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Coping with Modernity
Man and Company in Contemporary Japan

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By Peter Matanle

Introduction[1]

In 1973 Ronald Dore, to wide academic acclaim, published his comparative study of British and Japanese factory life, *British Factory-Japanese Factory* (Dore, 1973). Although Thorstein Veblen had hinted at and anticipated Dore's thesis as early as 1915 (Cole, 1978), the argument Dore put forward was at the time a radical one. He theorised that, because of what he called the "late-development effect", Japan had been able in some measure to leap ahead of the United Kingdom into a more advanced or more modern form of industrial organisation upon which henceforth the UK would converge. A key aspect of this ability to leap ahead, Dore claimed, was the development of the so-called lifetime employment system, which, according to his theory, had come into being precisely as a result of Japan's late development. Hitherto, western observers such as James Abegglen, who in 1958 had been the first western industrial sociologist to describe the lifetime employment system in detail to the west, had assumed that, because of its assumed roots in Japanese pre-modern culture and tradition, the system possessed rigidities and inefficiencies which would cause Japan eventually to converge on the Anglo-Saxon economies and, in particular, the United States. The implications of Dore's work, therefore, were profound.

Debates concerning the issues of modernisation and convergence have as many different strands as there are scholars working within them. However four separate though related issues stand out: first, the question of what modernisation and convergence constitute, second, the problem of what stages or aspects of modernity different countries have achieved, third, the issue of whether convergence is occuring and if so, fourth, upon which country others are converging.

This paper is a short presentation of a qualitative empirical investigation of the work values of male white collar university graduate employees and the institutions of employment in three large Japanese corporations. As such, it is work in progress and is a summary of the research I have undertaken thus far. The arguments I present here are for the purposes of stimulating an exchange of ideas rather than an exposition of a fully formed thesis. The purpose of my research into these two complementary areas is to produce some conclusions concerning the nature and direction of Japan's experience of modernity. In so doing I hope to be able to make a modest but original contribution to the academic disciplines of the Sociology of Work and of Japanese Studies and to contribute to the refinement of existing theories of modernity and convergence with special reference to Japan.

Background Rationale

Modernity is as much a state of mind as it is a set of institutions and infrastructures. While it is vital to examine objective socio-economic conditions, it is equally important that we make an attempt at unraveling the complexities of how individuals make sense of their environment and the relationships that constitute their social world. For it is people that create and recreate institutions and relationships out of their value orientations but who must also, nevertheless, accommodate themselves to the constraints and limitations imposed on them by external exigency. Without an approach that takes account of agency and structure we risk giving either

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an overly structuralist description of reactive and dependent subjects or an under-socialised account of autonomous and purposive agents behaving as atoms devoid of social context[2] (Granovetter, 1985).

Before describing the subjects of my research I wish to make some observations about why I believe this inquiry might be relevant to discussions concerning the nature of modernity and, thus, socio-economic convergence. The reasons are threefold and concern the importance of work in the modern world, the status of the lifetime employment system and white collar work in Japan in the 1990s and the importance of researching and revealing the Japanese experience.

Work is, arguably, the most important social institution of the modern world. Combining some of the ideas of Jahoda (1982), Csikszentmihalyi (1988), and Haworth (1997); in an environment where traditional pre-determined social roles and relations are disappearing, life in modern society compels all but the most resourceful to seek the satisfaction of their basic physiological needs through the wage relation. The exchange of labour for money, or paid employment, in a modern society allows individuals to purchase food and shelter as well as provide security for themselves and their families. Work, in addition, is crucial to the achievement of personal identity. It allows us to acquire the resources by which we can express our identity to others and perhaps even construct our identity as social individuals. The content of a person's work, the social and status relations external to the family determined and made possible by work, and the consumption and leisure opportunities opened up to an individual through the wage relation not only provide the principal means by which an individual can construct his or her personal identity, they are also the principal means by which a person's identity is unwittingly revealed as well as deliberately signalled to others. Finally, and perhaps most importantly in the modern world, involvement in work may also provide the opportunity to experience psychological fulfillment and deep enjoyment through the actualisation of productive and creative abilities and impulses.

