a big company, the ministerial bureaucracy, or within the political sphere.

Due to the Japanese system of lifetime employment, the nation‘s top universities function as the main channel through which recruitment to elite positions takes place.

As a result of the strict hierarchical order of the universities, high schools are ranked in accordance with their records of sending students on to the prestigious universities. Therefore, the examinations for entering the "right" high school are almost as important as the university entrance exams. Students usually prepare themselves for the entrance examinations at non-regular cram schools, and a billion-dollar business has developed to prepare students for the exams. This puts enormous costs onto the parents over the whole of the student's school life.

Furthermore, Japan's educational system has witnessed a wave of privatization of the pre-college education. Today, the overwhelming majority of schools with the best records of sending their pupils on to a prestigious university are costly private institutions. Thus, parental strategy in avoiding a school with a poor reputation became most important.

However, not only the family's income but also gender determines the educational opportunities in Japan. Although there is a distinct upward trend in the number of female students attending the nation's top universities, women are still underrepresented, especially at prestigious universities. Entering such elite schools and universities is therefore not only

based on formal objective criteria. In fact the "objective" criteria for selection create an illusion of fairness disguising the unequal advantages held by the upper classes' male children.

Since elite selection in Japan is still centered upon very few educational institutions, we find a reasonable link between the educational performance and the allocation of elite positions. Eighty percent of the (mostly male) incumbents of Japan's positional elite attended one of the nation's most prestigious universities, and the outstanding role of Tokyo University for training and selection of Japan's national leadership is clearly confirmed. The fact that the overwhelming majority of the Japanese elite has faced and passed the tests of meritocracy through "exam hell" gives these elites great legitimacy, no matter what their class background may be. Networks such as academic bonds tie the elites together into a network of connections, forming a grid that resembles a fish net, and – together with an elite family background – serves as a cornerstone of elite unity and cooperation. Due to the limited access to elite education with regard to gender and income, the elites in Japan have a narrow social base of recruitment and are characterized by self-reproduction.

The increasing importance of costly private institutions within the Japanese educational sector has led to a school system outside the public school system and out of control of the nation state. This is why the nation state's ability to direct the educational system into a more egalitarian and democratic manner has largely disappeared. We might assume that the present prerequisites of elite education and elite recruitment are not likely to change within the next future even though inside Japan critics of the excessive entrance examination system and the related problems have become more vocal in recent years. Much depends on the question whether the Japanese government is really willing to promote earnest and far-reaching educational reforms that translate into equal educational opportunities in order to ensure equitable access to higher positions without regard to gender and class.

VI. Appendix

Appendix 1:

	2005	**N=**	**Prefecture**	**Founder**	**sex**
1	*Kaisei*	*166*	*Tokyo*	*private*	*m*
2	*Tsukuba daigaku fuzoku komaba*	*104*	*Tokyo*	*national*	*m*
3	*Nada*	*100*	*Hyôgo*	*private*	*m*
4	*Azabu*	*82*	*Tokyo*	*private*	*m*
5	*Tôkyô gakugeidai fuzoku*	*75*	*Tokyo*	*national*	*m/f*
6	*Ôin*	*64*	*Tokyo*	*private*	*f*
7	*Komaba tôhô*	*64*	*Tokyo*	*private*	*m*
8	*Kaijô*	*60*	*Tokyo*	*private*	*m*
9	*Eikô gakuen*	*56*	*Kanagawa*	*private*	*m*
10	*Seikô gakuin*	*49*	*Kanagawa*	*private*	*m*
	1995	***N=***	***Prefecture***	***Founder***	***sex***
1	*Kaisei*	*170*	*Tokyo*	*private*	*m*
2	*Tôkyô gakugeidai fuzoku*	*110*	*Tokyo*	*national*	*m/f*
3	*Tôin gakuen*	*107*	*Kanagawa*	*private*	*m/f*
4	*Azabu*	*101*	*Tokyo*	*private*	*m*
5	*Nada*	*95*	*Hyôgo*	*private*	*m*
6	*Tsukuba daigaku fuzoku komaba*	*84*	*Tokyo*	*national*	*m*
7	*La Salle*	*73*	*Kagoshima*	*private*	*m*
8	*Ôin*	*72*	*Tokyo*	*private*	*f*
9	*Eikô gakuen*	*70*	*Kanagawa*	*private*	*m*
10	*Kaijô*	*68*	*Tokyo*	*private*	*m*
	1985	***N=***	***Prefecture***	***Founder***	***sex***
1	*Kaisei*	*157*	*Tokyo*	*private*	*m*
2	*Nada*	*121*	*Hyôgo*	*private*	*m*
3	*La Salle*	*117*	*Kagoshima*	*private*	*m*
4	*Tôkyô gakugeidai fuzoku*	*100*	*Tokyo*	*national*	*m/f*
5	*Azabu*	*82*	*Tokyo*	*private*	*m*
6	*Musashi*	*73*	*Tokyo*	*private*	*m*
7	*Tsukuba daigaku fuzoku komaba*	*72*	*Tokyo*	*national*	*m*
8	*Eikô gakuen*	*62*	*Kanagawa*	*private*	*m*
9	*Urawa*	*61*	*Saitama*	*public*	*m*
10	*Tsukuba daigaku fuzoku*	*59*	*Tokyo*	*national*	*m/f*

