

A PATTERN OF CLASS AND YOUTH DEVIANCE IN JAPAN

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Abstract: The paper presents a class analysis of youth deviance in Japan. From the late 1970's state directed delinquency controls have stepped-up contributing to an increase in the official rates of youth crime. This crackdown has targeted working class youth. Juvenile arrests and harsh punishment (placed in juvenile detention facilities) are shown to be disproportionately high for working class youth. A number of observational studies also indicate that youth rebellion (youth gang affiliation, troubles at school etc.) largely occurs among working class youngsters.

The recent crackdown on youth deviance has a historical precedence. From Tokugawa (1600-1867) Japan to present day, youth-adult conflict is described as a pattern of class cultural conflict, surges of nationalism and concomitant tightened delinquent controls and major conservative reforms in education. Propaganda must be considered as one of the reasons why the link between inequality (class and human rights) and youth deviance has not received much attention in scholarly research and in public discourse.

Key words: delinquency controls; working class; juvenile delinquency

INTRODUCTION

The powerlessness of youth makes them most vulnerable to the controls of adults in positions of power. Conflict with authority is furthered as adolescents are at an age of rebellion and idealism discontent with the status quo seeking out a new and better tomorrow (Erickson 1978). Young people are present and future oriented, questioning the past and traditional ways. Today's youth are a new generation in a rapidly changing technological world, more familiar and reliant upon personal computers, mobile phones and global information than previous generations. Conflict is inherent to this generation gap in Japan. Consequently, adults' social control over youth can tell us much about what is done to protect and maintain the status quo in the midst of social change.

A main means of containing and controlling youth behavior occurs through the criminal justice system. In Japan, upon adolescence or at the age of thirteen up to twenty years old, a youngster is confronted with a myriad of juvenile delinquent controls. Not only are young people now liable for the same crimes as adults but also for pre-delinquent offenses that cover just about every facet of non-conformity from smoking cigarettes to hanging around with the wrong crowd.

The control of juvenile crime operates through the organization of delinquency prevention. Delinquency prevention activities and controls have escalated over time. From late 1970's to about the middle of 1980's, the number of police and police-community delinquency prevention programs increased along with further restrictions

placed on youth behavior in public places that came about in 1985 with the passage of the Business Affecting Public Morals Law (in Japanese, *shin fuzokou eigyō hō*, a crackdown on businesses and youth at places where youth gather such as game centers, pubs etc.) (Yoder 2004; Yokoyama 1989). In this new millennium, delinquent controls have targeted younger aged youth, incorporated stricter means of punishment and given the police more authority to catch youth in the ‘wrong.’ Criminal liability (responsibility for the crime, as opposed to not held accountable because of age, allows for more severe penalties) for juvenile crime was lowered from 16 to 14 years old (Japan Times November 29, 2000; Schwarzenegger 2003; Yoder 2004). Sentencing youth to detention in juvenile centers and reformatories was changed from fourteen to twelve years old; previously youth below the age of fourteen were placed in family-like facilities (Ito 2007). Finally, police now have the authority to question, search and seize evidence in the homes of youth not just for committing a crime but also if they suspect a child is likely to commit crime(s) (Ito 2007; Japan Times, September 9, 2004).

JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

Increased delinquent controls from the 1970’s have contributed to high rates of juvenile crime. Compared to adult Penal Code offenders, from 1976 to 2004, the rates of youth Penal Code offenders have been between three to five times higher (Shikita and Tsuchiya 1992; *Hanzai Hakusho* 2005). Utilizing the latest figures, in 2004 among Penal Code offenses excluding traffic offenses, the percent of youth offenders at 12.1 (per thousand youth) compared to adult offenders at 2.5 (per thousand adults) is nearly five times greater (*Hanzai Hakusho* 2005). Pre-delinquent offenses doubled from the 1970’s to 80’s and have remained high ever since (*Hanzai Hakusho* 1991; *Seishōnen Hakusho* 2005; White Paper on Crime 1984; Yoder 1986). In 2004, 1,418,085 youth were cited and sanctioned for pre-delinquent offenses, a more than seven times higher rate compared to the 193,076 juveniles arrested for Penal Code offenses (*Hanzai Hakusho* 2005; *Seishōnen Hakusho* 2005). While recidivism inflates the official rate of pre-delinquent offenses, nearly nine percent of youth in 2004 were cited for misbehavior (the most prevalent violations from high to low were: curfew, smoking, bad companionship, gang activity and drinking alcohol).