In Japan work and the institutions of employment are dominated by the lifetime employment system[3] in large corporations. Although fewer than one third of the workforce is actually employed in this system it dominates the employment horizon. It is the system to which the secondary and tertiary education systems are geared and into which they feed their brightest students (Takeuchi, 1997). The power of the system is such that, even in the dual labour market that characterises employment in Japan, small and medium sized enterprises must organise their recruitment efforts around the cyclical and structural requirements of large corporations (Nomura, 1998) and in periods of labour shortage provide some of the trappings of long-term security and welfare corporatism to retain and attract scarce high quality employees.

Although Thomas Rohlen's (1974) anthropological study of a regional bank was a welcome addition to our knowledge of the culture of white-collar work in large Japanese corporations, much of the most influential academic work on the lifetime employment system has concerned itself with employment conditions for blue-collar employees in manufacturing enterprises (Abegglen, 1958; Cole, 1971; Dore, 1973). For it is in this sector that the starkest differences have been evident between Japan and the western economies because manufacturing is where the large corporation is most dominant (Dore, Bounine-Cabalé and Tapiola, 1989) and

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[2] Although Granovetter's discussion focuses on a critique of an under-socialised neo-classical economics and an over-socialised sociology the point he makes is similar to the above discussion of agency and structure and their implications.

[3] The lifetime employment system, or *shuushin koyousei*, is not a contractual guarantee of employment for life but, ideally, a long term implicit reciprocal relationship of loyalty on the part of the employee and care on the part of the employer. It is commonly characterised by recruitment of males into a large and prestigious corporation upon graduation and employment until the stipulated retirement age of 55 or, more commonly now, 60. Promotion is based on a mixture of seniority (skill accumulation) and ability (potential). Pay is usually based on a mixture of rank, grade and, increasingly, results. Employment past the age of retirement is rare and usually reserved for senior executives.

because of what Koike (1995) terms the "white-collarisation" of blue-collar employment. Although manufacturing enterprises continue to be some of the most admired and feared of Japanese companies, and blue-collar work continues to be the lifeblood of Japan's export oriented economy, tertiary industries now make up approximately 60 percent of the private sector economy (Economist, 1999) and white collar work now exceeds blue-collar in terms of the number of males engaged. In 1997 13.79 million people were employed in managerial, clerical, sales and professional services as against 12.37 million employed as craftsmen or in manufacturing or construction work (Management and Coordination Agency, 1997).

Finally, to end this section on the relevance of studying the sociology of white-collar employment in Japan, adapting the arguments of David Williams (1996), Japan offers an important challenge to western assumptions about the nature of development, its directions and its possibilities. Japan, as a technologically advanced yet non-western capitalist economy and society, offers us a unique opportunity to refine sociological theory and make it more generalisable than is possible through a concentration on western individuals and institutions. Although the west was the first region of the world to experience modernity and industrial development and western expansion meant that all forms of modernity since are in a sense derived from contact with the west, the Japanese example shows us that, although the west will influence and give colour to the Japanese experience, modernity is not a uniquely western phenomena and that it would be reductionist to equate it with westernisation.

Method

Turning now to the study itself, originally, through personal contacts and introductions kindly provided for me I was able to conduct interviews and obtain documentary data from five separate companies. However, due to the quantity of data collected I was forced to narrow down the study to three. The reasons why I chose these three was because they are from different business sectors, they occupy different competitive environments, and all three companies have a reputation for not being pioneers in their sectors, thus being a good test of popular claims that the lifetime employment system is collapsing and Japan is converging on western, or Anglo-American forms of industrial organisation.

The first of these three companies is an optical and associated high technology products manufacturer employing approximately 7,000 regular employees. The second is a non-bank financial services company employing approximately 12,000 people and the third is a regional utility of approximately 20,000 employees.

The method of entry was different for each company and depended on my relationship with it[4]. I had been introduced to the first company during my MA course in Japanese Studies at the University of Essex. I approached it directly and requested to study there a second time. I was granted the request after an interview. For the second company, I asked a personal contact to introduce me and make a formal request on my behalf. I knew my contact had high level links with the company and, after a few weeks of negotiations, I was granted my request. I was introduced to the last company by my PhD supervisor at the University of Sheffield who has strong links with it.

I interviewed between fifteen and thirty male university graduate white-collar employees at each company of all ages and positions. I also interviewed at least one senior personnel manager and one senior union official from each company. All formal interviews took place on company premises and were, apart from a handful of occasions where my respondent insisted on speaking English, conducted in Japanese. In addition, all interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed into English upon my return to the UK. In all interviews only the respondent and myself were present.

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4 See Grønning (1997) for a good discussion on the ethical and methodological merits and demerits of accessing large Japanese corporations through the front door or by using more covert methods.