	1975	***N=***	***Prefecture***	***Founder***	***sex***
1	*Nada*	*126*	*Hyôgo*	*private*	*m*
2	*Kyôdai fuzoku komaba*	*123*	*Tokyo*	*national*	*m*
3	*Azabu*	*106*	*Tokyo*	*private*	*m*
4	*Kaisei*	*104*	*Tokyo*	*private*	*m*
5	*Tôkyô gakugeidai fuzoku*	*95*	*Tokyo*	*national*	*m/f*
6	*La Salle*	*83*	*Kagoshima*	*private*	*m*
7	*Kyôikudai fuzoku komaba*	*76*	*Tokyo*	*national*	*m/f*
8	*Shônan*	*60*	*Kanagawa*	*public*	*m/f*
9	*Musashi*	*57*	*Tokyo*	*private*	*m*
10	*Urawa*	*55*	*Saitama*	*public*	*m*
	1965	***N=***	***Prefecture***	***Founder***	***sex***
1	*Hibiya*	*181*	*Tokyo*	*public*	*m/f*
2	*Nishi*	*127*	*Tokyo*	*public*	*m/f*
3	*Toyama*	*110*	*Tokyo*	*public*	*m/f*
4	*Azabu*	*91*	*Tokyo*	*private*	*m*
5	*Kyôikudai fuzoku komaba*	*87*	*Tokyo*	*national*	*m/f*
6	*Shinjuku*	*72*	*Tokyo*	*public*	*m/f*
7	*Kyôdai fuzoku komaba*	*68*	*Tokyo*	*national*	*m*
8	*Nada*	*66*	*Hyôgo*	*private*	*m*
9	*Koishikawa*	*63*	*Tokyo*	*public*	*m/f*
10	*Kaisei*	*55*	*Tokyo*	*private*	*m*
	1959	***N=***	***Prefecture***	***Founder***	***sex***
1	*Hibiya*	*168*	*Tokyo*	*public*	*m/f*
2	*Toyama*	*93*	*Tokyo*	*public*	*m/f*
3	*Shinjuku*	*83*	*Tokyo*	*public*	*m/f*
4	*Nishi*	*83*	*Tokyo*	*public*	*m/f*
5	*Koishikawa*	*63*	*Tokyo*	*public*	*m/f*
6	*Kyôikudai fuzoku komaba*	*53*	*Tokyo*	*national*	*m/f*
7	*Azabu*	*52*	*Tokyo*	*private*	*m*
8	*Ryôgoku*	*49*	*Tokyo*	*public*	*m/f*
9	*Kaisei*	*47*	*Tokyo*	*private*	*m*
10	*Shônan*	*32*	*Kanagawa*	*public*	*m/f*

Table A1: School background of persons who passed the entrance examination for Tôkyô University 1959-2005 (rank 1-10). Source: 1959-1995 http://www.eonet.ne.jp/~building-pc/zatsugaku/tokyo-univ.htm; 2005: http://www.biwa.ne.jp/~syuichi/toudai-ranking.html; Note: The information on founder and sex were researched by: http://www.gakkou.net/cgi-bin/koukou/src.cgi ; m= male; f= female.

Appendix 2:

Prefecture	Applicants		Successful Candidates		Prefecture	Applicants		Successful Candidates	
	n	***in %***	***n***	***in %***		***n***	***in %***	***n***	***in %***
Shizuoka	*1*	*0.7*	*0*	*0*	*Kumamoto*	*6*	*4.0*	*1*	*2.0*
Aichi	*1*	*0.7*	*0*	*0*	*Ôita*	*1*	*0.7*	*0*	*0*
Gifu	*3*	*2.0*	*1*	*2.0*	*Miyazaki*	*3*	*2.0*	*1*	*2.0*
Fukui	*4*	*2.7*	*0*	*0*	*Kagoshima*	*9*	*6.0*	*2*	*4.0*
Ishikawa	*1*	*0.7*	*0*	*0*	*Hyôgô*	*35*	*23.5*	*19*	*38.0*
Shiga	*3*	*2.0*	*1*	*2.0*	*within Hyôgô:*				
Kyoto	*4*	*2.7*	*1*	*2.0*	*Kôbe City**	*16*	*10.7*	*6*	*12.0*
Nara	*5*	*3.4*	*0*	*0*	*Ashiya City*	*1*	*0.7*	*0*	*0*
Wakayama	*1*	*0.7*	*0*	*0*	*Nishinomiya City*	*6*	*4.0*	*6*	*12.0*
Osaka	*25*	*16.8*	*13*	*26.0*	*Amagasaki City*	*1*	*0.7*	*0*	*0*
Tottori	*2*	*1.3*	*1*	*2.0*	*Takarazuka City*	*2*	*1.3*	*2*	*4.0*
Shimane	*1*	*0.7*	*1*	*2.0*	*Kawanishi City*	*1*	*0.7*	*0*	*0*
Hiroshima	*1*	*0.7*	*0*	*0*	*Sanda City*	*1*	*0.7*	*1*	*2.0*
Yamaguchi	*6*	*4.0*	*0*	*0*	*Akashi City*	*2*	*1.3*	*2*	*4.0*
Kagawa	*3*	*2.0*	*1*	*2.0*	*Kakogawa City*	*1*	*0.7*	*1*	*2.0*
Tokushima	*2*	*1.3*	*1*	*2.0*	*Takasago City*	*1*	*0.7*	*1*	*2.0*
Ehime	*1*	*0.7*	*0*	*0*	*Ibo County*	*1*	*0.7*	*0*	*0*
Fukuoka	*27*	*18.1*	*6*	*12.0*	*Awaji City*	*1*	*0.7*	*0*	*0*
Saga	*1*	*0.7*	*0*	*.0*	*Tsuna County*	*1*	*0.7*	*0*	*0*
Nagasaki	*3*	*2.0*	*1*	*2.0*	***N=***	***149***	***100***	***50***	***100***

*Table A2: Applicants and successful candidates for entrance examination of Nada high school in 2006. Note: *Location of the high school. Percentage: Own estimation. Source: http://www.moon.sphere.ne.jp/nada-h/nyuushi_kou18.htm.*