Class

The family social class of youngsters has been largely ignored in studies on juvenile delinquency in Japan (Foljanty-Jost 2000; Shikita and Tsuchiya 1993; Yonekawa 2003; Yoder, 2004). Yonekawa (2003) noted the lack of official attention given to class and delinquency in Japan and conducted surveys in different prefectures to assess the relation of father’s education and occupation to official actions taken against youth offenders (Yonekawa 2003). The results clearly showed a strong inter-relation of class and official arrests. The far majority or eighty-six percent of youngsters arrested for Penal Code offenses came from a low family social class (father’s education high school or below and most blue collar workers) background (Yonekawa 2003: 118-20). Furthermore, youngsters adjudicated and sent to juvenile detention facilities (juvenile classification homes and reform and training schools) were from the lowest family social class background (Yonekawa 2003: 118-20). Nearly fifty percent of youth sent to these detention homes compared to a national average of about three percent came from a

single parent family and general poverty level measured by families on welfare relief was nearly twelve times higher than the national average (Yonekawa 2003: 115-118).

A number of studies lend credence to Yonekawa's findings (Dubro and Kaplan 2003; Devos and Wagatsuma 1984; Greenfield 1993; Kiyonaga 1982; Okano and Tsuchiya 1999; Rohlen 1983; Yoder 2004). Various measures of the working class (single parent families, low family socio-economic status, working class areas, youth gangs and attendance at low ranked high schools) have indicated a high misrepresentation of working class youth arrested for Penal Code offenses, cited for pre-delinquent violations and sent to detention homes.

Official statistics of youth crime does not indicate the actual amount of youth criminal behavior since most youth are not caught for criminal acts particularly pre-delinquent violations. Studies have shown, however, that working class youngsters do engage more often in actual youth crime than higher class youth. Working more than higher class youth have been involved with or are members of youth delinquent groups, have higher self-reported rates of youth crime and girls active in the sex industry as so-called *enjo-kōsai* (compensated dating meaning teenage prostitutes) largely are from working class families (Devos and Wagatsuma 1984; Greenfield 1994; Louis 2004; Mock 1996; Okano and Tsuchiya 1999; Rohlen 1984; Yoder, 2004). Finally, observational studies on *bōsōzoku* (youth gangs) have reported serious and dangerous violations of traffic laws and high rates of youth crime particularly drug abuse among gang members (Greenfield 1994; Sato 1991; Yoder 2004). Various class-correlated social indications of *bōsōzoku* such as low levels of completed education, high rates of criminal arrests, placement in juvenile detention facilities and residence in working class areas infer that the majority of *bōsōzoku* are from working class families (Dubro and Kaplan 2003; Sato 1991: 109, 159; Greenfield 1994: 19-46; Yoder 2004: 24-26, 157-60).

Youth deviance extends beyond crime. In fact, youth deviance covers an array of non-criminal behavior as it involves deviations from adult normative expectations and rules imposed on youth such as appearance, mannerisms and public behavior. The most salient and profound non-criminal youth deviant behavior are violations of school rules as the school has the authority to sanction youth for non-conformity of numerous school rules. Studies have found that violation of school rules and being counseled for inappropriate dress and behavior occurs more often among working than higher class students (Okano and Tsuchiya 1999; Rohlen 1984; Yoder, 2004).

Youth crime: past and present

The history of youth deviance in Japan has been one of class cultural conflict. Ambaras (2006), in a well-documented and insightful book titled "Bad Youth," traced youth crime in Japan from the Tokugawa era (1600-1867) up to the end of World War II. Combining Ambaras's (2006) work with contemporary works as described in this paper, will highlight class cultural conflict as central to youth deviant behavior throughout history.

From the 17th century in Tokugawa Japan up to present day, youth rebellion has been characterized by youth gangs and non-conformity of working class youth. Ambaras (2006: 9-29) described the activities of three gangs in Tokugawa Japan called:

kabukimono (derived from *kabuku* to deviate and the wearing of a short kimono), *yakko* (toughs) and *wakamono* (youngsters). Most gang members were lower caste servants and peasants opposed to Tokugawa's social caste system. These youth gangs intimidated higher caste members and broke the laws as set forth by the ruling class (Ambaras 2006: 9-29). They engaged in gang warfare, caused disruptions in public places and attacked and destroyed the property of merchants involved in scandalous activities during hard economic times (Ambaras 2006: 12-17). In reaction, the Tokugawa regime cracked-down, passing laws specifically aimed at the dissolution of youth gangs. It now became a crime and punishment for anyone who provided shelter for youth gang members and all rebellious activities of these gangs were outlawed.