Each interview with the company employees lasted between thirty minutes and one hour and was a semi-structured interview comprising of questions relating to the interviewee's family and educational background, application and entry into the company, progress through the company, attitudes to the employment system, work values and, finally, hopes for the future. Each interview with the personnel and union officers took between one and two hours and related to the formal and informal systems of recruitment, training, promotion, pay, rotation and labour-management relations at each company. In addition, I requested documentation regarding these issues.

At each company I had an intermediary, or gate-keeper, to negotiate through. This person arranged interviews and collected data that I requested of him. Nevertheless, I was able to arrange meetings with company employees independently of the gate-keeper to provide a check on some of the information I was receiving through the formal, company arranged, interviews. These more informal interviews were mostly conducted over food and drink in a local restaurant.

I did not always get answers to my questions or the documentary evidence that I asked for and I occasionally met with a polite but firm refusal. This resulted in somewhat a unbalanced and imperfect store of information that makes comparison a difficult and sensitive task. I tried at all times to be open and friendly with all my respondents and not to appear to judge any of their answers. I tried to make them feel as comfortable as possible with me as a foreigner and sometimes rather inarticulate Japanese speaker and, on the whole I am pleased with the results. On only a very few occasions did I feel awkward or sense that the respondent felt uneasy with me or that the respondent may not have been telling me what he believed to be true at the time of the interview.

Results

The results of my research fall into two main categories. First, developments in the institutions of employment in the three companies investigated, and second, employees' and managers' subjective impressions of the role of those institutions in their lives.

1. Developments in the Lifetime Employment System

There appears to be a gradual marketisation and rationalisation of the lifetime employment system taking place in Japan. While there is steadily more emphasis on ability for promotion and performance for pay and less on seniority in a strict sense, the consequences of the training and rotation system mean that the promotion system still possess an inherent and implicit seniority component within it. Ability is still very much understood to be an accumulation of skills over the long term and, thus, the potential ability to perform a more complex task in the future. However, the pressures of slow growth and global competition mean that fewer employees can expect regular promotion and merit considerations are becoming more significant when candidates from eligible groups are chosen. As a senior manager explains:

> I think it is changing. When we entered, the internal organisation of the company was determined by seniority and 80 or 90 ... well 80 ... percent of entrants could reach the level of section chief.
>
> So 80 percent or so were promoted. If you worked for [company name] for a certain time then you went up a rank. That was the image we had. So, now, it has changed. It is important for you to have worked for [company name] for a certain number of years but, [company name] now asks, "What can you do for us?", "What kind of work can you do?". Promotion is determined by this.
> General Manager, 48, Financial Services

In all three companies there is a campaign to extract greater efficiency savings and attention is increasingly focusing on costs. In the personnel management system this is reflected in increasing performance evaluation being incorporated into pay calculations. This was explained as the result of an intensification of competition caused by slower growth, economic globalisation and the expectation of future competitive fallout from deregulation in domestic

markets. One of the consequences of the greater attention to costs has been a reduction in recruitment of new graduates. All three companies have achieved recent reductions in new hires and total employment alongside increases in sales turnover as well as savings resulting from reductions in overtime and so on. It is interesting to note that a greater exposure to competition seems to elicit a progressively more extreme adaptive response. The optical products manufacturer had frozen new graduate hiring at zero for two years and reduced the size of the workforce through transfers and early retirement by approximately one third, while the financial services and utility companies had simply reduced new hires and made only small reductions in the total wrokforce. In the case of the utility, over a two year period from 1996 total employment had been reduced by only 600, a fall of only 3 per cent. It was explained to me in a very matter of fact manner by a senior manager that holding a near monopoly in a vital utility means that market share is guaranteed and price inelasticity could be maintained even in recessions. Profits were virtually guaranteed, therefore, almost regardless of cyclical effects.

Simultaneously, recruitment procedures are adapting to meet the need for greater flexibility and rapidity of response to changes in world and domestic markets and in technology. Graduate recruitment is steadily depending less on affective relationships between companies and particular universities and seminar groups and more on rational and open competition. Further, recruitment throughout the year, of mid-career specialists and of foreign (predominantly Asian) employees into the core labour force, are also increasing steadily. Once again, the degree of response seems to depend on the degree of competition and cyclical sensitivity to which the company is subject.

