



Lund University  
Department of Sociology

# **Knowledge Transition and Ideology in Japan**

## **A qualitative sociological case study on individual strategies in Japanese education**

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## Abstract

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This thesis uses a qualitative sociological approach to identify case-specific cultural patterns and strategies among university students in Japan. The qualitative material was collected during a field study in summer 2002 and is presented in four cases. The focus in the study is on structural tendencies and cultural reproduction in using schooling as a basis for both identity and participation in Japanese society.

The aim of the thesis is to shed light on individual life-worlds and cultural patterns that create a rational field in utilising education as a resource. The main question is how the participants identify school as both a cultural and a structural resource.

The meritocratic Japanese educational system emphasises the aspect of equal educational opportunities. The normative and structural basis of educational policy is to a large extent used by the participants in this study as an ideal image of what a high-achieving and motivated student is like. The specific cases, on the other hand, do not identify themselves as following the normative way of achieving an education. For them school and education are mainly an instrument for identity creation and social recognition. Specific qualities that the cases can recognise are used as symbolic capital in their rational field.

Specifically Japanese characteristic in terms of gender relations, ethnic belonging, and differences between urban and rural areas tend to create different cultural patterns among the participants, for whom education becomes an instrument for both formal participation and identity creation. The cases measure themselves against an ideal that they do not recognise themselves as achieving. It is instead an alternative allocation of resources that makes them see education as a resource in creating independence both through economic self-sufficiency and against cultural patterns they recognise as limiting their self-fulfilment.

Keywords: Education, culture, ideology, gender-specific relations, urban-rural, Koreans.

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*Abstract*

*Acknowledgment*

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Education in modern Japan

Education is commonly regarded as a resource for employment and further advancement in industrialised societies. The highly industrialised Japan with its high division of labour should reasonably not be an exception in this sense. Japan's history has been dominated by flexibility towards changes: the Meiji restoration and its transition from a feudal to an industrial nation, and the economic success after World War II are examples where education has played a major role as a national resource. But it might be misleading to strictly evaluate education from a macro-perspective of resource allocation in order to evaluate its function. From a sociological perspective education fills several functions, for example socialisation, selection and diversification. This thesis has in particular focused on cultural-specific contexts and the meeting with institutional learning. The ambition was to obtain a greater understanding of and insight into the motivation of Japanese students, and by looking at specific cases come closer to how the students use school and education as both a cultural and structural resource.

In international comparisons of academic achievements from the early 1970s to the mid 1990s Japanese students have been ranked among the highest in subjects such as maths and science (Fujita 2000: 43).<sup>1</sup> Educational policy in Japan has focused on positive effects in Japanese education measured by the high achievements in international comparison, a large quota of students going to tertiary education and the successful role of education in a generally expanded economy (Yoneyama 1999: 18f; Okano 1993; Ikeda 2001). The Japanese education has been used as an example of how to allocate human resources in a prosperous model of economic growth, and how a nation of limited natural resources can instead develop a strong economic base through a well-educated population (see Rohlin 1988). The modernists' approach towards Japan emphasises the successful process of industrialisation that leads to urbanisation and the spread of education, which in turn transforms principles of allocation of human resources from a particularistic base to a universalistic one (Ikeda 2001:582). According to Okano (1993), the functionalist approach have been predominant in analyses of Japanese education: recognising that Japan offers more 'equality of educational opportunity' than other industrialised nations, and the competitive nature of Japanese schooling is regarded as a 'meritocratic' nature of Japanese

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<sup>1</sup> That is the international comparative studies conducted by The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) (Fujita 2000:43).

education (Okano 1993:18f; Yoneyama 1999; Rohlin 1988). Regarded from a macro-perspective, the meritocratic selection and single-line structure of the Japanese educational system has the appearance of offering equality in education. Individual achievements are the basis for advancement in education, and are therefore regarded as fair. By following the same logic, students' failure in education can be reduced to lack of talent, merit or ambition. Enrolment in tertiary education is considered high in Japan, where about fifty per cent of the high school students continue to higher education (MESSC 2000:18). But those graduating from a four-year university amount to approximately twenty-five per cent of the students: among the Japanese population as a whole about twelve per cent hold a university degree (Sugimoto 1997:107). Japan is also recognised as an educational credential society where the hierarchical structure of higher education attaches greater importance to where students have studied than to the subjects included in their studies.

This thesis will argue for the need for a differentiated sociological approach in creating a greater understanding of Japanese education and view its function in perspectives of socialisation, selection and individual life-worlds. In industrialised societies basically all children attend modern schooling. How a pupil manages the meeting with institutionalised learning is most crucial for his or her advancement in future life. Education becomes the measurable criterion for knowledge as well as a key to success in contemporary societies. Arguably it should also be offered on equal terms to the population, one perspective being that meritocracy in itself provides equality in education. From another point of view individuals depend on the 'cultural preparation' and handle the meeting with institutional learning differently. The pupil can be more or less prepared for the knowledge and methods of learning that are offered in schools, from a cultural, social and material perspective, and arguably Japan should not be an exception.

## 1.2 Purpose and aim

This study is based on four cases of Japanese university students. The purpose is to shed light on individual life-worlds, and strategies that utilise education as both a structural and cultural resource in contemporary Japan. That is how the individuals use schooling for both self-fulfilment and advancement in the merit-based Japanese educational system. Schooling is commonly regarded as means for submission of knowledge. The term knowledge used in education becomes both normative, and through the institutional form of education, also legitimised. Since schools also fulfil social functions of selection in societies with a high division of labour, knowledge becomes measurable and as a result certain standardisations occur. There is a notion of 'good' and resonantly 'bad' performance in education, where educational doctrines set

a normative frame on qualities regarded as desirable. The educational credential character of the Japanese educational system tends to create an 'idealised' image of the high-achieving and motivated student, an image that is not in accordance with most Japanese encounters with schooling. The educational doctrines in Japan also place emphasis on equal opportunities in education, where it is stressed that everybody should have the same possibilities to achieve an education. Ethnographic studies on Japanese schooling by Okano & Tsuchiya (1999) and Okano (1989) illustrate that equality in form does not necessarily mean that inequalities vanish. Cultural, social and material resources create different expectations of what schooling ought to be, and also how education is adopted. This study seeks to widen the term knowledge in evaluating schooling as an ideological and normative arena, that demands recognition of the form in education for its students. Students need to recognise the standardisation of knowledge in order to take full advantage of what education can offer.

The ambition is to highlight the following question:

- \* How is education identified as a resource for the particular cases? The ambition is to come closer to how the participants view education, and what meaning it fills in their lives.

The thesis has the following outline: Chapter 1 presents a brief historical background to Japanese post-war educational history and policy, describing three major phases in educational policy from 1947 until the present. In chapter 2 a theoretical background to education is given and its function in industrialised societies is described. Chapter 3 deals with methodological questions and includes a presentation of the qualitative material. Analyses of the material are presented in chapter 4. Conclusions and summary are given in chapter 5.

### 1.3 Historical perspective on Japanese post-war schooling

#### 1.3.1 Democratic schooling

After Japan's surrender in 1945 a Supreme Command for the Allied Powers (SCAP) was created for the purpose of governing the country during the occupation, which lasted until April 1952 (Beauchamp & Rubinger 1989:85). Japan had surrendered unconditionally, and the SCAP had extensive power to reinforce US doctrines. Both before and during the war, Japanese education was identified as an important legal as well as moral tool for militarism and nationalism (Beauchamp & Rubinger 1989:85). It was the Imperial Rescript on Education, promulgated by

the emperor in 1890, that stated the official guidelines on education until the rule of the occupational forces. This promulgation had an eclectic use of moral and religious values that emphasised the subordination of the individual to the good of the state, and was also a tool to reinforce militaristic and nationalistic values in pre-war Japanese education (Beauchamp & Rubinger 1989). Textbooks were frequently rewritten to suit the government's policy. Yamazumi Masami's example from an ethics textbook describes the story of Noguchi Hideyo (1876–1928), a well known medical researcher who badly burnt his hand in early age:

'Hideo began to attend school. As one might expect, the other children made fun of his hand. Though it saddened him he decided to ignore them: "So what if my hand is deformed. If I study hard I can succeed in life – I'll show them!"' (Yamazumi 1986:92). In the 1943 version of the textbook the same episode is described as follows: 'so what if my hand is deformed. If I study hard I can do something great for my country – just wait and see!' (Yamazumi 1986:92). According to Yamazumi, the Imperial Rescript on Education had the ambition to create a similar mind control in schools as in the army: all citizens should put the nation's well-being before individual ambitions (1986:91).

