UNIVERSITY OF TURKU

Living in the Bubble of Privilege

Sociological Imagination of Japanese Elite Youth from the Stories of Exchange Students in Finland

Master's thesis
MDP in East Asian Studies
Faculty of Social Sciences

Author(s):
Hinako Matsui

15.11.2023
Turku

Master's thesis

Subject: MDP in East Asian Studies
Author(s): Hinako Matsui
Title: Living in the Bubble of Privilege: Sociological Imagination of Japanese Elite Youth from the Stories of Exchange Students in Finland
Supervisor(s): Dr. Yoko Demelius
Number of pages: 80 pages
Date: 15.11.2023

This thesis explores the sociological imagination of Japanese young elites from a generational perspective. Through interviews with eight Japanese exchange students in Finland, the study investigates elite students' stressful lives by examining their aspiration for Finnish society as hints that mirrors their desire. Participants expressed the challenge of meeting Japan's social expectations and the rigid *shukatsu* system. The research delves into the political ignorance of these elites, attributing it to both their privileged status and extremely busy lives as highly educated university students. The study also discusses the insulating effect of their privileged backgrounds that limits their ability to understand personal challenges in a broader socio-political context. This examination emphasizes the need to critically assess the societal structures influencing the sociological imagination of Japanese young elites and the potential consequences of their political disengagement for the future of Japanese society.

Key words: Japan, youth, generation, sociological imagination, political attitude

Table of contents

1 Introduction

In this research, I will investigate the sociological imagination of Japanese elite youth through the experiences of university students from Japan who are temporarily staying in Finland for exchange studies. Sociological imagination indicates the ability to understand the connection between personal experiences and the larger social and historical context (Mills, 1959). In other words, it is one's capacity to connect private problems with public matters. I will apply this theory to this study because it offers a valuable perspective to understand a specific age group by connecting them with historical events in a specific location (Woodman & Wyn, 2014). Discourses on generations are often criticized for oversimplification (Johansson & Herz, 2019; Woodman & Wyn, 2014). However, by recognizing the fact that a generation can be divided into an indefinite number of smaller "generational units" by considering people's different social positions such as ethnicity, race, gender, and class (Mannheim, 1952; Johansson & Herz, 2019), they enable us to uncover both change and stability between different generations, while also making it possible to further differentiate between individuals and groups within a specific cohort.

The targeted group of this qualitative research will be those on the "elite" track in Japan, i.e., those enrolled in a four-year university. Furthermore, the students' status of being abroad for studying provides further specification; their financial affluence and living experience in an environment with sociopolitical conditions different from Japan. By investigating them, I will try to examine the privileged youth's private lives and their implications for Japanese society from the perspective of sociological imagination.

The late teens to early twenties are a crucial time for elite young people in Japan because it is when most of them complete their student life and enter the Japanese corporate world (Mathews, 2003). Through various aspects of student life such as competitive university entrance exams, club activities, part-time jobs (*arubaito*, or *baito* for short), or study abroad (*ryugaku*) (Kato, 2015; Porter & Porter, 2020; Sekiguchi, 2010), students obtain sociocultural literacy and fluency required in working life (Breaden, 2014). For most university students, the culmination of their life as a student is the Japanese-style job-hunting activities (*shushoku katsudo*, or *shukatsu* for short). *Shukatsu* is considered a single and the best chance for successfully entering the Japanese corporate system (Mathews, 2003), and at the same time, it is a "rite of passage to reaching adulthood (Kato, 2010, p.53)." By integrating into the corporate world, they become a *shakaijin* (社会人, socialized adult) who are believed to deliver full social responsibilities (Dasgupta, 2012; Roberson, 1995; Mathews, 2003). Young people in Japan are under implicit normative expectations in mainstream media and scholarship that they should "smoothly 'transition' into further education and jobs and play their part in maintaining the established social order (Toivonen & Imoto, 2012, p.17)."

Among the various experiences during the student-to-work transition, exchange studies can be considered an extreme experience for students because they are thrown into an environment with totally different sociopolitical or cultural norms. Since the post-war period to the recent days, Finland or *Hokuou* (北欧, Nordic countries) has long maintained the image of the "country of happiness" and the "true affluence" in Japan, and this positive image is widely shared not only among the older generation but also among the youth (Mitsui, 2012; Ipatti, 2020; Yoshitake, 2003). Reflecting this point, the initial intention of this study was to investigate how they reconsider Japanese society and their life in Japan by applying sociopolitical literacy acquired through exchange study in the "advanced" country. However, as I processed the interviews with the informants, I realized how they stay unchanged and

strive not to deviate from the “promising” elite life course throughout the exchange study period. Thus, the central issue of this study is not about students’ liminality, an anthropological concept that indicates a period of one’s transformation from old to new being (Turner, 1969), nor the liminal phase of international students when they “come to terms with their host cultural surroundings (Williams, 2001, p. 20).” Rather, the central issue in this paper is how strong the perception of the ideal life in Japan is, and how young elites' concentration on “my life” averts their eyes from wider socio-political issues that Japanese society today is facing. To emphasize, my attempt in this research is not attributing their detachment from public matters to themselves; rather, I will investigate what aspect of Japanese society binds them within the “private orbits in which they live (Mills, 1959, p.3)” even though they are witnessing very different sociopolitical conditions and people’s lives under them.

The typical academic approach to youth in post-war Japan has been a “deficit model” that problematizes those who have “incomplete or delayed transitions into what are viewed as culturally appropriate social roles (Toivonen & Imoto, 2012, p.17).” In other words, those who are on the right life course are not socially or politically “found out” as long as they are playing an ideal role at each stage of life. Therefore, I believe the broad value of this research project lies in my focus on the privileged, or not marginalized layer of the young generation that is less investigated in academic research.

1.1 Research Questions and Thesis Structure

In this paper, I will focus on the following four questions:

1. How do Japanese exchange students perceive Finnish and Hokuou society?
2. Why do they admire Finnish/Hokuou society and way of living?
3. What socioeconomic factors shape their political attitude?
4. What is the socio-political implication of elite youth's political ignorance?

To answer these questions, I will investigate the empirical data that I obtained through the semi-structured interviews with Japanese exchange students studying at the Finnish universities. To be sure, the purpose of this research is not to investigate their aspiration toward Finnish/Hokuou society and lifestyle itself; Rather, I will be utilized the perceived picture of the country as a hint to investigate the vision of elite youth and rigid Japanese society.

This paper is composed of seven chapters. The first chapter presents research questions and introduces the theoretical framework. Chapter 2 will provide the background of Japanese society after the 3.11 Fukushima triple disaster and its impact on people's political participation. Then, Chapter 3 will examine the existing literature about Japanese elite youth. Then, methodological concerns will be discussed in Chapter 4. This chapter also describes how I faced a challenge during the data acquisition and how I diverted the direction of the research project by reflecting on the experience of failure. In Chapter 5, I will analyse the empirical data that I obtained from the interviews and discuss the life path of elite students who are enrolled in top-tier universities in Japan. By utilizing their aspiration for the perceived Finland or Hokuou as a hint, I will investigate the rigidness of youth life as an elite. In Chapter 6, I will extend the discussion to the youth's lack of sociological imagination and

political ignorance. Chapter 7 will conclude the overall discussion of this paper and the potential of future research on Japanese youth and generation.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

In this research, I apply the American sociologist C. Wright Mills' (1959) theory of "sociological imagination" to analyze the life of Japanese elite youth. The term "sociological imagination" was introduced in Mills' book "*The Sociological Imagination*" published in 1959, and this theory provides us a lens to link a particular group of ages at particular times and the society in which they live (Woodman&Wyn, 2014: Johansson&Herz, 2019). In the book, Mills explained that sociological imagination is the concept that understands various problems experienced by individuals in everyday life in the context of history. He suggests that having sociological imagination allows us to figure out the interrelation between 'the personal troubles of milieu' and 'the public issues of social structure (Mills, 1959, p8)'". According to him, no problem of individuals can be solved without an understanding of the society that surrounds them, and the other way around (Mills, 1959, p.3- 12). As a concrete example, the slogan "the personal is political" used in the second wave of feminism around the 1960s and 1970s embodies sociological imagination that expanded women's everyday personal experience to a political matter (Ochiai, 2023).