In personnel management too, there has been an adaptive rationalisation of management systems. There is greater attention to ongoing systems of management by objectives through regular reviews with superiors. At these interviews the previous period's performance is discussed and future goals negotiated. In addition, companies are either setting in place or seriously considering the implementation of in-company job advertising systems to rationalise and make competitive some intra-company transfers, thus instituting for the first time something approaching an internal labour market. Finally, companies are exhorting their employees to develop new approaches to their work, their company and their lives. Employees are being asked to take on greater personal responsibility and rely less on an affective relationship within a paternalistic corporate system.

However, it is impossible to avoid feeling that there is, as yet, a mismatch between the transformations that companies profess to be implementing and the substantive adaptations already achieved. One example is sufficient to highlight this problem. In 1997 the financial services company instituted a "Job Challenge System" which in essence is a stream of employment within which employees can bypass ordinary job transfer procedures and apply directly to the department to which they wish to move. However, by 1998 only 30 employees or so out of 12,000 had thus far been allowed to join this stream. When questioned, one personnel manager said that the system is new and still in the experimental stage. As yet it is impossible to tell whether the company wishes to develop these systems more widely or use them merely as a signalling mechanism.

As Lincoln and Nakata (1997) suggest, much of the effort so far seems to be in signalling to employees the need for changes in the corporate structure and for diminished expectations in a more severe environment rather than in implementing substantive changes. Moreover, the clear reluctance to radically restructure seems to indicate that the lifetime employment system still possesses a strong social and political legitimacy as a national institution (Lincoln and Nakata, 1997). Thus, it remains to be seen how far companies will proceed in their restructuring. It seems that the first stage is to use existing structures and methods of responding to cyclical downturns and to persuade employees of the necessity for change. The second stage is to set in place and test mechanisms for change and the third is to implement them more widely. It is my feeling that the companies I have researched are in the second stage of their restructuring and the extent to

which it will proceed in a substantive manner has still to be agreed by management and employees.

2. Employee Perceptions of the Lifetime Employment System

Company efforts to persuade employees of the need for drastic restructuring, even if it is yet to implemented substantively, seem to have payed off. Most employees that I interviewed were convinced that restructuring is necessary in order to cope with external developments such as slower growth, the ageing of the workforce, globalisation of markets, intensifying competition and deregulation in domestic and international markets. However, this belief is expressed in a somewhat fatalistic manner, particularly among older employees who express a feeling almost of bereavement at the passing of a golden age of security and certainty. Moreover, few younger employees celebrate and look forward to the predicted liberalisation of labour markets and expansion of opportunity and choice that might be expected to come to the labour aristocracy in large companies in Japan as it has in the United States and Britain. Younger employees tend to be not so much optimistic but realistic about the future. Nevertheless, they express nervous satisfaction that pay and promotion are less seniority based and are confident that a more ability and performance based system is in their interests. The following statements exemplify this difference between the generations.

> Its gradually changing, I think. ... Japanese society itself is experiencing a condition after the period of high speed growth and the bursting of the bubble where some huge companies are going bust. Also, in international society Japan's position is becoming more difficult. So, from now things are getting much tougher. In addition to that, as it is said everywhere, the lifetime employment and seniority systems are on the point of breaking down. From now they will begin to break down, I think. ... More than good or bad I think it is inevitable. The world is changing in that way and so it is good for those that suit it. I am 50 years old this year and, personally speaking, the previous system is more comfortable but, its inevitable.
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> Senior Manager, 49, Optical Products

> ... there is very little mid-career hiring. Promotion is very much by the seniority-merit system. It's a traditional Japanese enterprise. ... Yes, it is changing to a more ability based system. But, until now it has been a regional monopoly and, from last year or the year before last, with liberalisation and changes in the rules if you look ten years into the future then I think things will be completely different. ... so until now we have been motivated to ensure company survival, but from now the system will gradually become more ability based. ... Realistically speaking it is right way to proceed, I think.
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> Employee, 32, Utilities

Employees do feel less secure, especially about promotion and employment over the long-term. But, given that only a very small number of large corporations have actually collapsed and compulsory redundancies are extremely rare, this loss of security is more an expression of anxiety about long-term prospects for promotion and employment until retirement than about the immediate prospect of unemployment. The adaptive response seems to be a growing desire among employees to seek security in the professionalisation of careers and in combining company specific skills with generic training and qualifications not only to insure against the, albeit unlikely, event of sudden unemployment but also as an attempt to equip oneself for the perceived needs of the company for more skilled professionals and the possibility of making a future voluntary move.