The current Japanese educational curriculum has its basis in the World War II constitution implemented by the occupation forces (Okano & Tsuchiya 1999:13–31). A key term from the General Headquarters of the occupation forces was 'democratic and peaceful education', and its objectives were to implement consciousness of democratic rights and responsibilities with the emphasis on peace education. The principles of Japanese education were founded in The Fundamental Law of Education (FLE) from 1947 (MESSC 2000:9ff). This legal basis of education was regarded as a cornerstone of the new constitution. In creating peace and democracy and preserving Japanese culture, education was regarded as most essential. The educational aims were 'the full development of personality' where 'love for truth and justice' would permeate individual values (MESSC 2000:9ff). The focus is on respect for labour, a sense of responsibility and an independent spirit, and that all people should be given equal opportunities to acquire an education according to their abilities; the FLE underlines that there should not be any discrimination on account of race, creed, sex, social status, economic position or family origin.

The increased democratisation of Japanese education included a greater focus on equal opportunities based on ability. A single-line school system (6–3–3–4) was created for the purpose of fulfilling this objective (Okano & Tsuchiya 1999:33). The single-line system replaced pre-war multiple tracks as well as raising the statutory school leaving age from twelve to fifteen (Beauchamp & Rubinger 1989:119f). A new curriculum was introduced where in general the pre-

war elitist schooling system was to change towards general education for all citizens. The new policy put the focus on universal values of education as a basis for democracy, and as a tool to foster a young generation of Japanese into ‘peace loving and active democratic citizens’ (Beauchamp & Rubinger 1989:119f). In sum, demilitarisation can be identified as the main goal in the first phase of post-war education policy in Japan.

### 1.3.2 The use of human capital

The 1960s represented a shift from a stage of restoration to growth. Citizens of Japan were to be educated for participation in the nation’s economic growth. The importance of human resources for economic growth was underlined (MEXT 2001a) When the income-doubling plan was presented in 1960, it estimated a shortage of approximately 170,000 scientists and engineers during the period from 1960 to 1970 (Beauchamp & Rubinger 1989:145).<sup>2</sup> In practice this resulted in more resources being allocated to science and technology, and the influence of major corporations on government policy increased.

Enrolment in higher education in particular rose during the period from 1960–1970.

Enrolment at different education levels (%)

	1935	1947	1955	1965	1975	1985	1995	1998
Elementary Education	99.6	99.8	99.8	99.8	99.9	99.9	99.9	99.9
Secondary Education	39.7	61.7	78.0	82.7	95.3	96.3	97.0	97.4
Higher Education	3.0	5.8	8.8	14.6	30.3	32.1	37.1	42.0

Source MESSC 2000:18

Private universities were given a greater role in higher education, accepting 60 per cent of students entering the university in 1955, and 70 per cent in 1965 (MEXT 2001a) The Ministry of Education supported the private initiative through subsidies for expenditure. Okano and Tsuchiya declare that the shift from justifying the immediate post-war democratisation and socialisation of the people to meeting the new requirements now went along the line of corporate need for ‘human capital’ in the manufacturing industries (1999:39f). Education should, according to this human capital perspective, be evaluated in terms of how it can contribute to the economy.

<sup>2</sup> This was initiated during the government of Prime Minister Hayato Ikeda, and its goal was to double the national income within a decade (Beauchamp & Rubinger 1989:145).

Education came to be regarded as an investment, and a greater burden was put on the parents who were supposed to finance their children's education to a larger extent. Their contribution was regarded as an investment that would later pay off thanks to an overall expanded economy. Parents' expenditure on education was consequently doubled for primary and middle-schools pupils between 1961 and 1964 (Okano & Tsuchiya 1999:39f).

### 1.3.3 Neo-nationalistic influences and current trends in the 1980s

In the 1980s the four reports published by the ad hoc council (National Council on Educational Reform) between 1985 and 1987 presented three major goals: (i) the principle of respect for the individual; (ii) transition to a lifelong learning system; (iii) response to internationalisation and the information society (MEXT 2001c). These reports have constituted the basis for the neo-conservative reform movements. The purpose was to decrease the centralised and standardised education system, and instead promote flexibility towards changes. According to the Ministry of Education these reforms were necessary since 'Japan increasingly witnessed a loss of social solidarity and decline in educational functions of the family' (MEXT 2001c). In a similar pattern the Educational Reform Plan for the 21st century developed by the Ministry of Education in 2001 identifies three general goals (MEXT 2001b): Firstly, to foster Japanese with a rich sense of humanity. Secondly, to create an educational system that encourages individual abilities to grow and foster Japanese with rich creativity. Thirdly, to create an educational system to meet the changes in social and economic conditions in the world.

### 1.3.4 Educational debate in Japan today

Some critics of the reform policy recognise the previous high quality of Japanese education by international standards (see Amano 2003; Fujita 2000; Shimizu 2001). But the alleged problems of, e.g. bullying and school refusal, have created a moral basis for the public debates where the core of the problems is not identified. Instead the critics claim that the reforms have mainly been provoked by concerns about the 'internationalised society', with the efficiency of Japanese schoolings being questioned as to whether it is sufficient for the 'changing world'. The centralised and regulated education system is criticised by the media for the examination procedures which put pressure on the pupils and in turn are alleged to create school-phobia. Political initiatives were a response to this public attention. Schoppa (1991), for example, underlines how Prime Minister Nakasone used debated incidents of violence among school children in the 1980s to urge the need for educational reforms. The initiatives on decentralisation are also criticised since

this is alleged to increase privatisation in the domains of education, and it is feared that the flexibility and diversity could in practice reintroduce a multi-track schooling system (Okano & Tsuchiya 1999: 212–233).

The merit-based system and single-line structure is regarded as most essential in providing equal opportunity, often measured in terms of achievement and attendance. The selection process is to a large extent standardised, and in order to enter higher education over half of the Japanese high school students take the national entrance examination (MESSC 2000:38).<sup>3</sup> The form of this examination has contributed to the so-called ‘educational credential society’ that places great importance on where individuals have studied, rather than what they have studied (Okano & Tsuchiya 1999: 212–233). Consequently the result is a hierarchical structure where the most prestigious universities are the most difficult to enter. This affects educational choices from secondary education: entering a prestigious high school will also improve the possibilities for entry to a prestigious university (see Sugimoto 1997; Okano & Tsuchiya 1999). The ‘examination-hell’ puts pressure on students from an early age to be accepted at the ‘right’ educational sites. This tracking problem has created an educational industry with private extracurricular cram schools, *juku*, in order to better prepare students for examinations. The increased time pupils spend in schools has created a debate on students’ pressure, along with other popularised identification of current problems in Japanese education: the focus is especially on bullying, school violence, school refusal and corporal punishment (see Schoppa 1991; Amano 2002; Sugimoto 1997; Okano & Tsuchiya 1999).

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<sup>3</sup> The National Center for University Entrance Examination (NCUEE). The NCUEE includes 31 subjects in six subject areas: Japanese language, geography and history, civics, mathematics, science and foreign languages. Applicants do not take all subjects: students often choose subjects depending on which ones are designated by the university they wish to enter (MESSC 2000:82).