According to Mills, individual awareness of and exposure to the social structure is tightly "bounded by the private orbits in which they live (Mills, 1959, p. 3)." In other words, each individual or group has a different degree of sociological imagination. Specifically, Mill argues that those in a position of affluence exhibit a relatively weak sociological imagination (Mills, 1959). This argument is supported by some studies such as Edmiston's (2017)

qualitative research on affluent individuals and materially deprived individuals in the United Kingdom and New Zealand, or social psychological research (Costa-Lopes et al., 2013). Bamfield and Horton's (2009) research on the UK's public attitude toward inequality revealed that affluent people show a better understanding of poverty and express stronger interest in the issue when information about the mechanism of poverty is taught. Thus, one's capability that connects self and society can improve if an opportunity to learn about the structural problems is provided (Bamfield & Horton's, 2009). Fraser and Hagedorn (2018, p.56) argue that in the context of today's globalizing world, "scholars have been challenged to incorporate an additional layer—'the global'" into the concept of sociological imagination.

Mills' theory is anchored in a sociologist Kari Mannheim's generational theory that was introduced in his essay "*The Problem of Generations*" first published in1923 (Woodman&Wyn, 2015). The impact of Mannheim's theory on Mills can be seen in the emphasis on the generational theory that argues the necessity of understanding a certain generation in association with sociopolitical events that they commonly experienced (Mannheim, 1952). Edmunds and Turner (2005, pp.573-574) argue "a generational perspective can therefore shed important light on key contemporary debates, such as the process of social change, the rise and fall of social capital, national identity and cosmopolitanism, changing gender roles and the causes and consequences of social and technological change and, finally, the process of globalization itself."

The generational theory comprises of three elements. First, a generation emerges when a group is "positioned within similar institutions and experience the same events at a similar point in the life course (Woodman&Wyn, 2014, p.58)." Second, a generation appears when the mechanism of older society cannot be reproduced by the new generation. Finally, he pointed out that a generation is not homogeneous group of people but can be divided into an

indefinite number of smaller "generational units (Mannheim, 1952: Woodman&Wyn, 2014)." The scholarship of youth studies and popular discourse about youth and generation have always faced massive criticism for labeling and oversimplification (Johansson&Herz, 2019:Woodman&Wyn, 2014). Considering this fact, the third point suggested by Mannheim that focuses on "units" especially important to be aware of when discussing how the targeted group are making sense of their lives in relation to the society in order not to fall in to the "crude generationalism (Woodman&Wyn, 2014)."

In Japan, "generation" has been always labeled and problematized reflecting the transition of the socioeconomic background such as *dankai* (baby boomers, born in 1947-49), bubble (those who enjoyed bubble economy, born in 1965-69), *rosugene* ("lost generation" after bubble economy, born in around 1970-84), and *yutori* (Millennials, born in 1987-2004) (Nikkei, 2016). Although the generational categorization is very common in popular discourse, more scholarly works have to be accumulated considering their oversimplification of diverse "units" existing among them.

Mills developed his theory of sociological imagination when America was experiencing significant socio-political change in the aftermath of World War II, the beginning of the Cold War, the Civil Rights Movement, and various other social and political movements. Under such upheaval, he called the people to convert private troubles into public issues (Gitlin, 1959). In parallel, the Japanese society under which the targeted group of this research grew up has been facing full of socio-political, or economic challenges as reviewed in the next chapter. Furthermore, in the era of the internet, they are exposed to global scale matters every single day. In such time, I believe that applying Mill's theory of sociological imagination from the perspective of generation will allow me to investigate the lives of Japanese elite youth and how they interact with the public sphere.

2 Background---from 3.11 to the Pandemic

The objective of this chapter is to investigate the socio-political or economic events in Japan that shaped the Japanese society in which those who were born around the turning of the century have raised up. In the popular discourse, this age group is often called Generation Z, or Gen-Z. According to BBC (2018), Generation Z are “people born in the 1990s and early 2000s. They are more technically advanced and social media savvy than their parents, even the previous generation - millennials.” McKinsey (2023) also defines Generation Z as “people born between 1996 and 2010” and the “generation’s identity has been shaped by the digital age, climate anxiety, a shifting financial landscape, and COVID-19.” In the US, they are sometimes called a generation of social justice due to their belief in fairness and human rights (Mimaki, 2023, p.140).

In Japan, generations have been always labelled and investigated reflecting the transition of the socioeconomic background such as; *dankai* (baby boomers, born in 1947-49), bubble (those who enjoyed bubble economy, born in 1965-69), *rosugene* (“lost generation” after bubble economy, born in around 1970-84), and *yutori* (Millennials, born in 1987-2004) (Nikkei, 2016). Galan and Heinrich (2018) used the term “Heisei generation (p.220)” for analysing the age group that corresponds with generation Z, but so far, it seems that there is widely used “Japanese label” exists. Henceforth, I will use the general terms "young generation" or "youth" to indicate the targeted age group in this research. In the following sections, I will provide background information on the socio-political context of Japanese society, within which the young generation has grown up.

2.1 Stagnated Japan

> Just before the recent global Covid-19 pandemic, Japan was already on the road of a long recovery from one of the biggest crises in its recent history, caused by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami and the following Fukushima Daichi nuclear disaster (Mizra, 2022, p.1)

On the 11th of March in 2011, a massive earthquake hit the *Tohoku* (Northeast) region in Japan. Not only the strong and long-lasting shake, but the corresponding tsunami and damage of Fukushima nuclear power plant destroyed the ordinal everyday life of the people in a moment. More than 150 thousand people died, and 2.5 thousand people are still missing even in 2023 (NHK, 2023). Furthermore, over 20,000 people were recognized to have passed away due to stress and health problems caused by life as refugees. Because of its scale and impact, the Great East Japan Earthquake (hereafter, 3.11) left many socio-political implications for Japanese society such as political leadership, polarization between those who have and not, role of local communities or vitalization of civic movement.

In the same year, a rookie sociologist Yoshinori Furuichi published a sensational book "*The Happy Youth of a Desperate Country*". In this book, he asserts that more than 70% of Japanese youth are feeling "happy" because they do not expect such a thing as hope for the future in Japan. According to him, young people feel happy here and now because they cannot imagine being any happier in the future than now (Furuichi, 2011). Although this book has gotten criticism from the academic world for its "superficial assertions about 'happiness' (Osawa&Kingston, 2015, p.68)", or his ignorance for the vulnerable and less privileged group of people in Japan (Osawa&Kingston, 2015), his book suggest the emergence of everyday "little pleasures (Galan&Heinrich, 2018, p.226)" such as spending time in a park on sunny

days expresses a new concept of happiness in Japan that is different from what older generations appreciated as a happiness (Galan&Heinrich, 2018).

