

German Institute for Japanese Studies Tokyo (DIJ)

DIJ Social Science Study Group



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School's out Forever – Examining Career Guidance and Transition Mechanisms at Japanese Senior High Schools

Irregular employment and average job turnover rates have been increasing for many years in Japan. At the same time, a shift from a credential society (gakureki shakai) to a learning capital society can be observed. According to Kariya (2010) this results in three challenges: (a) an increasing performance pressure on young people, (b) the emergence of a new dynamic of class cleavage and (c) a shift to a flexible labor regime. Once a defining characteristic of Japan's credential society educational achievements no longer reliably translate into desirable occupational success (Tachibanaki 2006). Employment in unstable and low-pay jobs, reduced career mobility, and fragmented work biographies have so far often been explained with insufficient education (Honda 2004). However, this neglects the uneven distribution of critical factors for success in the job market, such as the educational opportunities schools offer and individual learning competencies.

This ongoing research project re-evaluates the role of senior high school and workforce-related education in the transition process into the labor market against the background of deteriorating job prospects. It explores the micro level praxis of schooling and career guidance at municipal senior high schools (including schools offering vocational training) in the Tokyo metropolitan area by means of participant observation of NPO-led career guidance events and expert interviews with headmasters, teachers and NPO coordinators. By examining differences in measures to promote skills relevant for the job market and in career guidance services, the project seeks to illuminate how schools shape graduates' chances of a successful transition.

Vincent Lesch is a Ph.D. student at the department of Japanese Studies at the Asia-Africa-Institute/University of Hamburg, specializing in the Japanese educational system and labor market. At present, he holds a scholarship of the German Institute for Japanese Studies and conducts field research in the Tokyo metropolitan area.

All are welcome to attend, but registration (heinrich@dijtokyo.org) is appreciated.

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