## 2. Theoretical approach

### 2.1 Modern schooling

Nils Christie states that the educational system confirms already existing differences in society (1972:30–52). If you want to advance in society, schooling is essential, i.e. higher education level. Education at a lower level is basically the same as no schooling at all. Christie argues that there is an escalating process of selection: When compulsory education in industrialised countries creates a population where basically everyone can read and write, this quality does not become a merit in itself. If the majority of students graduate from secondary education, it becomes a minimum of educational achievement rather than an educational merit.

Torsten Husén (1980) points out the importance of viewing education in a wider social context. On the one hand education is an instrument for individual careers and national economic growth, and on the other hand the educational curriculum emphasises harmonious development and personal gains in knowledge itself. It can be said that this is a paradox in the function of the meritocratic system, and a problem for how to motivate students for educational achievement. According to Husén, an important reason for crisis in education is the ‘achievement’ society, where schools have a selective function in sorting individuals into different positions and accordingly encounter difficulties in accomplishing pedagogic goals in accordance with the educational curriculum (1980:17). In a system where achievement and selection are based on quantified values measured by grades, some sort of standardisation will occur that results in uniform approaches to educational quality and methods of teaching (Husén 1980:29). In this sense educational equality is not offered by increasing a larger amount of educational sites to higher education since it does not reduce the competitive and selective nature of education. Arguments claiming that the system offers equality need to fulfil the following two assumptions according to Husén: (i) Social mobility is best accomplished by offering equal formal opportunities for education. (ii) Individuals have different qualities by birth which decide educational achievements. These differences in qualities do not question the social equilibrium as long as the society rewards individuals according to their achievements and not on basis of creed or economic means (Husén 1980:55f). The assumptions focus on an institutional and formal level of explanation. Durkheim’s ‘social fact’ is explained as something ‘which is general over the whole of a given society whilst having an existence of its own, independent of its individual manifestations’ (Wallace & Wolf 1999:21). Durkheim’s examples of social facts could be laws, morals and customs which in themselves become more than each individual contribution to the society. In the functionalist sense, selection is necessary, since it can be the basis for solidarity in

equal terms of institutional access for the individual based on his or her merits and in accordance with the social facts.

Louis Althusser focuses on the ideological functions in a society. He asks, 'what do children learn at school?' (Althusser 1971:132). Apart from rudimentary skills such as reading, writing or arithmetic they will also learn 'good behaviour', which includes moral education based on respect for a system and its social and technical division of labour. It is not merely a reproduction of labour but also a reproduction of the ruling ideology, as well as its agents. Schools in this sense become an apparatus that ensures 'subjection to the ruling ideology' (Althusser 1971:133). According to Althusser, ideology is a system of ideas and images that dominate a person or a society's consciousness: that is, an imaginary creation in relation to the real conditions that prevail (Althusser 1971:131f, 138). Reproduction of qualifications of the workforce is ensured through school systems and other institutions: it is not only practical or theoretical knowledge that is taught in school, but also moral values. These are rules designed to maintain respect for the social and technical division of labour. This is the practical function of an ideology. It is not enough to reproduce workers' qualifications but also their submission to the ruling virtues. The submission and reproduction of consciousness can be compared with Gramsci's concept of hegemony, according to which values, or the rationale, are affixed as a natural part of consciousness whereby the individual ambition coincides with the doctrines of the ruling elite (Gramsci 1967:150ff).

Bourdieu and Passeron (1980) also recognise that the ideological function of educational system is to legitimise the established order. The authors identify the crucial reason why the educational system manages to preserve its ideological function, namely, by focusing on equal opportunities in the educational system (1980:62f). Accordingly, education has a double nature: at the same time as the tendency is to preserve its function and culture, it strives to unify the educational values within the existing social structure (1980:61). Education can in this sense fulfil its social function, i.e. a class-reproductive function, as well as fulfilling its ideological function, which is to hide the social function by emphasising its autonomy *vis-à-vis* society (1980:62).

## 2.2 The cultural approach – knowledge and education

The difference between physical and intellectual work, argues Gesser (1985), is not mainly a difference between those working in blue-collar or white-collar jobs. Gesser illustrates this by quoting Nicos Poulantaz, who states that the distinction is crucial in aspects of political and ideological relations determined by specific relations in production (Gesser 1985:12). This establishes an organic relation between intellectual work that is separated from manual work, and the manual work has reduced intellectual aspects and is consequently defined as requiring less

'knowledge' in its practice. This definition of knowledge is illustrated by Gesser's example of the American sociologist Robert M. Cook and his review in *American Journal of Sociology* 1968/69 (Gesser 1985:13).<sup>4</sup> His review, according to Gesser, was criticised since Cook was a regular construction worker and not a professional scholar at the time when the article was published. Cook had previously been an associate professor at Yale but had voluntarily left this position, his review was, however, still evaluated in terms of his present formal position in employment. Knowledge is in this sense legitimated through institutional participation and position. The form and content of knowledge are separated, and formal and institutional recognition is crucial.

Berger and Luckmann (1973) recognise legitimation as the process of 'explaining' and 'justifying'. The authors write: 'Legitimation [explains] the institutional order by ascribing cognitive validity to its objectivated meanings. Legitimation justifies the institutional order by giving a normative dignity to its practical imperatives' (1973:111). In order to ensure that a procedure is legitimated by the participants, not only the 'proper' values are needed, but also specific 'knowledge' is of equal importance. There must be knowledge of the roles that define 'right' and 'wrong' actions within the structure. By gaining this kind of knowledge the individual will also have a more solid basis of values that enable him or her to succeed in education.

Bourdieu argues that in order to succeed in education, a whole set of cultural behaviour is necessary (Wallace & Wolf 1999:112). Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* can be explained as various principles of evaluation and distinction (Bourdieu 1999:19). An individual's habitus is the basis for deciding what is 'good' or 'bad', and what would be regarded as distinguished by one person, pretentious or boastful by another and vulgar by a third. According to Bourdieu, habitus can explain the uniform style that unites practices and means with single agents or classes of agents. Habitus is a generative unifying principal that transforms the inherent and relational attributes into a uniform lifestyle. Important for understanding the 'value' and strategic use of habitus is its specific relation to the relevant social room. Bourdieu describes the social room as 'structures of differences', that are not constant but instead relational and dependent on different positions in the field (1995:44–46). The social room is described as a field that forces itself on the individual, and at the same time becomes a competitive frame for action and goal-orientation (1995:44–46). The specific field varies but in general the evaluation of its rules is set by an individual's symbolic capital that determines the position in the particular field. Bourdieu describes symbolic capital as different characteristics of e.g. economic, cultural, or social capital (Bourdieu 1995:97). These are transformed into symbolic capital when the social agents can recognise them and ascribe specific

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<sup>4</sup> Robert M. Cook reviewed the American sociologist Amatai Etzioni's book *The Active Society* from 1968. The review was published in *American Journal of Sociology* 1968/69, vol. 75 (Gesser 1985:13).

values to them. Symbolic capital should be regarded as a relational understanding of the social world, i.e. different social rooms that contribute to the understanding of 'reality'. Personal background and knowledge of the particular 'rules' are crucial in acting rationally in a particular field.