Allison (2015) defines the post 3.11 as the time of "return to normal" by encouraging the people to unite by positive mottos such as "Japanese united as one" and "Japan, hang in there!" At the time of the disaster, the ruling party was he Democratic party of Japan (DPJ), which gained the power in the 2009 national election by overcoming LDP's political hegemony in Japanese politics. However, shortly after, DPJ lose its power criticized for its lack of leadership and misleading in the post-disaster management (Kushida, 2014). It was again Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) that took back the power in 2012, and Shinzo Abe formed the second Abe cabinet. Examining the eight years of Abe's second administration is important in this paper because it occupies a great time of the life of youth and thus his political ideology well reflects the atmosphere of Japan under which the youth had grown up. Even though Abe was assassinated in 2021 in the midst of the pandemic, LDP maintains its power and the legacy of Abe's politics.

Abe's political ideology backed up by an ultra-right and ultra-conservative lobbying group *Nippon Kaigi* (日本会議) is well represented by the slogan that he repeatedly use such as "beautiful Japan (美しい日本, *utsukushii nippon*)", or "take back Japan (日本を取り戻す, *Nippon wo torimodosu*)." What he ambitioned with this slogan was not recovery of Japan from the disaster, but his ambition to build a conservative, nationalistic country with reinterpretation of the Article 9 of the Constitution (Kingston, 2017: Morris-Suzuki, 2013: Nakahara, 2021).

Another key word that represents his nationalistic political vision is "Cool Japan (クールジャパン)". According to the Cabinet Office of Japan, Cool Japan is a national project that attracts foreigners through Japanese coolness, and by getting "empathy" from the foreign

audience, Japan aims to foster “Japanese bland” and increase the number of Japan lovers all over the world (Cabinet Office, 2019). Researchers argue that this way of national branding is based on the myth of Japanese essential uniqueness that emphasizes Japan’s non-Western and un-Asian cultural entity (Tamaki, 2019: Valaskivi, 2013).

Although Abe strived to create a positive and hopeful atmosphere in Japanese society, the reality was a looming precariousness and socioeconomical stagnation. Especially, Abe’s conservative “dream” toward the concept of traditional family blended well with the neoliberal policy discourses, specifically surrounding the ideal of *jiko sekinin* (自己責任, self-responsibility). This is because his obsession for the traditional form of family required family members---especially women---to take care its members, and independent from the state support reinforced an image of an ideal citizenry (Goldfarb, 2016: Mizra, 2022). Kariya (2012, p.130) asserts “in the catchphrase of the day, a ‘self-responsible society (自己責任社会, *jiko sekinin shakai,*) ‐ a society that exacts a greater degree of self-responsibility from its members ‐ was needed.”

In line with many other countries, the COVID-19 pandemic heightened the insecurity of the everyday lives of marginalized populations and those who were already vulnerable before the pandemic (Ueno, 2021: Shibusawa et al, 2021), and increased the economic gaps between social strata (Klien, 2021). Together with the fear of getting infected, unease, and anxiety stemming from the disease threat, the practice of social distancing resulted in compromised social and familial connections, heightened feelings of loneliness, boredom, and inactivity, as well as limited access to healthcare services (Tanaka&Okamoto, 2021). Because of such situation, many people are forced to alter their lifestyle due to the restriction of entering to schools, day care facilities, and workplaces (Shibusawa et al, 2021).

To summarize this section, Japanese society that current young generation have seen and experienced are full of precariousness and uncertainties. However, at the same time, Japanese politics that they know is almost equal to LDP and Abe's politics which embodies neoliberal ideology and strong nationalism that intend to cover up Japanese society's vulnerability and people's insecure lives increased after the 3.11 triple disaster and the pandemic.

2.2 Political Participation after 3,11

Norris (2002, p.14) defines political participation as "any dimensions of activity that either designed directly to influence government agencies and the policy process, or indirectly to impact civil society, or which attempt to alter systematic patterns of social behaviour. Although 3.11 disaster and Abe administration brought a political uncertainty and the 2011 Fukushima nuclear catastrophe marked a decisive moment for civic engagement in Japan, which now may well be standing at the brink of a new era of social movements and political activism (Chiavacci& Obinger, 2018). Allison (2018) also points out that hopeful new ways of being and belonging in society have arisen, such as volunteerism after 3/11 and local mutual support organizations that are redesigning sociality away from the narrow confines of family and work.

In the context of youth, Gonon (2018) points out that 3.11 triggered the birth of "politicized generation" among the young generation that had been politically silent for a long time. One of the most prominent instances of youth-led activism in Japan is often associated with the anti-nuclear protest by SEALDs during the second administration of Prime Minister Abe around 2015 (Gonon, 2018). According to Hammond (2020, p. 445), Japanese higher

education appeared to fall short in meeting the demand for political discourse. Nevertheless, SEALDs exemplified a 'do-it-yourself' spirit, forging their own political agency.

While 3.11 Fukushima triple disaster stimulated Japanese people's attention to politics, it does not mean Japan's political indifference was solved dramatically. Especially, young people continue to be less interested in politics in both direct and indirect sense. According to Mainichi (2021), the voter turnout among young people in Japan is considered to be low. For example ,in the House of Representatives election in 2017, the voter turnout for those in their 20s was 34%, which was less than half of the turnout for those in their 60s. Also, Asahi Shimbun's report (2023) reviled that Among those in their 40s and below, there is a notable trend of distrust in politics, according to the survey. Seventy percent of respondents in this age group express distrust in politics, with a particularly high 74 percent among those unaffiliated with any political party. This indicates a widespread skepticism towards politics, especially among the younger generation. Hommerich (2017) argues Japanese young generation lose their motivation in speaking up for their own rights or pushing change because they are the generation who has given up on expecting more for themselves in the future in a society that has no room for growing up.

In short, although Japanese people's interest in participating in the public sphere has increased since the 3.11 Fukushima triple disaster, its scope remains limited. Particularly among young people, political ignorance and distrust are chronic.

3 Literature Review on Japanese Youth

In this chapter, I will examine the existing literature on youth studies in Japan by especially focusing on studies related to the lives and experiences of highly educated youth. According to the statistical survey conducted by MEXT (2020), the higher education attendance rate of the 18-year-old population in Japan was 82.8% in 2022. Among them, 53.7% of students enrolled in four-year universities. Japan is one of the fourteen OECD countries where more than half of the population has access to higher education (OECD,2022). In the following section, I will investigate the existing literatures on university student life and the gaze from Japanese society on their lives.

3.1 Youth Study in Japan

Toivonen and Imoto (2012) argue so-called "deficit model" has been dominant in the field of youth study in Japan. In this model, those who could not "smoothly 'transition' into further education and jobs, and play their part in maintaining the established social order (Toivonen & Imoto, 2012, p. 17) were problematized and attracted both academic and public interest. In concrete, in Japan, only those who could succeed in "completing one's studies, obtaining a job (the most qualified position possible, with the best salary possible), getting married and having children", and "achieving all of the above, and in this order" were recognized as a responsible adult (Galan, p.46). In other words, young people need to demonstrate their personal abilities, professional responsibilities, and family responsibilities, otherwise, they are considered as "deficit (Galan, p.46)" and dishonorably labeled as, for example,

Futokou---"school non-attendance (Toivonen&Imoto, 2012, p.3)", NEET---not in education, employment, or training (Allison, 2015), or *hikikomori* ---social withdrawal (Furlong, 2008).

Although Japanese youth life is a "single track" that pressures both young people and their parents for its lack of second chances (Furlong, 2008, pp.314-315), most youth problems in Japan are "concerned with incomplete or delayed transitions" and one's insufficiency or inability in playing "culturally appropriate social roles (Toivonen& Imoto, 2012, p.17)." In other words, as long as they are fulfilling their "responsibilities" at a proper time in their life, they are not "found out" by society. Thus, the lives of those who are on the "right track" just like my informants, and their troubles in society are less likely to be investigated in the youth studies in Japan.

