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Introduction

Third-Year Literature Major: My first day here at the university was hard. It made me nervous to go to the orientation meetings because I had to find a seat when I didn't know anyone. I didn't have any high school friends who came to this school, so I knew literally no one. However, on the second day, I sat next to a girl I had noticed before. She wasn't like some of the other girls who were dressed like they belonged in a magazine, but was wearing ordinary jeans and a sweater without heaps of jewelry or makeup. The meeting was late in starting so we started talking. I found out she wasn't from Tokyo either. Afterwards we went to the cafeteria together for lunch. It turned out that we had several classes together so we began hanging out and have been friends ever since.

Beginning with freshman orientation, one of the main agendas for most students during their college years is making friends. Like the student quoted above, many students find the first few weeks an uncertain period of searching for compatible friends. Whether in classes, clubs or the cafeteria, finding friends is a top priority. Boring classes, aloof professors, bad cafeteria food and long commutes can be tolerated, even made enjoyable, given friends. However, failure to find compatible friends can lead to a sense of alienation from school itself. Most students recognize the importance of the academic mission of the

school and its connection to future jobs. A large proportion become involved in their seminar during their third and fourth year, which combines academic work with a membership in a community of students. However, the heart of the college experience is often outside of the classroom: It lies in the social relationships with members of the seminar, extra-curricular activities (both school sponsored and non-school sponsored), part-time jobs, commercial leisure activities and individual networks of friendships. As another student commented, "If you really want to understand us, ask about what we do after class."

This paper describes the patterning of these individual networks of friendship among Japanese college students. As the first quote indicates, college students scan and screen each other for like-minded souls, often using non-verbal clues like dress, hairstyle, and other bodily ornamentation as indicators of difference and similarity. Previous reports¹⁾ using a smaller sample of the same data, indicate that this filtering process occurs quite early in the first year. Many friendships originate in the first week of school. Compared both to friendships in Japanese middle and high schools as well as in U.S. universities, Japanese college student friendships are slower to develop and more fragmented. University students often have a number of groups of friends they spend time with—high school friends, work friends, college friends and special interest group friends. In contrast to high school and junior high, friendships are no longer concentrated within the bounds of a single school, nor grounded in a single club or homeroom.

Perhaps it is this lack of concentration within one organization that produces a wide range of types or categories of students at the university level which form a continuum of involvement in school. However, it is possible to identify three basic orientations: 1) students oriented to the academic mission of the school, 2) students focused on the social life of the school, and 3) students whose focus lies outside of school. Within these major divisions, student categorizations reveal a number of sub-categories, which differ somewhat by university and even different departments of the same university.

Background

Research on college students in the United States points to the importance of peer social relationships and distinctions. Nathan's recent ethnography of college life at a large, American public university found that students believed that they were in college to learn, but that a majority of their learning occurred outside of classes in interpersonal relationships and social activities. Even when students included learning associated with classes (films, group work, readings related to classes) the median response was that "65% of learning occurs outside of classes and class-related activities, while 35% occurs within." While some students reported that 90% of their learning occurred outside of the classroom, very few reported that more than 50% of their learning occurred within the structure of classes.²⁾ Their real reason to be in college was "the college experience," which students portrayed as "fun," "friendships," "partying," "life experiences," and "late-night talks."³⁾

Nathan's findings echo the work of Moffatt⁴⁾ who also identified the world outside of classrooms as at least equally important to the definition of the college experience.

Beyond formal education, college as the students saw it was also about coming of age. It was where you went to break away from home, to learn responsibility and maturity, and to do some growing up. College was about being on your own, about autonomy, about freedom from the authority of adults, however, benign their intentions. And last, but hardly least, college was about fun, about unique forms of peer-group fun—before in the student conceptions, the grayer actualities of adult life in the real world begin to close in on you.⁵⁾

This emphasis on fun and friendship is not a recent trend. In her history of American higher education, Horowitz shows that the dominant culture of "college men" from the late 18th century to the 1950's was based on "a peer consciousness sharply at odds with that of the faculty and of serious students... [given] institutional expression in the fraternity and club system."⁶⁾ In short, for

students over the past 200 years, much of the importance of the college experience in the U.S. has been in social activities and personal relationships.