The institutionalization of juvenile delinquency and state wide control and management over youth behavior took place during the Meiji period (1868-1912). The first Juvenile Reformatory Law was promulgated in 1900 aimed at reducing crimes characteristic of lower class youth such as theft and unlicensed prostitution and to rehabilitate and reform lower class 'moral impropriety.' The state became a 'moral authority' in treatment of juvenile offenders given the power to detain youth in reformatories for living in an improper home, vagrancy, idleness or simply involved with the 'wrong people.' This set a precedent of pre-delinquency that ever since has allowed the state to set forth special laws, controls and sanctions specifically against youth for the purpose of upholding 'culturally prescribed behavior' in the interests of preserving the status quo.

From the early part of the 20th century, the mass media shocked the public with sensational accounts of delinquency among so-called normal 'middle class' students. Magazines, novels and newspapers focused attention on a new well to do youth generation of 'loose morals.' Higher class students openly displayed rebellious behavior, a threat to tradition and social stability. Student groups called *nampa* (loose in morals or rakes) chased women and were frequent customers at houses of prostitution, *sōshi* (rowdy students) gangs dressed in an unconventional manner, exhibited violent behavior in public and were active social critics of the government. Finally, *jogakusei* (female students) were depicted as loose and immoral in the pursuit of male companionship.

The affect of the mass media and official concerns and attention given to the wayward behavior of higher class students did not result in a trend away from targeting working class youngsters for juvenile delinquency. Official punitive actions; arrests, probation and detention in reformatories, remained disproportionately high among working class youths. What sensationalizing of middle class delinquency did result in, similar to today, was an increase of state control over primary and secondary school education leading to more school rules, disciplinary actions and eventually installing patriotism as central to educating the young.

Delinquency prevention over time became a well organized state directed entity during the Taisho (1913-1926) era with an increase of social welfare and delinquent prevention programs and agencies. The nexus of delinquency prevention work involved social workers, child protection commissioners, probation officers, teachers, and adult volunteers. The main focus of delinquency prevention was directed towards identifying environmental conditions leading to delinquency and reforming 'erring youngsters.'

Delinquency prevention officials and social workers classified cases of either potential or actual delinquents based on how their life differed from ideal normative middle class standards. The cause of delinquency was attributed to living in abnormal or broken homes (homes without both natural parents), little or no education and mental deficiencies and disorders. This resulted in labeling of the working class since they were much more likely than the higher class to come from so-called abnormal homes and had the lowest level of education. A report by Tokyo child-protection commissioners in 1926 indicated that since 1920 most or about sixty percent of juvenile delinquent cases were that of delinquent children raised in abnormal homes (Ambaras 2006: 111). Furthermore, Tokyo Court Statistics from 1923 to 1932 showed that about fifty percent of young people given protective measures came from broken homes (Ambaras 2006: 111).

Mental and intelligent evaluations furthered the stigmatizing of the working class as delinquency prone contributing to prejudicial value judgments differentiating the working from the higher classes. One example of such labeling is given below (Ambaras 2006).

Tokyo Prefecture Juvenile Research Institute experts' findings of high rates of retardation and personality disorders among the children they classified as delinquent were no doubt shaped by the fact that the overwhelming majority of these children came from the working and petty commercial classes and few, like their parents, had completed even the compulsory elementary school course. Indeed, a study commissioned by the Tokyo City Social Bureau in 1930 found that intelligence correlated directly to parents' employment, from an average intelligent quotient of 104.3 for children of professionals to an average of 89.8 for children of unskilled laborers (Ambaras 2006: 118).

While delinquency prevention efforts were well intentioned and did improve somewhat on the economic, educational and familial problems confronting working class youth, such concentrated efforts with problems of the working class also contributed to greater efforts to rehabilitate the offending youth with questionable results (Ambaras 2006: 123-129). Working class youth were highly overrepresented in the statistics of youth receiving protective (probation or custodial treatment) measures (Ambaras 2006: 106-7). The far majority of Tokyo Juvenile Court Cases from the early 1920's to middle 1930's resulting in protective measures were meted out to boys at the bottom strung of the labor market, unemployed or working as shop clerks, artisans and factory workers. The same applied to girls receiving protective measures, the largest percent unemployed or worked as housemaids and café waitresses.