It is important to regard the process as dynamic and relational. This can be illustrated by Willis' (1991) study of working-class students using non-conformist behaviour in opposition to the official 'knowledge' orientation in school. The study illustrates that the individual is not a passive bearer of culture, but also transforms and creates alternative cultures and strategies which are rational for his or her life-world. Billy Ehn and Orvar Löfgren (1982:13) underline the dynamic interaction in the term culture: experiences, knowledge and values that are shared and transformed in social action are the core of culture. The individual is both a bearer and an active creator of culture. Individuals constantly reshape culture by having new experiences and questioning dominant ideas by creating alternative cultures (Ehn & Löfgren 1982:15). The meeting with institutional learning is also a process of defining individual position in the group. Jonas Frykman (1998:30f) sees how identity is formed in education: pupils need school in order to 'become something, and to be someone'. The achievement of becoming 'someone' can be interpreted as a structural and formal recognition of achievement, but it also involves an identity-creating process based on structures. Arnman & Jönsson (1986:83) remark that schools visualise the structure of a society where the pupils should fit in, and help to imprint self-identification in accordance with this structure (Arnman & Jönsson 1986:83f). The authors identify the ideological aspect of equality in schooling, where free choice dominates the view of educational achievements, and there is a conviction that differences in talent or skill determine educational choices. The result is that pupils are regarded as subjects who perform rational actions. This in turn includes the perspective that the individual is fully able to survey society, school and the employment market, rationally and unambiguously (Arnman & Jönsson 1986:84). Beverly Skeggs also identifies structural restrictions on individuals, stating that identity is not a result of objective social positions (1999:153). Identities are continuously reproduced as responses to social positions by access to the system and by utilising different forms of capital. Skeggs argues that individuals have limited access and mobility between different subject positions in the structure. According to Skeggs, the institutional organisation and division of labour is structured in a way that leads to unequal treatment due to factors such as class, gender and race. The responses to this structure depend on the boundaries created for the individual.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 The material

This study is the result of fieldwork conducted in Japan in the summer of 2002. The qualitative data were collected through interviews with a total of thirteen students enrolled at four-year universities in the Kansai area. Five of these interviews were conducted with the aid of an interpreter. Of the students that participated in my study, nine belonged to a university teacher-training programme, thus with different majors. Four of the students were studying in different disciplines, and two of them were of Korean origin.

The initial contact with the field was made in spring 2001 via a Japanese person whom I got to know through the International Secretariat at Lund University. This contact became my gatekeeper to the field, and most valuable for my success in actually conducting a field study in Japan. The assistance included an invitation to the home department of my contact, and being introduced to staff and students at the department as well as practical help with accommodation. My contact had also arranged a supervisor for me at the department, which proved to be of great help for my study. The Japanese supervisor's wide contact network made it possible for me to visit three different universities and several scholars involved with issues of education at the university. Formality is of great importance in Japanese universities, and being formally introduced opened many doors.

In the phenomenological perspective the individual is viewed in an interpretative way, considering his or her life-world. Bogdan and Taylor underline the importance of not reducing the subject to an isolated variable or a hypothesis (1975:4f). Importance is instead attached to the subjective nature of this kind of approach. It then gives the researcher the possibility to acquire a deeper understanding of the definition of the world of the subject. It is this definition that is essential. My general aim was to examine the concept of knowledge: not as an objective phenomenon, but rather what kind of sense people make of their definitions. I was interested in framing the individuals' life-worlds: in doing so I regarded interviews as the most powerful tool for collecting data. I wanted to have the possibility to follow up and to get closer to the logic that individuals used in personal interpretations. From the phenomenological perspective, the term life-world can be understood as the most fundamental level of consciousness, which provides individuals with insight and determine how a person experiences reality (Wallace & Wolf 1999:174f).

In practical terms there are several difficulties about coming close to the life-world of the subjects. Davies and Esseveld (1989) focus on the subject–subject relation that is created

between the interviewer and the interviewees. In order to ensure a fruitful dialogue it is necessary to have some sort of 'give and take' relationship, where the authors recognise the need for solidarity with the interviewee. According to my experience, common rituals that we expect people to perform are important in establishing good contact between an interviewer and an interviewee. This may mean having an informal conversation before getting on with the actual interview. In the field interviews with the students, most of the sessions started with general questions regarding their studies. They, on the other hand, usually asked me questions about Sweden, and in some cases also showing anxiety about the interview, which they now could talk about, thus making the atmosphere more relaxed and informal. But it is also an unequal relation, where I as a researcher define the situation, and this should not be underestimated in an interview session. An important factor in qualitative research is the respect of the researcher for the individuals and how the material is to be used. In my experience, clear information about the nature of the study, and how the material is to be collected, limits anxiety among the participants. Stojanovic underlines that the interviewees are the ones who are experts on their own lives, their opinions and their actions (2001:50). The researcher's goal is to interpret and understand. In doing so, a trustful relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee must be established in order to ensure a fruitful qualitative interview.

### 3.2 Choosing the group – limitations and possibilities

I knew that communication could be a problem in the field since I do not speak Japanese. I recognised that senior students as a group could speak at least some English. Students in the teacher training programme should also, following the same logic, be more interested than other students in problems and issues in contemporary Japanese education. The students participating in this study were studying at master's level and therefore identified as senior students since they all previously had a bachelor's degree. Five of my thirteen interviews were conducted with the aid of an interpreter. I had the possibility to get help from a volunteer interpreter, and my idea was that it could be useful in the event of communication problems. None of those interviews are used in the material here since I did not have positive experiences of creating a dialogue or following up responses from the participant by this means of communication. The dialogue was to a large extent conducted between the interpreter and the interviewee and it reduced the potential to create the subject to subject relationship that was important for my purpose.

In all of the interviews I had a checklist where I had written down several themes I was interested in discussing. I did not necessarily follow this form slavishly, apart from some crucial themes that I asked all participants about. These themes concerned background, motivation and

ambitions. I tried not to tell them any kind of ‘facts’, or correct their story: I just tried to encourage the participants to share their experiences and emotions with me. Depending on the participants’ responses I followed up their answers, often by simply asking ‘what do you mean?’ or ‘can you explain this to me again?’ My experience is that by encouraging the participant to explain, he or she was willing to share experiences and quite sensitive data.

The material of this study is presented in four case studies. The selection of interviews and the form of presentation should of course not be regarded as representative of a larger collective. It is instead supposed to represent four different ways of recognising and dealing with institutional learning. The focus is on cultural patterns and personal life-worlds important for the individuals represented. I decided to use this form of presentation partly because of certain similarities in the eight interviews which are the basis of this thesis: the similarities were found in cultural patterns and recognition of how to utilise education as a resource. It is important to note that the eight interviews from where I selected the cases should not be regarded as typical cases of cultural patterns or life-worlds representing Japanese students. It is instead the aspect that Trondman (1993:127) describes as understanding of the social conditions that sets the framework for individuals’ self-realisation that is desired in this thesis. According to Trondman, this view in interpreting qualitative data includes the need to relate individuals to different social circumstances, i.e. different level of analysis including specific environments, relations and structures that have affected individuals’ self-recognition. I have also tried to relate the cases to wider aspects of Japanese society, with the ambition of increasing the understanding of personal experiences.

The four interviews that make up the cases ranged from one and a half hours to two hours in length, and all of the interviews were taped and transcribed. Two of the cases were interviewed on two occasions. I tried as much as possible to keep the original formulation, but in order to present a more readable text some changes have been made regarding the language.

### 3.3 Presenting the material

#### 3.3.1 Case 1. Yoko

Yoko is a 33-year-old Japanese woman now studying in a master’s programme with English as a major. She wants to become a teacher of English, and she has previously worked as an English teacher for eight years at a private English conversation school in the Kansai area.

Yoko’s story

When I was in high school I was not so interested in studying. I was really into club activities but I liked English very much, and I wanted to study English in college, but my grades were not so good. I was just doing my own thing and the teachers did not take care of me. We had a lot of materials that we had to study, and the teachers were always telling us to study hard. They kept telling us to study, so I think that is the only thing basically that made me discouraged since I did not know how to study. I wanted more instructions, more orientation from my teachers on how to do it. I was very good at English in junior high school, and that made it fun to study English. At high school I was in a brass band where I played the trumpet, and I wanted to go to a music college and become a professional trumpeter. When I told my music teacher this he advised me not to since I was a woman, and the competition was so hard. I was really hurt by his negative attitude since I respected him a lot. The second thing I liked was English so I decided to go into that field. My first ambition after finishing school was to become a translator, and I studied for it for a year, but I was not very interested in talking about business and politics all the time and I got tired of it. Also I was looking for a job where I could get more money, so I applied to this conversation school. And then once I started teaching I thought this is my career, it totally changed my direction.