> Q: So, are you developing your skills?
> A: ... If I can I intend to improve my skills.
> Q: Concretely, are you doing anything?

A: Concretely. If you ask me concretely ... well, one thing is I aim to pass the actuary qualifications.

Q: What kind of qualifications?

A: Well, in Japanese it means the mathematical principles of insurance. When you receive the premium a part of it has to be used to pay out on claims so how to use it to its best advantage. After that, the structure of the insurance business. So you need mathematical knowledge. You can do it without the qualifications but, it is normally required to work in that business.

Q: So, if you have that qualification you can move to another company?

A: It is quite useful for that.

Q: Are you taking the qualification for that reason?

A: The reason is not really because I want to move to another company but, the main reason is to improve my skills. I want to have the skills to be an actuary.

Employee, 28, Financial services

Security of employment remains high for most white-collar employees in Japan's large companies, even if their perception of it has been dented by some high profile corporate collapses. Companies' restructuring efforts are mostly directed at the seniority system and at an attenuation of lifetime employment, not its elimination. Most employees are aware of this, as exemplified by the following exchange with the same employee.

Q: Last year Yamaichi Securities collapsed. Were you very surprised?

A: I was surprised, yes. ... The employees of Yamaichi Securities are top people but, the top management ... if our management were of the same type then there would be a chance of the same thing happening to us I thought. I thought they are different people too, but I had to think they are different people.

Q: So, has your own future become more insecure, do you think?

A: As for possibility it has but in fact it isn't, I think.

Q: So, this company is OK?

A: Yes, this place is OK, I think.

Employee, 28, Financial Services

Nevertheless, some younger employees are coming to see working for the same company for nearly one's whole working life as being indicative of personal stagnation and are seeking to enhance or broaden their experiences through working for more than one employer or in more than one career. How far these employees will take their desire for a variety of experiences only time will tell, but some employees are making serious preparations for doing so and in my pilot interviews in preparation for the main body of my research I was able to meet some that had already gone overseas to study for post-graduate business administration or international law degrees and subsequently changed companies or who were in the process of changing career and company to become professional consultants and lawyers. The following extract from an interview with a confident 28 year-old employee expresses this.

Q: So, on joining the company did you expect to stay at the company until the retirement age?

A: No. If I have a chance I'd like to work somewhere else. ... I have a strong desire to leave Japan and work overseas for some time.

Q: What would you like to do?

A: I haven't any definite ideas and media related work would be difficult so I think I'd like to give hotels a try.

Q: There is some kind of a link isn't there?

A: Yes, there is. I don't want to work for this company all my life.

Q: Are you thinking seriously about this?

A: Yes. I am thinking seriously about it.

Q: Don't you have much of a concern for security?

A: Security? It would be a lie to say that I wasn't concerned but, if your work isn't interesting, even if you have security, you can't grow as a person. I feel that. From when a person is born they want to grow.

Employee, 28, Utility

The above also exemplifies what is the last, and perhaps most important finding from my field research which is that work is increasingly, in addition to providing material security and psychological certainty, being viewed as a vehicle for the self-realisation of the individual and an opportunity to self-expression, self-growth and self-fulfillment. However, in a slightly nuanced version of the needs based theories developed by western social-psychologists, for my respondents self-fulfillment and self-actualisation are often sought and found in human relationships and through living one's life according to social norms and expectations. The somewhat self-absorbed and extreme individualism that is so much part of the culture of self-development and self-actualisation in Anglo-Saxon countries is not a strong feature of the Japanese experience at this time. On the contrary, although the interest in self-development and fulfillment is strengthening, in Japan it seems that social conformity and social relationships and dependencies are also very much a part of the Japanese culture of achievement. The following extracts attest to the variety of values attached to work in a large company in Japan but also to the socially contingent nature of Japanese employees' values.

As far as work is concerned, I would like to do work that I am motivated to do (*yarigai*). I have no particular desire to be promoted faster than other people. I'd like to progress at the same speed as others (*hito nami ni*). As for my family life. I'm married. Within that so long as nothing bad happens, I will consider that to be success. Just that, I'm afraid.

Assistant Manager, 32, Utility

For me personally my family is the base; my wife and children. To enjoy that area. Above that I am a company man (*kaisha ningen*) and I want to enjoy that and my work. As far as the company is concerned I don't have any big ambitions or hopes.