During Japan's militaristic (1937-1945) years, the state increased its supervision over youth working in war related industries. Military conscription, large military force and casualties of war dramatically cut into the civilian adult working population with working class youth becoming the majority of Japanese laborers employed in factories, mines and aircraft plants. Delinquency prevention shifted centered on maximizing the productivity of youth during Japan's war years. Pre-delinquency was broadened to include attitudes and behavior at work unfavorable to productivity, youth liable for

criminal arrest and punishment for absenteeism, insubordination to one's peers or by demonstrating a bad 'attitude' at work. These new labor related pre-delinquent criminal offenses, watchful and strict job supervision and the adjudication of youth crime conducted by juvenile court officers at the work place itself contributed to an increase in the rate of youth crime and protective (including newly established work reeducation programs) measures among working class boys.

Schools reflected the nationalistic surge leading up to and during World War II. The Ministry of Education renamed the schools 'national schools' (*kokumin gakkō*) emphasizing patriotism and unselfish service for the war cause. Students now were obligated to engage in religious rituals, visit and pay homage at Shinto shrines, honor military commemorations, read imperial re-scripts, work in labor and community services and engage in military like training in physical education and at after-school drills.

The model of delinquency prevention in pre and postwar Japan has been based on an ideal middle class model of expected youth behavior. Institutional policies, however, are partially responsible for delinquency itself. Class privileges relate to working class youth sub-cultures of crime during both time periods. Primarily, this has occurred through a class bias educational system. Secondary school and higher education in prewar Japan was reserved mainly for children of the higher class contributing to working class cultural poverty and youth crime. In postwar Japan, a class tracking educational system has created the optimal condition for anti-school student subcultures at low ranked high schools and significantly lower levels of a high school and college education of working compared to higher class youth (Cummings 1980; Rohlen 1983; Yoder, 2004). Class cultural conflict and class discriminate delinquency controls account for a disproportionately high rate of arrests and in particular punitive measures (probation and detention) dealt to working class youths throughout history.

The trend toward nationalism today is similar to Japan's militaristic years. Various national government educational councils began in the early 1980's blaming unruly youth on an eroding of traditional values (Yoder 1986). Government educational councils escalated culminating in June of 2007 with the most profound postwar nationalistic shift in education in revision of the 1947 Occupational educational reforms or Fundamental Law of Education placing patriotism as central to education. Gregory Clark, former vice-president of Akita University, the only non-Japanese member of a National Conference on Education Reform set up by former Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi, gives us an insight into what these revisions were all about (Clark 2000).

Its [Occupational educational reforms] emphasis on rights rather than obligations, on fostering respect for truth and peace rather than loyalty, has resulted in it being seen as a major cause of current problems. Stricter discipline, stronger moral education and greater national pride in both schools and families were seen as the main solution (Clark, 2000: 2).

Hidenori Fujita, Tokyo University professor of education and member of a national commission council on educational reforms, has been critical of the rationale used to promote reform measures in education (Fujita 2003; Arita 2002). Nationalistic curriculum reforms for elementary and secondary schools were crafted said necessary in order to deal with troubles at schools, maladjusted youngsters and youth crime (Fujita 2002: 160). However, Fujita (2003: 156-157, 160; Arita: 3, 2002) states that such reasons for justifying educational reforms are reflective of the sensational mass media coverage of youth crime and conservative politics among council members and the reforms do not relate to reducing youth problem behavior.

CONCLUSION

The state from Tokugawa Japan to present day, has pinned the blame of youth problem behavior on individual youths, families, the schools and breakdown of traditional values. This has resulted in both pre and postwar Japan, escalation of state intervention up-scaling juvenile crime controls and increased government power and authority over the education of children and youth in an authoritarian manner. The justification for clampdowns on youth problem behavior at various times, particularly nationalistic shifts, is a form of propaganda through language, constructing a paradigm of youth problem behavior void of class inequality, human rights or any blame on the state itself. There have been objections to increased state intervention in the lives of youth within the political and scholarly realm, still, inequality, class cultural conflict and youth rights has not been at the forefront of disputes. Moreover, lost amidst all this turmoil are the perspectives of youth—voices that deserve our attention.

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