3.2 Being an Elite in the Society of *Jiko Sekinin*

I shall begin this section with a quate of Japan's best-known women's studies scholor Chizuko Ueno's speech at the matriculation ceremony at the University of Tokyo, one of the most prestigious universities in Japan.

> I hope you won't focus your efforts only to win the game for yourself. I hope you will use your gifted talents and favorable environment to help those who are less fortunate, and do not denigrate them. And I hope you live your life by accepting who you are even with your weaknesses and by helping and supporting each other (Ueno, 12.04. 2019)

The fact that she needed to deliver this message for the future elites implies that Japanese society is in a situation that imagination for the unfairness of the society and other people's lives are less cultivated even among the "smartest" group of people who are most likely work for the government or prestigious Japanese companies.

In the field of educational sociology, Japan has often been recognized as *gakureki shakai* (学歴社会) where one's educational background (*gakureki*) determines his/her entire life in the society (*shakai*) (Blumenthal, 1992; Galan, 2018; Imai, 2018; Okada, 2001; Teichler, 1992). What is peculiar in Japan is that the name of the university that a person enrolled in and graduated from itself is more important than his/her academic achievement (Blumenthal,1992).

Large companies that assure recruit students from prestigious universities because a In order to "get on" the track, many start fierce competition in very early stage of their life (Okada, 2001; Japan Times, 2014). Many consider that public education is not enough to be competitive, and send their children to private cram school (*juku*) by paying extra money (Blumenthal, 1992). All the actors related to *juken* including students themselves, their parents, teachers of their high school, or *juku* strive for entering/let them entering the universities with higher hensachi (偏差値, "standard score") rating, which indicates "the level of difficulty of its entrance exam – the higher the *hensachi*, the lower the dropout rate, and vice versa (Galan, 2018)."

The first and foremost goal of the competition is *shukatsu*, the entrance gate for Japanese corporate world. name of the university especially matters when students experience school-work transition. In Japan, graduating from university is a pivotal time of life for young people because school-to-work transition means one's transformation from student (*gakusei)* to socialized adulthood (*shakaijin*) (Dasgupta, 2012: Mathews, 2004: Roberson, 1995: Shire, 1999). In contrast to being an socially immature *gakusei*, being a *shakaijin* means to be a person with both professional and family responsibilities (Galan, such as "full-time work, marriage, parenthood, or even taking on the role of grandparent" (Dasgupta, 2012, p.58). Researchers point out that university students do not suddenly or automatically become

shakaijin: many of them experience the process of “becoming a *shakaijin* by actively engaging in job-hunting (*shushoku katsudo*, for short, *shukatsu*) （Aronsson, 2015; Dasgupta, 2012; Roberson, 1995; Shire 1999).

There are of course various types of job-seeking and requitement at different timings of life, however, the term *shukatsu* generally indicates a bulk employment system that opens the door only for soon-to-be-graduating university students who seek career-track employment (Breaden, 2014; Mathews, 2004). For Japanese youth, becoming a member of corporate family by going through the various processes of employment selection of *shukatsu* is considered to be “the only and a sacred ‘rite of passage’ to reaching adulthood” (Kato, 2010, p.53).

This “rite” is comprised of various stages such as attending information sessions, writing a motivation letter, taking a written exam, and having interviews multiple times (Breaden, 2012). Throughout these processes, “students strive to analyse and internalize the picture of an ‘ideal’ applicant that companies suggest and perform ‘self’ according to it” (Nagao, 2016, p.36). Physical appearance is also an important element to be competitive in *shukatsu*. Students strive to adjust their exterior to the criteria such as black suit, black hair, or tidy makeup in order not to be judged as an inappropriate applicant (Ishikawa, 2021: Nagao, 2018). *Shukatsu* often let students neglect last stage of their study because of the long-lasting and multiple process (Breaden, 2012) and is even entailed by harassments by employers because of a weaker position of students who are expected to be obedient (Nagano, 2016). Here, it is clear that what companies are judging is not applicants’ "working competent" here does not mean working experience and skills but indicates socio-cultural fluency that are required in working life in Japanese corporate world (Breaden, 2012). Shire (1995) explains this fluency as language and behavioural skills that are appropriate for hierarchical

environment of Japanese companies. Starting from how to knock the door of interview room to how to wear, there are many "manners" to perform to be an ideal applicant (Nagao 2016). The system of *shukatsu* is supported by the university-corporate cooperation aiming at producing students with working competence (Senoo, 2023) . In this setting, most Japanese university students regard *shukatsu* as “one’s single last chance at entry into a career” (Mathews, 2012). This also suggests a third path is hard to imagine for them in the society that getting a full-time job by *shukatsu* is considered to the only way for youth to reach adulthood. Elite students choose a path that are familiar for them because the amount of efforts that is required to pioneer other ways of navigating their life is overwhelming (Arroson, 2014).

From a gender perspective, becoming a *shakaijin* have different meanings to men and women (Dasgupta, 2012: Kato, 2010: Nagao, 2018: Roberson, 1995: Shire, 1999). Dasgupta (2012) asserts the concept of becoming and being an adult in the Japanese context is strongly associated with “masculinity” that put full-time employment—the goal of shukatsu and the symbol of adulthood—had long been a domain of men as the head of the family in ~~the~~ post-war Japan (p.44-57). On the other hand, women had been expected, or often positively pursued to be “good wife, wise mother” (良妻賢母, *ryosai kenbo*) who support the breadwinners by retiring their job after their marriage and birth giving (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2019: Steel, 2019).

The concept of social adulthood centered on the company-based identity formation for men and anticipated “company-to-family” transition for women” (Shire, 1999, p. 79). Aronsson (2015) argues that “being a housewife was such a part of a woman’s life that it practically became equated with womanhood” and femininity had been associated with “inherent inferiority to men (p.60).” Meanwhile, “women’s professional ambition, high education, and

high income have been long judged in Japan as being in opposition to femininity (Nemoto, 2016, p.74).” Furthermore, those with international experience have been discriminated because “these educations have been seen as a form of deviance from normative Japanese femininity” (Steel, 2019, pp.74-75). In such settings, so called career women *(kyaria ūman*) struggled with unfair treatment at the workplace compared to the counterpart salaryman and the social expectation of following a career track (Aronsson, 2015, p.33-49). Sometimes, young Japanese women contribute to reproduce occupational gender inequality by making their career plans based on internalized gendered, heteronormative expectations (Imoo, 2023: Mathews 2004).

The important point is that although the opportunities of social relocation such as juken and shukatsu are believed to be equal to everyone, one’s possibility to hang onto “upward” mobility is not equal. Although the door is, on the surface, open for everyone equally, however, the reality is far from equal. Teichler (1992, p.294) argues that “the intense competition has the consequence of again giving advantages to those who are privileged to start with.” Kariya (2012) argues that “students of the top-tier universities selected through rigorous examinations in a mass education society do not easily develop consciousness of themselves as elites. Thus, it is difficult for elite youths to develop a sense of social responsibility, self-sacrifice, and spirit of service carried by the phrase *noblesse oblige* – can be easily imagined (Kariya, 2012, p.105).”

3.3 International Experience of Japanese Youth

In today’s Japan, the governments entangle youth’s international opportunities and further development of Japan as a nation. Especially Abe second administration has led the initiative

to send more and more youth abroad for the educational purpose to cultivate *grobal jinzai*（グローバル人材, global human resecures）. The main point of *grobal jinzai* is on "the old and familiar tie between corporations, overseas, and men" and it was re-emphasized around 2010 by the new national discourse of Global Human Resources (Kato, 2015, p.224)." Smith and Samuell (2022) also points out that Japanese government's intention of sending young people abroad is for the sake of future economic growth by cultivating human recourse with English language proficiency and multicultural experience (Smith&Samuell, 2022). Paradoxically enough, the recent GHR discourse keeps Japanese youth inbound despite the word global because the very premise of this initiative is that they will return to Japan and contribute to the growth of economy by working for Japanese companies in the future.