Although the “college man” culture centered on non-academic student social life was dominant, Horowitz also shows the conflict over the definition of college culture. Rather than one homogeneous culture of students, there are competing ones. In American universities from the late 18th century until today, there have been three types: “college men” “outsiders” and “rebels.” College men (and later women) evolved from the confrontations of students with colonial period university administrations. Wealthy upper class students resented the strict, puritanical lifestyles the early colonial colleges tried in vain to foist on students. Eventually the students were successful in carving out an independent social world beyond the control of college administrations in clubs, athletics, and social organizations within the school. Their poorer classmates who entered college for the chance of upward mobility were “outsiders,” aligned with the academic mission of the school and the faculty. “Rebels,” challenged both groups. While the numerical balance between these groups shifts over time and between different universities, the essential differences persist. These differences in how undergraduates define themselves, view their professors and see the purpose of a university education create different subcultures representing different social groups⁷⁾

The most influential research on the importance of social categories of contemporary youth is Eckert's study of “jocks” and “burnouts” in an American high school.⁸⁾ The names jocks and burnouts are particular to the research site, but Eckert documents how these categories represent an important cultural split not only in the high school, but between the middle class and the working class. In different places and times, the same split between “socialites” or the “leading crowd” and “greasers” or “hoods” has existed for a long time. The jocks embody the culture of the middle class and are oriented to the school: they participate in sports (hence their name), student government, and other school sanctioned activities. The burnouts, in contrast, embody the values of the working class. They are oriented toward adult society outside of school.

Burnouts reject school authority and adopt the major symbols of resistance in our time—smoking and drugs (hence their name, “burned out” from overuse of drugs).

The importance of the work of Eckert and Horowitz lies in their explorations of how student categories are tied to deeper social divisions and processes. Student conceptions of themselves are linked to issues of social class, social mobility, and social change in the larger world. The quaint-sounding names of student groups reflect a complex social reality in which educational institutions mediate the transition of youth into adulthood. Thus, student categories illuminate trends in current society as youth reproduce and modify the society they are about to enter.

This preliminary study of the social categories of Japanese university students has the same aims. Its purpose is to use student categories as a lens with which to view deeper issues in Japanese society and education today.

In order to explore the deeper connections, this paper outlines the basic categories students themselves use and the meanings they attach to them.

Methods and Data Collection

The research for this article is drawn from open-ended interviews conducted with 40 first to fourth-year students at three, four-year universities. The interviews lasted between one and four hours and took place between January 2003 and March 2006. In the interviews students responded to questions about their daily schedules, classes, friends, feelings about their current university and their future, but were invited to suggest topics they thought important to understanding their university experience. They represented four different faculties (Engineering, Literature, International Studies, and International Culture) at three highly ranked private schools in Tokyo. Approximately equal numbers of men and women participated.

Student Categories in the University

In contrast to high school students, college student’s lives are less

constrained by the institution of the school. At four-year co-educational institutions both in Japan and the United States, the role of university administrations as surrogate parents is weak. In fact, this role is even weaker in Japan than in residential colleges in the U.S. where the tradition of dormitory residence on university property compels the need for some university oversight. With few dormitories, Japanese universities escape the burden of even minimally policing student social lives. A long tradition of independent, non-residential college life as well as size may encourage the development of segmented subcultures or categories expressed in a variety of student categories.

Along the continuum of orientation to school, three overarching divisions appear: 1) students oriented to the academic mission of the school, 2) students focused on the social or extracurricular life of the school, and 3) students whose focus lies outside of school or school peer groups. While the categorizations of students in the International Cultures Department are the main focus of this report, they overlap to a considerable extent with those of students in other universities and departments.

These categories are usually marked by differences in clothing. Free of the dress restrictions many Japanese students experience through junior high school and high school, numerous styles blossom on college campuses. Most students' descriptions of categories of people on campus refer to these outer manifestations of sub-cultural types. Clothing is a powerful non-verbal signal of social identity. A number of iconic garments signal affiliation to particular groups. In the impersonal settings of large urban universities, clothing codes proliferate as a means of expressing relationships within and amongst university students.