After high school I went to a women's college. I think most students regarded their studies as four years of free time before getting married and they did not take it seriously. I was very disappointed, but I thought that I could do my own thing at this college. One day our lecturer told us, 'Please get married as soon as possible, that is how woman becomes happy.' I did not see marriage as an option. I feel that I am out of the group even now, maybe it is some kind of inferiority complex. I feel inferior to other people because I do not have experience like high school or junior high school teaching, what they call school. I try to study hard but still I feel as if I am not a real teacher. That is probably how the society, looks at me, 'well, you are a teacher, but you never taught at high school, you are not a real teacher'.

I know that the society here has some prejudice towards people from what we call low-level university. My university was not a high level university, and some of my friends from high school were wondering why I went to that university, and one guy even burst out, 'What!' That motivated me more to study English, because people think that I was not smart enough to go to another university, so I wanted to prove that I could be better than them.

I do not like to follow everyone, but I feel a little worried about being out of the group, but still I do not really want to be in a group. I work together with foreigners at the conversation school, and I always hang out with them during the weekends or in my spare time. In my life here

I talk to Japanese people but in my private life I am always with Americans. I think my idea has changed because of that environment, and I was influenced by the Western way of thinking. You should take care of yourself, and you should do what you want to do. If you do not like your situation, try to change it, that kind of thing. But in Japan it is not very good to think like that, here it is very important to have agreement. You have to sacrifice, and say 'yes' even you do not really think 'yes'. I am a little bit towards the American society but not completely. My friend who is American described me as a person in Japan who lives in the English bubble: I think it explained a lot about me. I do not like the society in Japan so English is kind of a way to escape from society. I protect myself with English, it is like a bubble, and I always sit inside the bubble and try not to have too contact much society. That is why I probably hang out with more Westerners than Japanese in my private life. I want to have a real career to support myself well enough for the rest of my life, which is the main reason. I am interested in doing research, and also teaching at the university.

Yoko expresses feelings of inferiority based on previous education. She does not recognise her studies at a women's college as a sufficient academic achievement. The academic atmosphere among her fellow students and teachers instead indicates a gender-specific orientation to a domestic life, which she did not accept. In Yoko's story independence is achieved through academic achievement, i.e. studies at a higher level, which will provide her with a professional career. She sees herself as limited in not having what she identifies as a 'proper' background, but she realises her possibilities to use her knowledge of English as an adequate tool for advancing in the structure. And to advance far enough in the structure would be a means to independence. Her focus is set on high achievement in the existing structure: a way to show that she is capable of succeeding even though she does not follow the common idealised way for Japanese students. Yoko expresses a feeling that her background limits her life-world, and she states that she prefers having foreign friends to Japanese. As a part of her description of the 'English bubble', her language capabilities are used both for a professional career and for social acceptance. English is ascribed a specific value, besides the communicative aspect, and turned into a symbolic capital which is used for a rational purpose in her field of recognition: both cultural belonging and being able to support herself independently.

In order to understand Yoko's description of her previous schooling experiences and future ambitions, it is important to look at the structure of the Japanese labour market and the gender-

specific expectations from families that create a difference between male and female values attached to schooling (see Okano & Tsuchiya 1999:75; Sugimoto 1997). Of women participating in higher education 24.3 per cent go to a two-year junior college, and 18.7 per cent go on to a four-year university (Okano & Tsuchiya 1999:75). This makes female enrolment in four-year universities the lowest among Western industrialised nations according to Okano and Tsuchiya. The equality plan states that each individual should have the same opportunities regardless of race, creed or gender (MESSC 2000). Even if institutional obstacles are not necessarily placed in the way of women, their participation in the labour market and access to education is restricted. From the perspective of employers, the female four-year university graduates are not a good investment since they are expected to get married soon and accordingly spend relatively few years in the company (Okano & Tsuchiya 1999:76). Men's educational qualification are more useful in acquiring high-valued and better-paid employment. The number of positions filled by male graduates in 1996 was 1.8 times greater than if an equal number of jobs had gone to men and women, while the figure for female graduates was 0.64 (Okano & Tsuchiya 1999:76). One of the exceptions is the teaching profession, where females are in the majority with 60 per cent in elementary school; in lower secondary education the share falls to 37.8 per cent, and to 22.3 per cent in upper secondary school (MESSC 2000:89). Limited institutional support for both child care and elder care makes it difficult for women to combine career with family responsibilities, often considered as woman's obligation in Japan. Okano and Tsuchiya state that over half of women in their early thirties are out of the labour force regardless of their education level (1999:76). Parents are keener to support their sons' education, since they are regarded as security for their old age. A large proportion of Japanese parents think that their children should be socialised to acquire sex-specific roles. In Japan 62.6 per cent support sex-based socialisation, in comparison to 20 per cent of the English parents, 31.3 per cent in US, and 6 per cent in Sweden (Okano & Tsuchiya 1999:77).

### 3.3.2 Case 2. Dae

Dae is third-generation Korean living in Japan. She is 26 years old and now studying at a Japanese national university in the Kansai area. She was educated at North Korean schools in Japan from primary school to a Korean university. Dae describes her educational experiences as strongly affected by being of Korean origin. She tells how her parents' experiences as second-generation Koreans were strongly affected by discrimination and prejudice. She and her sister were brought up in the belief that they have to be strong since the Japanese society discriminates against

Koreans, and their opportunities to succeed in society were limited.

### Dae's story

My parents hated the Japanese and the government. I can understand their feelings but my own life experience is different. The encounters and experiences that I had are different from my parents. I think most third-generation Koreans have such problems, and especially if they, like me, went to Korean schools. There are third-generation Koreans who do not go to Korean schools, and who do not speak Korean, and do not take pride in Korean culture, maybe they do not have such problems. I recognised that my world was limited, I lived in a Korean community, and I wanted to know more about the Japanese and the international society. I had many questions when I grew up, and I could feel a contradiction between what my teacher said, and my real encounters. For example, my teacher states that 'North Korea is a good country', but on television it is different, it says the opposite. So I had questions about what is right or wrong. Still, I did not know, I only knew about the Korean community and Korean education. This made it difficult for me to judge. Almost all Korean schools educate children according to North Korean education system. South Korea is regarded as bad and there is an antagonism between North and South Korea. I was told that South Korea is poor and that the situation is bad. That they are poorer than North Korea. But I visited North Korea on a school visit and now I know it is the opposite. I wanted to go elsewhere, when I was in junior high school I wanted to apply to a Japanese high school. The reason was that I wanted to know more about the big world, and also I wanted to become a doctor. In order to become a doctor I needed to enter a medical department at a Japanese university. Students who go to Korean schools are handicapped. Japanese students study hard from the start to pass the entrance test for universities, when we graduate high school it is already too late. I studied hard but I did not know what to study, I did not have information about what I had to study. So I only studied school studies, I mean most Japanese go to cram schools, and they get more information about what is necessary in order to enter universities, but we did not have any information. In any case my parents and my teacher were against me applying to a Japanese high school. They think that if a Korean goes to a Japanese school they will turn into Japanese. I couldn't go to a Japanese school since my parents decided my education, and children have no rights to choose their own education. I did not have the courage to say that I really wanted to go to a Japanese school, I would feel like a traitor, 'You have changed into a Japanese'. But now I heard, my little brother is in Korean high school, that they have changed since I was a student. Teachers now support kids entering Japanese

universities.

My parents want to control everything, my education, my employment and my life. They hope that I will marry to a Korean in Japan. But it is really difficult to meet a Korean here so almost all Koreans use matchmakers in order to arrange a marriage. I have experienced this arrangement and I hated it, it is so unnatural. I now have a Japanese boyfriend, but my parents do not know about it. I am afraid to tell them in case they won't accept him.

It is like now, when I applied to my current university I never told my parents. If I had said that I was taking entrance examinations for a Japanese university they would not allow me. I told them when I already knew that I had been admitted. And at first I think my father was furious, even if he did not show it to me. But later he was very proud, and he told me that I was great. This was the first time ever that he had praised me. I think that he wanted to go to a Japanese university, but he never had a chance. He is now very proud of me since I was able to enter a high-quality, high-level university as a Korean. I had no experience of Japanese schools but I qualified to pass the examination. He is still reluctant to some extent since I'm not married yet.