Kato (2015) points out that the "young people" in the Japanese governments' scheme ~~is~~ only targets university students that Japanese corporations are interested in as ~~a~~ potential human resource. For instance, Japanese government launched a project called Tobitate Ryugaku Japan project（トビタテ！留学 Japan）for promoting students' study migration with the collaboration with the private corporations. The project description written by Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) expresses the government's and corporates' intention to increase the number of *ryugakusei* for strengthen companies' international competence.

> As globalization accelerates, Japanese companies are endeavoring evermore to strengthen their presence overseas. However, with the relatively low number of Japanese university students studying abroad, roughly 70 percent of Japanese companies with operations outside of Japan say they found it difficult to secure and develop globally minded talent. In response, as part of the Japan Revitalization Strategy decided by the

> Cabinet in 2013, the Japanese government aimed to double the number of Japanese students studying abroad by the year 2020. (MEXT, 2022)

Obviously, the intention of sending students lies not in promoting overseas migration of Japanese nationals, but in gaining globally active corporate workers rather than encouraging. students' personal development and learning opportunities in a new environment with new people.

4 Methodological Concerns

In this chapter, I will introduce methodological concerns. My initial was to interview female Japanese university students with international experience and listen to their experience in Japanese-style job-hunting activities (*shushoku katsudo*, for short, shukatsu). However, during the recruiting process, I found out that Japanese university students who are in the middle of *shukatsu* or have already undergone the process are not very open to talking about topics related to shukatsu and sharing their experience because, according to them, it is very painful to remember the stressful experience in *shukatsu*. This fact already told me how hard and traumatic it is to go through *shukatsu*. Eventually, I changed the target group to Japanese exchange students who are currently studying in Finland. This change turned out to be beneficial for this research; not only it allows me to conduct in-person interviews but also, they were somehow more willing to share their personal experience than those who are in Japan. This was probably because my "positionality" made them feel that I am a very close person to themselves as discussed later.

4.1 The Role of the Researcher in the Field

Reflexivity in social scientific research refers to the active involvement of self-awareness about the researcher's personal experience and self-evaluation of his/her positionality throughout the research process from the initial selection of the topic to the final outcome (Berger, 2015; Aull Davies, 1999; Nomura, 2017; Pillow, 2003) Positionality indicates the researcher's features such as gender, race, age, class, or level of education all of which may determine the distance between the field and informants (Anderson,2021; Berger, 2015; Ergun&Erdemir, 2010, Kitamura, 2013). Kitamura (2013) argues that positionality is a

dynamic concept that ultimately defines how researchers regard the informants and, at the same time, determines how researchers are seen from the informants. Collins and Gallinat (2010) argue that people use their personal memories and experiences in understanding others, thus ethnographic research is dependent on researcher self. By using "the self as a resource (p.15)", researchers can obtain rich anthropological insight in the field (Collins and Gallinat 2010). Anderson (2021) also asserts that "by centering the ethnographic self in the research process to some degree, it is possible to produce a more nuanced, emotive, and reflexive study that benefits both researcher and researched (p.223)."

Ergun and Erdemir (2010) refer that researchers' insider-outside identities in the field become an opportunity to see and experience the field in novel ways (pp.34-35). In my case, my "insiderness" (Ergun&Erdemir, 2010) in the field was helpful in the whole process of the research. My background, for example, as a Japanese, Japanese-speaker, mid-twentieth, and status as a *ryugakusei* (international student) in Finland enabled me to easily approach the potential participants and get close to them just like a friend. Especially, the fact that the informants and I were born around the same time and grown up in Japan under the long stagnation was very valuable because this research will investigate youth's experience and vision from a generational point of view. Furthermore, as a graduate from one of the top tier universities, I was able to understand what they have experienced until now as elite students and Japan's sociopolitical situation that has surrounded them because, as I discussed above, Japanese elite students usually take a very similar life path (Kato, 2010: Senoo, 2023).

At the same time, I was an outsider for some points because I am a very "strange" student in the context of Japan. I realized that exchange students in Finland clearly differentiated me from themselves when they realized that I am a degree student that pursue a master's degree from a Finnish university. Also, in Japanese context, I am too old for being a student without a regular job. I gave up going on *shukatsu*. Moreover, I left Japan because I struggled very

much with fitting into the ideal and promising life expected for a university-graduate. My attempt in this research is not to differentiate myself from the participants. However, reflecting on this vague "discomfort" that I have with Japanese society throughout the research process provided me with many insights and realizations about the life of elite youth as I will discuss in the next chapter.

4.2 The Recruitment Process of Research Participants

The participant criteria I set were 1) those who enrolled in or completed four-year university degree in Japan, 2) those who spent their life mostly in Japan 3) those who are studying at higher educational institutes as exchange students in Finland. By setting these three criteria, I was able to recruit and interview young elite in Japan. My initial plan was to only include female students because of my special interest in women's gender-oriented struggles in Japanese society. However, I decided to include women and men in order to hear both sides of the story and to avoid oversimplification of gender roles in Japanese society (Kato 2015, p.63). Thus, I believe that including men as participants to hear different perspectives on their experience and self-reflection about their life as elite youth. Although my informants are not necessarily the wealthiest, the fact that they were able to reach the higher education and living in a foreign country for study indicates that they are in such a privileged group of people in today's Japan.

For informants' recruitment, I applied snowball sampling that allow me to reach the population that meets the participant criteria (May, 2011, p.145). Also, this sampling method can provide a feeling of reliability to potential participants because I am introduced to them through their acquaintances or friends (Nomura, 2017). The first participant was a Japanese

female student whom I sat next to each other in a lecture hall by chance in October 2022. Not only she willingly agreed to participate in my research, but she kindly distributed the advertisement of my research to her friends via a LINE group of “Japanese exchange students in Turku”. Thanks to her, three other Japanese exchange students contacted me. In addition, some of these three offered me to introduce their friends who fulfilled the criteria, thus, a total of eight students composed of five females and three males were recruited for the data collection.

4.3 The Process of Interviews

Interviews were conducted from November 2022 to March 2023. All informants were asked to participate in two interview sessions during the period. Most interview sessions took place in an in-person setting to make it easier to gain both nuanced verbal and nonverbal information such as facial expressions and body language. One session was exceptionally organized online due to the informant’s return to Japan after she completed her exchange study. I also set up pre-meetings with informants before the first interviews to get to know each other and to conduct the first interviews in a more relaxed and casual setting. Interviews took place at the university campus, and quiet but cosy and open places were chosen to make sure that informants feel comfortable to have a conversation. Before the interview, I explained ethical issues with the information sheet written in Japanese and obtained their signs on the informed content form .Each interview session lasted approximately one hour, but some sessions were slightly longer/shorter than an hour depending on the content and quality of the conversation. I applied a semi-structured interview so that I can be sure to ask essential questions (see Appendix 1) while adding more depth and flexibility to the conversation during

the interview (May, 2011, pp.134-136). All interviews were recorded upon agreement from the informants.

I kept research questions very general (see Appendix 2) to avoid leading questions that project my own thoughts and help draw a certain type of answers. I prepared the same set of questions for all the informants in the first session, and personalized questions in the second session depending on the content of the conversation in the previous interviews. By taking the advantage of the flexibility of semi-structured interview, I sometimes changed the order of questions, skipped some, or added new questions according to flow of our conversations. When structuring the list of questions for the second interviews, I reflected the content of the first interviews to hear about what was not talked about or possibly avoided by the informants.