***Gariben*—academic orientation**

Students who are oriented to the academic focus of the school are often called *gariben*. They are described as *majime* (serious) students.

Interviewer: What are *gariben* like?

Third-Year Literature Division Student: Oh, you know, they attend class 100% of the time. They always study and carry around a lot of books. Often they sit at the front of the class. But it doesn't mean they always do the best when it comes to tests. They just are always studying, that's all.

Gariben is an old word for a “grind” that has been in use during most of the post-war period among elementary through university students. Although they are a separate category, true *gariben* are usually small in number. These students may not actually be the highest achievers, but they suggest dedication to academics to the exclusion of “normal” peer relationships and study norms. The majority of students generally pay attention in at least some classes some of the time: they study, but not obviously or to the exclusion of other activities. *Gariben* seem exclusively and excessively preoccupied with classes.

Taikukai-kei—Athletes

A second small group of students are the athletes from university sports teams. Major universities like those from which students in this survey are drawn have a number of school-sponsored teams that play competitively against other schools. There may be at least two tiers of teams, one that represents the entire university, and another at the department level which plays other universities, but not in national competitions. Both of these levels require a heavy investment of time and energy, particularly the university-wide teams from which exceptional players may move into professional or company teams after graduation.

Sports teams directly support the extra-curricular life of the school. While sports are much less important in attracting alumni support than in the U.S., winning sports teams enhance a university's image. Games create occasions for students and alumni to unite behind the school. They also focus the players' energy and time on relationships with teammates within the school creating cohesive, school-focused peer relationships. Students who play a sport usually

report that their closest friends were teammates. This cohesiveness is apparent to outsiders.

Second year International Studies Major: You can usually tell which are the *taikukei* people. They often seem to be with each other. You know they belong to a sports team because they often have their team bags with them, wear t-shirts or polo shirts, but never any really high fashion or Harajuku type of clothing. When you see members of the rugby team you really know who they are because they are all pretty big.

Kuraaubu-chuushin no Hito—Club-oriented students

Similar to sports team members, students involved in other types of university-sponsored clubs and student government leaders constitute a second type of orientation to the non-academic or extracurricular mission of the university. While many students initially join a club, large numbers drop out. At each of the schools where students were interviewed, slightly over half of all students reported being in clubs. However, to be considered a club-oriented student, mere membership was not sufficient. These students are either the leaders of their club or belong to a particularly active club.

School orchestras, for example, tend to be very active, demanding clubs. Daily or practices and *gashuku* (study/practice trips) over vacations tend to create cohesive groups focused on a single, school-sponsored activity which generates other social activities. Many students report going out to dinner after late-afternoon club practices and periodic drinking parties to celebrate the end of the term or the completion of particular club activities.

A related, but slightly less school-oriented group was the social drinkers, or simply *nominikitai hito* (people who like to drink) who often find friends through socially-oriented clubs.

Interviewer: So are the students in the tennis circles a kind of *taikukai-kei* (athlete)?

Fourth-Year International Cultures Major: (laughter) Oh

my gosh no! People who join tennis circles do so in order to drink and make friends. The people who belong to the university tennis club, they really play tennis. Those who belong to the circles, well, they join for the image. They seem to think that it looks really classy to be carrying a tennis racket and wearing designer tennis clothes. The girls buy those pastel sweatshirts and wear gold necklaces and earrings or something. Its like they want to fit the image of an old-school, elite student. But all they do is party.

Drinking is a substantial part of college student social life. Thus, a heavy dose of social drinking could be considered quite ordinary. However, students often distinguished this type of “party culture” from less drinking-oriented categories.

Futsu no Daigakusei—“Ordinary” university students

Many of the students who belong to clubs consider themselves to be just “ordinary college students.” By ordinary college students, they mean people with lifestyles and interests that strike a balance between academics and peer-oriented activities and between school and non-school activities.

Third-Year International Studies Major: I guess I would consider myself to be just a regular college student. I attend classes regularly, only skipping class once in a while, like on a really nice day to do something fun with my friends. But I want to get a good job so I’m trying to keep up my grades and have started studying for TOEIC. I belonged to a tennis circle my first year, but got too busy with my part-time job in my second year to continue. Now I’m busy with my seminar so have had to cut back on how much I work. I still hang out with some of the friends I made in tennis, but also have friends from my seminar and part-time job.