Dae belongs to the minority of Koreans who attend North Korean national schooling. She was educated with the Korean Peninsula in focus and she felt a strong discrepancy between her Korean schooling and the world she encountered outside school. Dae had the opportunity to visit North Korea, where she experienced the harsh living conditions of the population. The image of Korea that she was brought up with was not shared by her image of what most people think in Japan, in her experience. She feels as if she was being kept out of Japanese society, neither participating in nor knowing anything about the society where she was born. She expresses feelings of being kept outside the world, and now wanting to fully participate. Her ethnic origin does limit her perspective of 'belonging' and participation: For Dae it is important not to betray the Koreans or forget the previous discrimination that occurred. For her the image of belonging to a large extent includes success in schooling at a higher level, and be accepted as a Korean-Japanese. Her pride in Korean culture and language is stressed, indicating that assimilation does not include forgetting her origin. As her encounter with in contemporary Japan is comparatively positive as regards recognition and acceptance, she does not see a contradiction between taking pride in her Korean origin and fully participating in the Japanese system.

Dae is proud of the Korean culture and language as a part of her identification with the Korean community, and her family's expectations. Her description of 'turning into Japanese' can

be understood as betraying the Koreans and their situation in Japan, where she takes on a collective responsibility as representing 'the Korean'. Dae does not feel a contradiction between being 'Korean', and participating in Japanese society, which she describes as dominating in her parents' relation to Japanese society. Instead she underlines the differences between generations and how the society has changed. Both she and her family are proud that she can participate in the meritocratic system, and being successful once the obstacles were forced. She is able to participate in Japanese higher education at a prestigious educational establishment, and the image of the normal path for a Japanese becomes normative when judging her own experiences and achievements. Entering a prestigious educational institution on her own merits partly becomes a way of recognising her qualities, and partly a means to decrease her parents' control over her life. Her father could also recognise her achievement in participating in a selection process, where her success lies in being recognised as 'equal' in terms of ability to participate in the system as her parents never could. Important in the discrepancy between her strategies for success and her parents is the gender-specific expectations of her family. Their stress on finding a Korean-Japanese partner can be interpreted as focusing on preserving the unity of the 'community'. Being Korean is for her a shift from her parents' image of struggle against society's prejudice and discrimination by focusing on their own group, whereas Dae puts the emphasis on belonging and acceptance.

The largest Korean school system in Japan is operated by the Chongyun organisation (General Association of Koreans in Japan), which has political ties with North Korea (Brender 2001). Korean schools in Japan include education from elementary to university level, even though the education has not been officially recognised as equal to Japanese education by the Ministry of Education in Japan (Brender 2001). It is also a minority that participate in Korean schooling in Japan, as about ninety per cent of the Japanese-Korean students participate in Japanese national or private schools (TaeYoung 2002:56). Even if high school students from North Korean schools can apply for some local universities, they are not eligible to apply to national universities (Okano & Tsuchiya 1999:114). The possibility for students with North Korean schooling to apply to higher education is either through special quotas that high schools have with some universities or by participating in correspondence courses, completing a Japanese high school degree (MESSC:12ff and 82f). Koreans in Japan have also been limited in applying for employment in the government sector since this has been closed for foreign nationals. It should be mentioned that initiatives have been taken to reduce the exclusion of foreign nationals. Since 1996 several municipal governments, including Kawasaki, Osaka, Kobe, Yokohama, Kanagawa and Kochi

prefectures, have taken the initiative to remove obstacles in the employment market and allow foreign nationals to apply for jobs in the governmental service (Okano & Tsuchiya 1999:114).

### Case 3.3.3. Hiroshi

Hiroshi is a 22-year-old living and studying in Kansai area. His major is English, and his ambition is to become a teacher. He was born in a small village in the region and did not first plan a teaching career. He was oriented to technical and practical subjects and first attended a technical college in a nearby city.

#### Hiroshi's story

I was living in the countryside and in school my classmates were okay. I thought that my friends were very interesting. In high school everything was new to me, since the school was not a normal high school but an industrial one. My parents were not involved in my choice because they said everything was up to me. I could choose according to my own interests. In general many parents guide their children to go to a particular university or high school, I think that I was lucky.

I did not have pressure in boys' school and I could be relaxed both in junior high and high school. I felt good in high school mainly because of my new friends. They came from all over the prefecture and they spoke different dialects and introduced me to new ways of thinking. I become interested in them and I developed a stronger relationship with my high school friends than my junior high school classmates. Still I was not very interested in the technical subjects. In high school I went to cram school before entrance examinations to the university. That was cram school for mathematics only, and I was not very good at maths so maybe I should not have gone to this cram school. I wanted to attend some other schools but there were also financial reasons, and in order to help my parents I decided not to apply to other schools. I did not really want to study hard, but still I wanted to feel the atmosphere among the students who went to famous universities. I wanted to feel the air, the atmosphere of what it is like to study hard. Since I lived in the countryside I did not know what to study or how I should do it. I thought that students in Osaka or Tokyo try harder than me. In my home town there is one junior high school and two high schools so there is not so much competition between the schools. I wanted to know what kind of studies I should do, and to feel the atmosphere among students in cities like Osaka. I was

able to change my mind since I understood that I love English, and that I hate maths. In order to study my favourite subjects like English literature, I have to study hard and I have to enter a good university. Maybe the main reason why I have chosen education is that I wanted to improve my ability to use English. Now in our society English is very useful for me in various areas. And I love their music, American soul music.

I started to study here in order to increase my ability to use English. I think ability orientation is good for employment, but some students do not think so. I think they have some kind of inferiority feeling. Some big companies tend to change this orientation to prestigious universities. Even if they still tend to choose university students from prestigious universities. I think the reason is that the employers cannot tell good students from other students, so they tend to look at the university name. I believe that a famous company cannot employ me, like Sony, since the name of my university affects my application. Students, for example from Tokyo University, have pride and they are encouraged to apply to famous companies.

Hiroshi underlines the credential effect of attending a university with a good reputation. Aspects that have affected his educational choices include his concern about his parents' economy, and the lack of a 'high-achieving' academic environment. His description of 'studying hard' is put in relation to cram schools in major cities, and the atmosphere those schools provide for a high academic result needed for high-ranking universities. In Hiroshi's description this is the ideal path of academic success in Japanese society. He sees that graduates from well-known universities have the best chance of finding good jobs. He does not express a will to study hard out of interest or satisfaction: instead he recognises school as a necessary resource for further advancement. The description by Hiroshi of the 'ideal' student is partly put in relation to participating at the right educational site, and partly being located in a greater city, where those students become normative for high-level and by implication proper students. Even though he regards his educational choice as a digression from the 'high achieving' path, his studies in English is an instrument for participation in the competition for employment. What is essential in this context for Hiroshi is found in employers' selection based on form, and limited recognition for other qualifications. He describes the increased use of English in contemporary Japan, and how it might be a possible tool for his advancement.

Japan shows differences between rural and urban areas in academic achievements and strategies of using school as a resource. A case study of 'Akai High' located in a small city in Gunma prefecture indicates that students mainly use school as a way to make friends, while

studies assume a low priority among students (Okano & Tsuchiya 1999:104–107). Generally, the students of Akai High have difficulties reading the textbooks, and have a considerable amount of students who fail exams. The students regard their school as inferior, and some remove the school badge from their uniform, so that others will not recognise which school they are attending. There are differences between urban and rural schooling in general: A study of composition writing by upper-level primary school children shows that city pupils tend to use a wider variety of conjunctions, adverbs and adjectives than rural pupils in Japan (Sugimoto 1997:117). The city children also tend to be superior in both descriptive and abstract sentence construction.