4.4 Ethical Concerns

Before the interviews, participants are well informed about ethical issues such as their voluntary, confidentiality, and use of data (see Appendix 3). Each interview was recorded upon the agreement of each participant, and I explain carefully that obtained personal information will only be shared between myself and my thesis supervisor whenever applicable. Obtained data including the personal information of each participant is stored in secured online storage (seafile) provided by the university with a strong password. In addition, all the informants are pseudonymized, and information that could lead to exposure of their personal information is hidden throughout the paper to protect their identity. I put extra care into this point due to the small size of the Japanese student community in Finland

which may make the detection of an individual very easy. Topics that could relate to sensitive topics were talked about and dug down only when they were brought up by their side.

4.5 Data Analysis Method

In this research, I applied thematic analysis as a data analysis method. The whole recorded data was first transcribed manually by using Microsoft Word and was coded with an Excel file. I applied open coding that processes data inductively to "develop, identify, elaborate, and refine analytic categories and insights (Emerson, 2011, p.175)." After finishing coding, I categorized the codes into four themes and proceeded them by thematic analysis that can "provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data. (Braun&Clarke,2006, p.78)." In my research, flexibility played a key role especially in the data analysis because my initial attempt of "listen to and write something related to gender" was developed into a broader and prominent topic---young elite and political ignorance.

5 Data Analysis and Result

In this chapter, I will present the obtained data and the result of analysis. In the first section, I will discuss how students idealize the Finnish society and Finnish way of living. Then, I will analyse their experiences and self-reflections about their lives as an elite youth in Japan. In the third section, I will focus on their vision toward the future life.

As a result of the analysis, aspirations toward the perceived Finland reflects the pressure and stress that they are experiencing in order to stay on the "right life path" that is believed to lead them to the promising future in Japan. Although researchers argue that current young generation cannot appreciate the same affluence as their parent's generation experienced and enjoyed (Galan, 2021:), many of the participants strive to catch the "boat (Fong and Tsutsui, 2015)" that takes them to the Japanese corporate world. The participants are not necessarily the most privileged group in Japan. However, my data indicates socio-political structure and issues are rarely visible for them because they are segregated from the unfairness and preciousness in the current unequal world.

Name	Age	Gender	Level of Degree	Study Duration
Ken	23	M	Undergraduate	10 months
Rei	25	F	Postgraduate	4 months
Mina	23	F	Undergraduate	10 months
Shota	26	M	Postgraduate	10 months
Yuta	24	M	Undergraduate	10 months
Nanami	22	F	Undergraduate	10 months
Sakura	22	F	Undergraduate	10 months
Haruka	22	F	Undergraduate	10 months

Table1: Participant Information

5.1 Aspiration for the Finnish Affluence

According to the statistic survey conducted by MEXT, majority of the Japanese university students choose to study in English speaking country every year (MEXT, 2023). In 2020, around 45% out of 42,709 students choose to study in the United States, the UK, Australia, or Canada. The following year had shown the same tendency. Smith and Samuell (2021) argue that this is because Japanese students tend to set English language acquisition as one of the biggest purposes of studying abroad. In the top ten destination countries, some non-English speaking counties such as China, Taiwan[1], Germany and South Korea are ranked in, but still, there is a clear preference for English speaking counties (MEXT, 2023).

[1] In 2020, China and Taiwan occupied around one third, but they disappeared from the ranking in 2021 due to the covid restriction.

Meanwhile, many of the informants in this research expressed their “no interest” in such major destination countries. For example, Rei mentioned “I was not interested in them at all (Rei, 08.11.2022).” Sakura also said, “I was not attracted by the popular destinations among Japanese students such as the United States or the UK (Sakura, 01.02.2023).” Ken clearly referred that “I was not interested in putting the purpose of exchange in improving English speaking ability (Ken, 16.02.2023).” Instead, all of eight informants were motivated to study specifically in Finland or *Hokuou* because of their interest in the culture and society that they think are attractive or advanced. All of the students had already started to create the image of Finland or *Hokuou* in their mind before starting exchange by information that they got from news, SNS, or cultural products imported to Japan. For example, Rei said:

> I had an image of *Hokuou* as being... I don't know... fashionable, rich, and fulfilling, and had been aspiring for it...I think I have gotten the image through some blog posts written by Japanese women who are living in Finland (Rei, 23.11.2022).

Mitsui (2012)’s study on media expression of Finland in post-war Japan points out that Finland has long been represented as the symbol of post-modern affluence in Japan, and this value is widely shared not only by older generation but also among young people. Especially Moomin series, a series of children books by Sweadish-speaking Finnish Tove Jansson and was animated in Japan around 1990, impacted greatly in Japanese people’s image formation about Finland as a nature-friendly and peaceful country (Mitsui, 2012). Yoshitake (2003) analyzed the representation of *Hokuou* in Japan from the historical view and argues that only an extreme image of *Hokuou* had been shaped in Japan either as the utopia of post-development or the failure model of welfare state.

The image of *Hokuou* is also shaped by active promotion of country’s attraction by Finnish embassy in Japan (Finland Center, 2022). Many Finland- and *Hokuou*-themed exhibitions, events, and lectures are organized both by officially and privately, and attracting Japanese

people. Also, there are many publications mainly written by women that feature happiness and cuteness of the perceived Finland. No matter what the reality is, "fans" of *Hokuou* believe that Japan and Nordic are fundamentally different, and life in the latter is more fulfilled.

Mina's encounter with Finland was via Moomin, a series of children's book from Finland.

> I was originally interested in Finland because I like Moomin, and I thought it (Finland) will be different from Japan because the prime minister is a young woman with a child, and I also liked that it seemed like a safe place (Mina, 23.11. 2022).

For Haruka, *Hokuou* had been a place of "escape from the reality" of her very stressful student life at the high school in Japan. When she was asked about the origin of her interest in Finland, she answerd;

> It's really difficult to say…the biggest thing was definitely my intuition, but there was a *Hokuou*-themed park near grandmother's and my place…some products from *Hokuou* were sold there, and I was also attracted by the buildings. It was the only way to release my stress of studying for *juken* for the university (Haruka ,15.02. 2022).

Haruka also had interest not only in cultural aspect, but also in the sociopolitical aspect of Finland.

> The other major factor (that made me interested in Finland) is the gender equality and the high place in the world ranking in the SDGs, especially in the area of gender. The government also provides generous support for those who need help with childcare (Haruka ,15.02.2023).

In contrast to the slow, relaxing and peaceful life that they believe people appreciate in Finland, some strengthen their dissatisfaction toward Japanese society as they spend more time in Finland. Yuta's motivation to come to Finland was supported by his aspiration for "Finnish way of living" that he discovered during his previous travel experience to Finland

when he was a high school student. In the interview, he often compared Finnish and Japanese life, and expressed his disgust toward the latter.

> In Finland, it is normal for adults to keep have their private time, and is also normal for children to go home at 4:00 p.m. and have dinner together. Education is free until graduate school, and, yes, there are unlimited opportunities for people. But in Japan, people are even suffering from the difficulty of paying back scholarships...even if we finished graduate school by borrowing scholarships, we don't even know whether we can get a regular job. We are doing everything for just surviving, not for what we want...(Yuta ,08.11.2022).

Mina also contrasted the perceived Finnish and Japanese lifestyle.

> I cannot work in front of a computer in an office anymore. Japan is very noisy. Train announcements, electronic billboards, and so on...I think it's partly because the streets are wide and it's really nice to stroll around the city (in Finland)... I wonder when and where people are working when I see them when I am wandering around the city during the day on weekdays! I love it when I see people relaxing in cafes and such. I think Japanese people are really restless...(Mina, 23.11.2022).