Like this student, ordinary students neither neglect their studies nor their friends,. but tend to have a number of friendship networks based on the variety

of activities that they participate in. A majority of students interviewed put themselves in this category.

Out-of-school orientations—Charai-kei, Harajuku-kei, Hippi and Otaku

In contrast to students who are categorized by their involvement the academic or non-academic life of the university, a variety of categories exist for types that have little relation to university life. The *charai-kei*, *harajuku-kei*, *hippi and otaku* are oriented not to school, but to either popular culture or adult society outside of school.

Second-Year Literature Major: In addition to the *gariben* who study all the time and the students immersed in their clubs, there is a group of people who well, I don't really know what they are doing in college. When they are in class they are sleeping or looking at their cell phones. They wear either quite flashy or really rough clothes and die their hair.

Another student labeled the students in flashy clothes *charai-kei*, or the “flashy or showy types.”

Fourth-Year International Studies Major: You can usually hear *charai-kei* coming. Their chains jangle, or their boots click on the tile floors of the cafeteria, and they talk in overly loud voices with their friends. You could also call the girls *gyaru* and the boys *gyaruoo* (male *gyaru*). Both seem to be only interested in fashion and having a good time. Some of them work part-time at cabarets and clubs. You rarely see them alone, but only in big, noisy groups on campus. And even when they're on campus, they often cut classes. In general, they neglect their studies.

Harajuku-kei (Harajuku-types) was often mentioned as similar to *charai-kei*, but few students could actually differentiate the two groups. Hippies were a

minor type mentioned by only one student who identified them by their ethnic-type clothing and distance from university extra-curricular life.

In contrast, *otaku* was mentioned as a category by nearly all students. The word—translated as addict, fanatic or maniac—characterizes anyone who is engrossed in a hobby-like pursuit to the exclusion of “normal” adolescent social and academic life.

Otaku are people who are crazy about their hobbies. For example, manga or anime *otaku* love comics and anime and are always thinking about them and the characters in them, sometimes to the point where they confuse reality with the fantasy life in the stories. Really serious *otaku* dress up as their favorite characters when they go to special events, but not for school so it is sometimes hard to identify them. Then there are the more melancholy types like *pasonkon otaku* (computer nerds) or *Akiba-kei* (Akihabara-types). You can identify them by their clothes. They always tuck the shirttails of their button-down shirts into their pants, which are usually not jeans, but corduroy or something else. They have a backpack that they always wear with both straps over their shoulders, never just slung over one shoulder like the rest of us. Then there are the *rekishi otaku* (history maniacs) and the *densha otaku* (train maniacs) who are almost too gloomy to mention.

Despite the differences between these types, they are united by their neglect of both academics and school-based social activities. The “average” or “normal” student balances studies, a variety of friendships both in and outside of school with personal interests.

Conclusion

Historically, peer relationships have been the core of the college experience. These relationships are patterned and represent fundamental orientations to school that embody cultural conflicts between different groups in societies. The differences in orientation to school apparent in the student categories illustrated above suggest deeper connections to society. These connections to social groupings should be explored in further research.

Footnotes

- 1) Fukuzawa, Rebecca. Undergraduate Life in Japanese Universities—Part I, (1) *Koganei Journal of the Humanities*, 2004, 41-57.
Fukuzawa, Rebecca. Undergraduate Life in Japanese Universities—Part II, (2) *Koganei Journal of the Humanities*, 2005, 13-28
- 2) Nathan, Rebecca. *My Freshman Year: What a Professor Learned by Becoming a Student*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005. p. 101.
- 3) Ibid. p.103
- 4) Moffett, Michael. *Coming of Age in New Jersey: College and American Culture*. Rutgers University Press, 1989.
- 5) Ibid, p. 28-29
- 6) Horowitz, Helen Lefkowitz. *Campus Life: Undergraduate Cultures from the End of the Eighteenth Century to the Present*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987. p. 11
- 7) Ibid, p.ix-xiv.
- 8) Eckert, Penelope. *Jocks and Burnouts: Social Categories and Identity in the High School*. New York: Teacher's College Press, 1989.

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