Besides differences in benefiting from school resources, the financial burden is heavier for rural parents sending their children to higher education since, apart from the regular fees required by universities or colleges, the cost of accommodation is added when students have to move from their homes. In addition, scholarships are relatively few, and usually not sufficient (Sugimoto 1997:113). Rural families also require more financial resources for their children's high school education. A major problem is that there are few high schools in the rural communities, which consequently creates a greater cost for rural families since they have to send their children away (Okano & Tsuchiya 1999:102). The tendency is that once students move to another city for high school studies they do not return to their community for employment. As a result of the decline of school age population, an increasing amount of local schools have to close, which further increases the depopulation in some rural areas. In the areas defined as depopulated in Okano and Tsuchiya's study (1999) schools decreased from 6000 primary schools and 2500 middle schools in 1960, to 3700 and 1300 respectively in 1990 (1999:102).

#### Case 3.3.4 Mei

Mei is a 40-year-old teacher from Kansai area. She is studying on a master's programme with English as a major. She has eighteen years of experience teaching at a junior high school in a small village. Mei was encouraged by the prefecture to pursue further studies in English.

#### Mei's story

Teaching has changed since I started eighteen years ago. Today students are less obedient and they find it easier to express their feelings. I think it has a good side to it, for example when we read. But many teachers are really annoyed when they stand up and walk out during class. I think

the reason maybe is because the kindergarten has changed, before they taught the children to be quiet and sit still, and listen. Everybody did that but these days in kindergarten, the children do whatever they want to do. Leadership is not practised in kindergarten, so students do what ever they want to do, some read or some walk around.

But the families have also changed. Parents have began working, before mothers used to stay at home, but now all mothers have started working outside so they leave the children at home or at kindergarten all day. They do not have security in mind, so they want to be noticed, you know, 'I am here!' We cannot completely punish the students or say, 'do not do that', because it would break our relationship. Teachers have to be more broad-minded then before. I talk to each student once a day, in between classes or at the morning meeting. I look into their eyes, talk to them and touch them and try to see how they feel.

I think that about half of the students are very relaxed and not so motivated. But in general they want to improve, and get better scores. Some ten per cent are not motivated at all and they regard themselves as failures. They go to bed very late and they do not want to study. There are probably family reasons behind this as well. Parents that are divorced are most affected, because parents do not or cannot afford to spend a lot of time with the child. The children concentrate on their family matters by themselves. Some children have moved to another place and they do not have many friends. If they feel anxiety or uneasiness in their mind they cannot concentrate on their studies.

I try to motivate the pupils. I say that it is their future if they, for example, want to become a nurse they have to go to high school. Job orientation is necessary: I say to them, 'English is used in computers, so study English.' They have to see relationships between studies and the real world. If they want to get a certain kind of job they have to go to university, or high school, so they have to study now. I work at a rural school and some think that they can get a job after graduating from junior high school. The students in town want to study more to get a better job, or go to other good areas. All we have is rice fields. Japanese usually go to high school. Even if they sleep or they do not study much, it is okay because their parents think 'high school, they go to high school that is okay'. It is very exceptional not to go to high school so they would be regarded as failure or very strange if they don't so parents want their children to go to high school. Parents from the rural area don't think so much, there are some high schools which anyone can enter, for example some have five points out of hundred in English and they can enter. They regard themselves as going to high school even if it is that kind of school.

A person should have motivation to advance or be well educated, but it does not depend on going to high school at the age of 18. That doesn't mean that you are motivated or that you want

to study. People like me can enter the university at the age of 40 and study more. If they think it is average to go to high school, that is useless. They have to consider the importance of content, and not the form. I can understand students who can't do well in maths or if students say I don't like English. If you like history it is good. It is enough for a person to have one good point. We are not gods, we cannot do everything, but Japanese education requires students to do everything with very high marks. It is very stressful for students. Also the mothers ask them to study, to get good marks and to go to a good university, and to get a good job, which does not have any relationship with children's ambition. We Japanese have a term 'educational mother', it's a very popular phenomenon in Japan. The educational moms are called 'kyoiku mama' in Japanese, everyone knows the term.

I think it is big pressure for students that did not study a lot because it changes dramatically at the age of fifteen in the third grade because of the entrance exam. They suddenly begin to study, it's a funny change. Before they say in fun, 'oh you didn't even take notes', or 'you have been walking around the classroom', those students suddenly begin to study. They want to enter high school so much, because it is considered normal. When I teach in the first grades I do not really look at the examinations level but in grade C I adjust the knowledge for the exam. In the first and second grade we enjoy games and songs, and many other activities related to human nature or community. It is important for them to concentrate on class in the third grade if they want to enter a high school they want. But it isn't enough just to pass the exam. I was a good student in junior high school and I wanted to go to the best high school but it was difficult there. I think half of the high school students can follow class the other half don't. //

Mei expresses a change in attitude towards schooling, which she puts in relation to changing social patterns. She underlines the difficulty in motivating students, especially the low achievers from rural areas, and in her experience seeing a practical use for the knowledge is crucial. Mei feels that parents from rural areas do not recognise the 'path': that a good high school eventually will increase the possibilities for better higher education. In her description the 'path' becomes the norm for a Japanese student, i.e. to pursue prepared and goal-oriented studies towards entrance exams, and accordingly be able to recognise the credential aspect of the educational system. Failure is to a large extent the lack of ability to recognising these aspects and instead focus on 'form' as the non-credential and formal aspect of education. Students need to understand the function of the system, and that success in education is not merely a question of

graduating from secondary education. From another point of view she stresses the importance of limiting the pressure on students, which the educational system requires for the high achievers. In one respect her role as a teacher comes between students' needs and the system's formal and informal requirements. Mei's explanation of a focus on a wider curriculum in the lower grades, and orienting her teaching to entrance exams in the last year indicates her ambition to give both 'qualitative' and functional teaching.

Mei also underlines the importance of having a close relationship, where her role as a teacher includes a moral responsibility. By knowing her students she can recognise reasons behind problems. Mei declares that her strategy is to avoid open confrontation in order not to destroy her relationship with students. This relationship, according to her, is crucial if the teaching is to function. This indicates aspects similar to those described by Willis (1991), who pointed out that open confrontation may gradually weaken the authoritarian role of the teacher: by using punitive measures frequently, e.g. sending students to the principal, the punishments lose their efficiency.

In Japan the notion of a student-teacher relationship is dominated by the word *Shido* or 'guidance' (Yonema 2001:62). *Shido* is not only practised in school subjects, it also includes moral, emotional and physical aspects of students' lives. Open confrontation between teachers and students in Japan is not common, and Japanese teachers try to a greater extent to guide and teach students without risking confrontation (Yonema 2001:61). Orderliness in the classroom is often explained as deriving from student-teacher relations (Yonema 2001:62). In Mei's case a failure for her students can also be interpreted as personal failure in creating a good relationship with her students. Rohlin (1983) states that the student-teacher relationship in Japan is dominated by the norm of a teacher who is devoted and involved but not an equal to students (1983:196). Teachers are in general encouraged by both school and parents to be close to students, but their relationship should not become friendship. It is an authoritarian role with similarities to family relations that is sought. Their responsibility as teachers reaches outside the school premises: For example, students caught misbehaving in Rohlin's study would be corrected regardless of where they were caught (1983:197).

#### 4. Analysis

The above cases have in common a will to participate in an institution that will provide wider possibilities of life chances. On the one hand they recognise the legitimacy of the structure, and the knowledge distributed through educational institutions. On the other hand their life-world experiences indicate limitations as far as identifying and reaching ideals that they have set up. The ideal derives from expectations and identifications of the Japanese 'normative student'. In the relation between higher education and division of labour, socialisation and transformation of knowledge becomes crucial (Gesser 1985:119). That means that attitudes, values and knowledge of 'the rational' are not generated universally, instead these values spring from specific social environments.