What they are viewing does not necessarily reflect the "reality" of Finnish society as all of them have no working experience as a regular worker neither in Japan and Finland. It was surprising that no negative aspects even thou are muted except for the harsh winter and the quality of food at the student cafeteria.

However, what their image toward Finland and *Hokuou* imply is that their desire for the concept of "true affluence" that they think is opposite from what they can obtain from life in Japan. In other word, their aspiration for the perceived Finnish life and society project what they think can be never appreciated or attained in Japan. In his best-selling essay "Hell of eyes" that critically analyzes Japanese society, sociologist Munesuke Mita (2008) mentioned "Peeking, dreaming, detaching one's soul… it may be a form of escape from reality with no

way out, but at the same time, it at least makes one aware of oneself as a vacuity, discloses reality as a vacuity." This reference was made when he analyzes the behavior of a man who desired a 別世界 (*betsusekai*, different world) in urban Tokyo that he believed fundamentally different from his miserable life in the countryside in the middle of 20 century in Japan. Similarly, students' stories are reflecting what they believe is lacking in their current and future life. Through their eyes, the complexity and historical background of the society that shape the everyday life of people in Finland are not imagined or ignored.

Shota, who did not really compare Japan and Finland throughout the interviews also told me:

> I feel better in this colder weather, and I don't like the place with too many people...what else...and I don't like the atmosphere in Japan like "the nail that sticks out will be hammered down." I don't really care much about it, but the existence of such a way of thinking itself is not good. So I think it's rather better to be somewhere else (than in Japan). (Shota, 22.11.2022)

He continued:

> In a good sense, people are not interested in each other . The way of thinking that everyone is different is strongly shared. So, it seems people don't really care about what others will think about them . (Shota 22.11.2022)

Haruka, for example, imagine that people are secured even they materially lack something for their life.

> I think the society embodies the value of "*taru wo shiru* (足るを知る, knowing the contentment)"…you know, they have less (laugh). People's life is not gorgeous, but, well, they might not desire for materialistic life in the first place, but for me, it seems that people are quite satisfied…I had been thinking about that for a long, but recently I realized that they can be satisfied even they are lacking something because they have a foundation that they can survive…the society is structed in that way. If I think the same situation in Japan, for example, the rural city, I cannot really say where but….it's just my image, but

> they should be in trouble for having less. Finland might be like that, but I thought that the very premise of the country is “we have nothing (Haruka ,01.03. 2023).”

Also, Mina believes Finnish people are contended with their life simply being connected to the nature.

> Japan is the place of competition! The existence of the ranking such as “employment rate of graduates[2]” as such is really bad. I don’t like competition, like, being hustle only to get employed by trading companies[3]. We can be happy only by being around the nature like people do in Finland even though we don’t work for that kind of companies (Mina 09.02.2023).

She continued:

> [In Finland], I can live as I am. People are enjoining colorful hair style and unique fashion. I love the life style here. Also, I am not hurry anymore. I can see the sky and stars often. I feel the nature is closer, and feel like, “I cannot go back to Japan!” (Mina 09.02.2023)

Over the exchange period, students usually do not change their view toward Finland or *Hokuou* as place of true affluence. Rei, for example, did not change her way of viewing Finland before and after her semester in Turku as she said “I only have positive image (about Finland). People were nice, life was slow…in a positive sense, my impression about the country did not change from the image I had before (Rei, 10.02.2023).” Even they spent a longer period, students usually expressed their continuous admire or even exaggerated love toward their life in Finland, or the perceived Finland as a country.

In short, throughout the interviews, students described Finnish society and people’s lifestyle in a very dreamy and ideal way, In such environment,

---

[2] There are rankings of “competitive universities for getting hired by a prestigious company” as such every year. For example, https://toyokeizai.net/articles/-/615500

[3] In Japanese *sogo shosha*(総合商社). Mass Japanese companies that trade in a wide range of products, materials and technologies. Getting accepted by one of them is believed to be one of the prestigious outcome of *shukatsu*.

Negative aspects noted that aside from the reality of Finnish society, those social conditions are not something a country can appreciate by nature, but they are the product of political efforts.

5.2 **Life on the Elite Track**

> [After I came to Finland], I started to think that I want to do what I want. I can change my job, and I can come back to a graduate school if I want. In Japan, people say I have to get a regular job at the age of 20, but here [in Finland], people are not like that, like, we have to do what we want. (Mina 09.02.2023)

In this section, I will examine the underlying reason why they admire the perceived Finland this much, or why the relaxing, peaceful country image win the heart of Japanese elite youth. As I delved conversations with the informants deeper, the possible reasons why they often describe Japan negatively in contrast to fulfilling Finland gradually became clear. “I think it is better here. When I go back to Tokyo, I feel pressure to do something...(Haruka, 01.03.2023).”

First, as a student studying at top tier universities, they had been experiencing a pressure of being on the right track on the proper timing of their life. As discussed in the chapter 2, elite students in Japan are facing contiguous challenges coming one after another such as *juken*, *shukatsu*. Through their eyes, Finland is seen as the place where people are living without such restriction. For example, Ken said “[The image of Finland is] freedom...the way of people's living is like…they are doing what they want to do (Ken, 16.02.2023).”

Haruka recalled her life in Japan and said:

> When I was in Japan, I was bound by many things. I am a type of person who lives in a hurry, so since I came here, I thought it would be better to slow down and focus on what I am doing now and what is happening in front of me. (Haruka, 01.03. 2023)

Again, if what they mentioned are reflecting what they cannot obtain in Japan, their life in Japan is opposite from freedom where people cannot follow their heart.

Ken even spent a year as a *ronin*[4] (浪人) after he graduated from a high school to enter the university where he wish to study. For him, a year of pause turned out to be a meaningful time.

> I just went to calm school every single day…but if I remember the time now, I think it's a good memory, well, or rather, it was good for me to go through it. Well, if I had passed the entrance exam on time, I might have never experienced a setback until the graduation. So, the experience of giving up something once gave me a good opportunity to…well, think about myself and my future. (Ken, 16.02.2023)

Although he recalls the period as a hard time, his "gap year" between high school and university became a time for self-reflection. Otherwise, he would not have had a time for considering about it because of the restless student life in Japan. As Ken's story indicates, Japanese youth are facing relentless challenges that are posed on them and cannot appreciate enough time to have conversations with themselves.

Even they are living in the country that they had been aspired and longed for, their thought were pretty much restricted by what they are supposed to do in Japan. As it was discussed in the previous chapter, their life as a student from a four-year university are largely driven by *shukatsu*. In fact, although I did not bring a single word of *shukatsu* from myside (see

---

[4] The word derived from a status of *bushi* (*samurai*, 武士) who did not have a master to belong in the feudal Japan. In the present sense, it refers to a student who have failed a school entrance exam of a particular year and preparing for an another chance given in the next year. In contrast, those who passed the exam without preparation period is called *geneki* (being active, 現役), a word that emphasize the "on time".

appendix 3) reflecting my previous experience that faced students' rejection to talk about it, the topic was always mentioned frequently during most of the interview sessions. Thus, it is clear that *shukatsu* and student exchange are entangled matters. Also, it shows how strong the gravity that keeps them stay in an appropriate orbit of life in Japan is.

Haruka, who started *shukatsu* already when she was a sophomore, told me that it was a desperate matter for her whether she graduates and start working "on time", or extend graduation by one year for the exchange study in Finland.

> I considered about *shukatsu* a lot because if I am on the right time, I would have started working in April of this year. So I worried about that a lot when I submitted my application [for student exchange]. (Haruka 15.02.2023)

I realized Nanami looked very tired anxious during the second interview and asked why. She answered "I cannot concentrate on anything happening here (Nanami, 21.02.2023)" because she was waiting for the result of an online job interview. She was under a pressure to "get at least one job offer before I go back to Japan (Nanami, 21.02.2023)." By happening, some of the interviews were conducted around the 1st of March, when the information related to *shukatsu* is officially released to students from the companies.