Manager, 49, Optical Products

In the past I worked for a company that makes things. Now I work for a company that uses things. Its an interesting story I think, so I think I'd like to write a novel or something. That would be the best thing for me. My experience is not an ordinary one, but more specialised and so I think it would be nice to write a novel.

Senior Research Editor, 50, Utility

... there is no belief in anything like the American Dream here in Japan. If one goes to a good school and enters a good university and works at a highly regarded company, if one can arrive at that then that's the best one can do. Anyway, success in terms of the American Dream is very different in Japan. ... That's a product of the Japanese educational and large company system. People want to be happy together.

Assistant Manager, 38, Utility

In my case that is to do what I am interested in ... management or business administration. I want to increase my knowledge to have a huge ability in that, if I can. One more is ... in Japan ... the corporation has a high performance level by international standards but ... employees' salaries are not high compared to Europe and North America. So, I would like to increase my salary. So I want to do what I want to do and increase my salary.

Employee, 28, Optical Products

To live a normal life would be good, wouldn't it? To have children and so on ... and raise them. To work well and be promoted.

Senior Staff, 33, Utility

Even if you are promoted ... for example if you are promoted to a good rank if that is a rank which doesn't match at all your talents then that would be awful. I'd like to do work that suits my skills so I think I could cope with being promoted to a certain level, but above that level the work content ... I don't want to be promoted to that level and so ... I want to do the work that suits my level.

Assistant Manager, 28, Financial Services

Its nice to have a high salary but, of course ... your work in a sense defines your life and if you decide to do uninteresting work then ... well it - life - becomes completely uninteresting.

Assistant Manager, 28, Financial Services

Work occupies most of one's time and so however much I was paid I couldn't work in a job I felt was awful. Also, my contemporaries are interesting and fun. For example, before joining the company we went out for a drink and there were a lot of interesting blokes there. A big reason was that I wanted to work with friends so ...

Employee, 23, Financial Services

To some extent I desire security but, if I really wanted that kind of security I would have chosen to work in a local government, I think. The fact that I didn't choose that shows that I wanted it a little but not that much. If I can have a basic lifestyle then I will do the work I want to do and join the company I desire, that's what I felt most while I was looking for work.

Employee, 25, Financial Services

Discussion and Conclusions

What does the data tell us? How can we use these findings to augment our existing theories of modernity and convergence?

Ronald Inglehart (1997) in his survey of value systems in 43 societies suggests that a major generational change, or paradigm shift, has occurred in industrialised societies. He calls this a change from materialist to post-materialist values. More explicitly, and echoing Abraham Maslow's (1987 [1954]) hierarchy of needs, he describes this shift as a move from the need for security and material comfort to a desire for self-expression and quality of life. While Inglehart claimed not to be determinist or teleological in his approach he did suggest that if a society chooses to develop in a particular direction then certain socio-psychological consequences are likely; the main one being, broadly speaking, the shift from concern for security to quality of life.

Combining Inglehart's work with that of Anthony Giddens (1990 and 1991), Zygmunt Bauman (1995), Mihaly Csikszentmihaly (1988), Ikuya Sato (1988) and Yoshimi Sugimura (1997), we can construct a theoretical framework for the relationship between value systems, work and modernity in Japan. Giddens claims we are experiencing a radicalised and globalised "high-modernity" characterised by a thouroughgoing individual and institutional reflexivity where the disappearance of traditional pre-determined life-roles leads to fundamental problems of ontological security and existential anxiety which require a "Reflexive Project of the Self" to generate programmes of actualisation and mastery for which the individual is solely responsible. In other words, he argues, in conditions of late-modernity we contemporaneously aspire to and are compelled to seek self-fulfillment through self-development. However, Giddens does not deal in depth with the issue of what actually constitutes, in a concrete sense, self-fulfillment or self-development. Moreover, Giddens does not explicitly describe the feelings, not only of the joy of liberation from tradition that modernity constitutes, but also the feelings of bereavement of the loss of certainty that it can also engender (Bauman, 1995). This dualistic aspect of the socio-psychology of modernity is brought out in the replies of my respondents where, in addition to a

generational difference in response, most expressed some form of bereavement or resignation at what they believed to be the crumbling or at least attenuation of a much beloved institution. This feeling of sad resignation at a perceived inevitability is, I believe, distinctive in the Japanese experience when compared to the UK and USA.