For Yoko and also Dae education on a higher level increases independence as regards the gender-specific relations in Japanese society, and in the particular cultural context. It results in a strategy for gaining recognition and acceptance. In Skeggs's (1999) study, the women are restricted in creating their identity: there are boundaries as to what a woman is supposed to become, but the boundaries are resonantly used in order to create strategies for gaining respectability. Dae and Yoko have created alternatives that allow them to be accepted by 'the community' but also to achieve greater independence. Yoko's description of the group can be understood as a generalised community, where an institutional arrangement such as marriage becomes normative. She can gain a position in the field by allocating symbolic capital as in the case of English language. The ability to use English is not merely restricted to communicative aspects, but also a measure of having the ability to succeed in society as a whole. The independence she seeks is both structural and cultural: Her previous experiences of being denied access to certain areas in education has created a self-awareness about possible options for advancement. She recognises the need for both economic and social 'independence', that is, to seek an alternative that will provide her with sufficient economic means as well as recognition from the described group.

Dae experienced feelings of inferiority, and a sense of being kept out of Japanese society. Her recognition of limitations in participation is bound to her ethnic origin, and the image of her 'community's' struggle against the Japanese. The ideological objectives of her Korean schooling were counterproductive in the sense of avoiding participation in Japanese society. Her early school experiences are instead used as motivation for going on to higher education. In her case, education includes possibilities for increased independence from her family, as well as a 'collective success' for the ethnic group with which she identifies. This is established through

education on a higher level that will gain social credibility in Japanese society. Still, she has an awareness of specific values that are important, and that should not be betrayed in favour of 'becoming Japanese'. Those values are symbolised by her in being proud of the Korean language and 'culture'. She applies a normative frame to the *ideal* student: a 'Japanese' person that has gone through specific institutions in order to graduate at a 'good' university. Through this generalisation, her struggle becomes collective: she was able to overcome institutional barriers and become an example of success for her Korean community. The 'community', according to her experience, does not necessarily seek participation in Japanese education, but can still recognise her achievements as gainful for the Koreans.

Education is a way into the society, as well as having a function that allows individuals recognition from a generalised 'community'. Hiroshi describes his school experiences as partly being remote from the 'big-city' high achievers. In his case the form and direction of his study were restricted since he grew up in a rural community. Students having formal recognition of graduating from some of the highly ranked Japanese universities gain qualities incomparable with his personal achievements. The form of knowledge is regarded as crucial, but Hiroshi sees a possibility to attribute his interest in English to a formally recognised value. In one respect, the increased use of English in the Japanese society makes it a commodity in the labour market, valuable knowledge for employment.

For Mei and her experiences as an educator, her story focuses on how to motivate students to become achievers in the educational structure, and on how to implement moral values. Concentrating on the form of education is, in her opinion, not being able to recognise the eventual pay-off from access to better educational institutions, with the prospect of better employment opportunities. Recognising the content of education, on the other hand, gives profitable knowledge about institutional access and the path to personal progress and values. By encouraging students towards content in education, Mei uses strategies that in some way can be related to practical issues in her students' common life experiences. She experiences a gap between what is generally regarded as educational achievement and what capabilities her students possess. Her role as an educator is that of a motivator in order to implement perspectives in students' self-recognition that they have the ability to succeed if they just study hard enough. It also includes a close relationship with her pupils. She assumes a moral responsibility for students' well-being, and puts this in relation to academic achievements. Having 'security in mind' is fundamental for good behaviour and thus for good academic performance, according to Mei.

The four cases in this study share the common resource of being able to recognise the importance of the form of education. The content of knowledge is to large extent recognised as

possibilities for advancement according to each field of recognition. There are specific cultural and social characteristics that are important in the individuals' self-image and group identification. The recognition of the 'general student' constitutes a core in evaluating individual achievements. The general student, then, becomes identified with being high-achieving, goal-orientated and highly motivated. This becomes a normative frame where the individual sees personal limitation and, at the same time, recognises what is necessary for successful participation. There are also images of the 'community', i.e. the consciousness of group-belonging that limits expansion of the life-world, but still has a function in mediating the values and norms that give broader access. The individual way of using school as a resource has different characteristics, but through identification of field-specific values, participation in educational institutions becomes important for self-realisation. The students can identify higher education as a tool for both recognition and advancement. Knowledge in itself is symbolised by this rational participation in educational institutions.

It is a culture-based rationality that becomes appreciable when the participants seek independence from the 'Japanese norm' in friendship, marriage, education and career. The more traditional 'rules' of the field are not accepted, and the cases take advantage of English, or higher education as a commodity, which makes it both a cultural and structural instrument. Applying Bourdieu's terminology, this is a symbolic capital since the participants can recognise it as a resource as well as giving it specific values. The agents can gain a position in the field by using the symbolic capital and it gives social recognition as well as becoming a structural tool for participation in e.g. employment.

A cultural process is dynamic, with the bearer of culture also actively reshaping culture. Values, norms and experiences are evaluated, re-evaluated and constructed according to the individual's rational field. This field is not structurally independent, and consequently the limitations and possibilities for the individual are set to specific cultural and structural contexts. The structures in gender relations, urban and rural differences, economic capabilities or structural disadvantages for minority groups constitute the core in culture construction for the participants. Education becomes a commodity and a 'cultural resistance'. It is a partial break with norms the participants have encountered, and at the same time a path to constitute new contexts where they can have social recognition as well as economic sufficiency, and by implication independence.

## 5. Conclusion and summary

Japan has been described as the ‘functionalist ideal’, as Yoneyama (2001) notes that the dominant perspective when analysing Japanese education tends to focus on the efficiency of the educational system in providing normative consensus through socialisation in order to ‘fulfil the need of the society’ (21ff). Accordingly, there has been an uncritical and positivist domination when evaluating the functions of Japanese schooling. The ideological doctrine emphasises that equality is ensured by meritocracy, and judging by the cases in this study there is recognition that if just enough effort is put into studies, high achievement is possible. The educational ideology corresponds with individual ambition, when the performing rationale of individuals as active subjects becomes the core of the educational doctrine. The active choice in deciding education, and the equality in formal participation legitimise the educational system, and the individuals relate failure or success in education to personal capabilities.

The participants in this study recognise that individual efforts will provide them with academic success if only the ‘right’ circumstances are provided. Emphasis is placed on the academic environment, and the knowledge about *what* and *how* to study. This can be said to reflect the normative consensus about schooling, whereby education both legitimises and normalises the knowledge distributed by educational institutions. In this respect they identify the form of education, i.e. the orientation to exams and quantified knowledge in schooling. But there is also awareness about the structural inequality that discourages their participation in education. In other words, the possibilities for high achievement are partly limited due to structural inequalities; e.g., pronouncements on gender-specific roles discourage academic advancement for women, and big cities provide better possibilities by offering a more study-oriented atmosphere than rural areas. All of the cases see themselves as being remote from the idealised image of Japanese students they describe, but share the common aspects of transforming their cultural heritage into academic achievements. In Mei’s case, her role as a teacher includes the task of motivating pupils in order to see the ‘content’ of schooling. She tries, so to speak, to change her students’ ‘rational field’, and encourages them to be oriented towards the competitive process of selection in making the ‘right’ educational choices, as graduating at a low-ranked high school in itself is a limited merit in contemporary Japan. But she is aware of limitations, and the characteristics of the educational system that are demanding for the students. From one perspective she is aware that this is a process of selection which inevitably will exclude a large share of the students. The ideological aspect of viewing individuals as endowed with equal ability to participate in education is in one sense revealed, since identified structural and cultural inequalities have been an

important basis for the ability of the participants to achieve academic success. They were able to identify aspects that limited their life-world, and realised their ambition by a struggle to ensure their self-recognition. In a way the cases in this study describe the toolkit necessary for participation in higher education.

It is important to note that this study analyses aspects of the process which utilise symbolic capital in the particular rational field, and make it a tool for education on a higher level. This is not to detract from the wider usefulness and quality of life that, e.g., proficiency in English or schooling in general will provide. It is instead the process of identifying school as a resource that gives social and cultural recognition, as described by the cases, which comes in focus of this thesis. School is an official recognition of the individual's capabilities, and it is used both as a source for creating an identity, and as a break with the norms and values that have limited the participants' life-worlds. This official recognition is normative in positioning oneself in accordance with the idealised Japanese student, as well as being granted social recognition in Japanese society.

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