Csikszentmihaly's (1988) augments our theoretical picture by describing activities and experiences that generate a feeling of "flow". Conceptually similar to, though more complete than, Maslow's (1987 [1954]) idea of "peak experiences", flow is the participation in a task that is more challenging than everyday life but equal to the abilities, when stretched, of the individual. The concentration required causes the individual to lose a sense of time and self-consciousness and results in a feeling of deep involvement and enjoyment, or a sense of "flow". Once experienced, people seek out flow activities and the ever greater challenges, involvement and enjoyment that it brings. Regular participation brings an ongoing sense of self-actualisation or self-fulfillment.

Csikszentmihaly and Csikszentmihalys' edited collection (1988) focuses on a wide range of experiences and a particularly interesting one is Ikuya Sato's (1988) research on *bosozoku*, or Japanese motorcycle gangs. Although the article deals with young delinquents it is interesting for our purposes because Sato alerts us to the consequentialist aspects of flow for Japanese people. His description brings out the socially contingent nature of the flow experience for members of these gangs, an aspect that Csikszentmihaly regards as largely absent from the flow of western people (Csikszentmihaly, 1988). The gang members describe the deep enjoyment, stimulation and satisfaction of being a part of a single entity, the gang, and riding together along highways and in and out of cities, weaving their motorcycles together in a complex, noisy and dangerous dance. In addition, Yoshimi Sugimura (1997) concentrates on Japanese work values and speculates about a collapse in the spirit of diligence that brought Japan such rapid and sustained economic success. Suggesting that work has now become more than an economic activity, he describes a quest for self-realisation where the individual seeks to develop himself and his talents freely while contributing to the organisation's success. Thus, in a similar manner to Sato's gang members, for Sugimura's Japanese company employee, self-fulfillment, or flow, is socially contingent and not possible outside the organisational context.

To conclude, therefore, although Dore, writing as he was in the early 1970s before the oil crises and dramatic developments in computer and communications technologies, could never have predicted the sociological circumstances of the late 1990s, it seems that Japan is experiencing, institutionally, a similar but not identical marketisation and rationalisation of structures that occurred in the UK and USA in the 1970s and 1980s. Of course, Japanese developments remain and will continue to be historically and culturally contingent but, I believe, this indicates Japan is now passing into a period of economic maturity and late, or high, modernity. The route to modernity has never been path dependent since there has never been a lack of alternatives from which to choose. Nevertheless, just as Marius B. Jansen (1965) explained when describing Japan's first encounters with western modernity in the 19th century, "In the long run the nature of the challenge and its point of origin dictated the broad lines of response."

The achievement of an affluent society has elicited slowly evolving and subtle changes in the way Japanese white-collar employees view their work. While employment security remains important, perhaps because of continuing rigidity in external labour markets, it is a base upon which the employee builds his world and it is becoming positively viewed as a vehicle for the realisation of personal goals and dreams. These goals are highly differentiated at the level of the individual and constitute personal preferences for the achievement of self-expression through the activation of abilities, self-development through personal growth, enhanced social prestige through promotional, professional and financial development, enhanced realisation of and responsibility for affective familial relationships, and greater integration into and involvement in long-term inter-dependent personal, social and organisational relationships. How much this is different to the experiences and preferences, or values, of white-collar employees in other

advanced industrial societies is not an issue that this research can concretely address. However, in the light of previous research elsewhere, the Japanese employee is a more social, inter-dependent, and less self-absorbed individual than his British or American counterpart.

What can we conclude from these discussions about the issues of modernity and convergence? Although Malcolm (1998) argues for the concept of "awkward", or "nuanced", convergence on western institutional forms he does not examine the social-psychology of modernity and development and, further, he does not investigate or theorise upon the limits to convergence. My preference, therefore, is to argue for a subtle change in emphasis.

Japan's emergence into economic maturity and late-modernity materially and institutionally is being accompanied by corresponding developments in the social-psychological arena. It must be stressed, however, that although Japan's modernity is inevitably coloured by its contact and involvement with the west and decisions to emulate western industrial development, Japan's political and economic élites made and continue to make conscious and calculated choices. The decision to emulate western capitalism and then western democracy inevitably led to some sort of superficial convergence on western societies institutionally and sociologically. Nevertheless, Japan's people and institutions retain a strong cultural distinctiveness and, in addition, retain the power to make informed and idiosyncratic decisions. Converging on western institutional and sociological forms only superficially, Japan continues to develop its own distinct yet parallel path through modernity.

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