> I need to start job hunting already now...all the information is released today. I need to go home and search for companies because I graduate next spring and I want to find a job on time…but I don't want to be distracted by *shukatsu* anymore… (Haruka, 01.03. 2023)

In order not to fall behind the schedule, or their cohorts, their mind are largely occupied by the *shukatsu* although they are physically in Finland and spending a time in their aspired country. For better or worth, the pandemic changed the conventional in-person dominated *shukatsu* into online format (Nikkei, 2020), and this allows students to commit to *shukatsu* regardless of their location. Many of the informants were attending conpanies' information

sessions and interviews from Finland sometimes very before dawn because of the time difference between Japan and Finland.

In contrast, I noticed that Rei's overall attitude toward exchange study in Finland is very relaxed. Rei came to Finland after finishing all the processes of *shukatsu* and securing her regular-job position. She said, "I have done *shukatsu* and will start working the next April…I almost gave up studying abroad because of the hardship of *shukatsu*…yes, it was my property (Rei, 08.11.2022)." For her, a short-term study abroad in Finland is rather a leisure than in contrast to the business of their life in Japan. Rei's attitude is reasonable because she is guaranteed to work as a regular employee right after the graduation no matter what they do until April, when most of newly graduates start working. In other words, her life path after returning to Japan is already fixed and studying abroad experience will not change her commencement of a full-time position.

In Japan, *shukatsu* is considered as "one's single best chance at entry into a career (Mathews, 2012)." Fong and Tsutsui (2015)'s research shows that the first job that freshly graduated youth determines one's career path and level of earnings for the rest of life. Fong and Tsutsui (2015) argues that "the rigidity of the labour market has created a situation in which individuals have a high chance of being left behind if they were not hired in the first year after school completion", and the cost of "missing the boat" is very high. Japanese mass employment system opportunities drop remarkably if students cannot secure jobs in the first year after completing their education (Fong and Tsutsui, 2015). Thus, it is a reasonable choice for them to devote as much recourse as possible so that they can at least obtain a feeling of security for their later life.

Related to career building, Sakura's parents seem that they are striving for not letting their child deviating from the right track. Sakura got some advice for her future from her mother that encourage her to make a choice that does not let her off from the track.

> I have always loved little kids, and when I was in junior high school, I gradually started thinking about my career path. And as a result, I thought that if I love little children, I should become a nursery teacher. My parents were quite opposed to that. Unfortunately, nursery teachers have a low social status and low wages. My parents were very concerned about that, and they said that I will have a hard time, and that I should not become a nursery teacher. […] That's when my rebellious period against my parents began (laugh) (Sakura, 01.02.2023)

Sakura's parents are aware of the reality that it will be really difficult to make a living as a nursery teacher in Japan because of their poor working condition and lower wage in spite of their responsibility (NHK, 2023). Even though it was her dream, they tried to guide her to more secure jobs.

Yuta, on the other hand, had a critical view of *shukatsu* already before he starts it. Even so, his plan was to experience it because *shukatsu* is what "everyone does (Yuta, 08.11.2022)". and he mentioned that the learning experience in Finland has already made him discover a new life choice other than *shukatsu*.

> [When I was in Japan], I had been suspicious like "What's the purpose of *shukatsu*, and what's the purpose of learning some cheap techniques for that?", or "what is *gakchika*[5]?" But even so, I was still planning to do *shukatsu* as everyone does. I was thinking that if I couldn't get a job in the industry I am interested in the most, I would find a company where I could still do what I wanted to do…[After I came here] I decided to go to graduate school…I realized that I can do so if I want to study…. I feel that the potential

[5] *Gakuchika* stands for *gakuseijidaini chikarawoiretakoto,* means "the thing you were the most passionate about when you were a student." It is one of the most common questions in job interviews in Japan, and students are expected to answer something other than studying, for example, club activities, part-time job, volunteer activity, or internship experience.

> of young people is getting narrower and narrower especially when I see people doing *shukatsu*. But in Finland, we can study if we want and if we want to work, we can work…I realized something I thought as a matter of course in Japan is actually not (Yuta, 08.11.2022).

Yuta had a critical view of *shukatsu* even before he starts it. Even so, his original plan was to go through it because *shukatsu* is what "everyone does (Yuta, 08.11.2022)." The system of *shukatsu* is supported by the university-corporate cooperation aiming at "producing" students with working competence. On the other hand, the "working competent" here does not mean working experience and skills but indicates socio-cultural fluency that are required in working life in Japanese corporate world (Breaden, 2012). Shire (1995) explains this fluency as language and behavioral skills that are appropriate for hierarchical environment of Japanese companies. Starting from how to knock the door of interview room to how to wear, there are many "manners" to perform to be an ideal applicant (Nagao 2016). Yuta questions toward performing this "small skills" that are far from the essential.

On the other hand, his choice of continuing study as a student suggests the possibility that Japanese university students are still bonded by the binary options; continue his/her status as a student or become a *shakaijijn* thorough *shukatsu*. When Rei was asked whether she had any other options than *shukatsu*, she answered "It means continuing graduate study, right (Mina, 18.11.2022)?". This also suggests a third path is hard to imagine for them in the society that getting a full-time job by *shukatsu* is considered to the only way for youth to reach adulthood. Elite students choose a path that are familiar for them because they are overwhelmed by the amount of work to pioneer other ways of navigating their life (Arroson, 2014). The only other option imaginable for them might be to continue a student status, as both Rei and Yuta suggest. Of course, the nature of exchange study only assures a temporal stay abroad, however, a third way are hardly imaginable.

In short, most of the students are stressed, or feeling strange about the monolithic life path that the society requires for them and at the same time that they internalize. They enjoy a temporal liberation from Japan in Finland, but it is only physically. Their mind is largely bound by what they have to do, or who they have to be in Japan. Students' behavior shows how strong the pressure is to be in the right place on time. However, both parents and their children still strive to obtain a university degree and even gain experiences abroad so that they can get a decent and stable job in one of the prestigious companies in the future. Thus, both monetary and mental burden can be considered as an important investment for the children's future in Japan. Mina, who experienced a cultural exchange with a local family with small children said, "I think it's really that people let children make mistakes (Mina,09.02.2023)." Mina's word reminds of the "deficit model (Toivonen&Imoto, 2012)" that dominated how Japanese society analysed youth---once they deviate from the right track, they will be labelled dishonourably (Toivonen&Imoto, 2012).

5.3 Decent Future in Unequal Japan

Allison (2012) introduced a concept "social precarity" to describe the state of Japanese society today. According to Allison (2012), social precarity is "a condition of being and feeling insecure in life that extends to one's (dis)connectedness (pp.348-349)" and it has become pervasive along with the government's promotion of neoliberalism and emphasis of individual responsibility (*jikosekinin*) since the 80s. While "no one is totally safe (Allison, 2012, p.367)" materially, mentally and socially in the neoliberal Japan, how informants describe their future vision was far from uncertainty and insecurity. Yuta, who expressed

overall disgust toward Japanese society and university life in Japan, he described his life as if it is perfect.

> Basically, I don't think everything will turn out alright, but I'm optimistic about my life. My life is alright as long as I don't die. I don't need money to eat luxury food... I'm sure I won't die after all...I think it will be just enough if I have a minimum level of cultural and healthy life. Actually I don't know what would happen if I really fail because I've never failed anything before because I'm living the complete life I want so far. I went to the high school I wanted to go to, I went to the college I desired, and I came here...I got my first choice for everything in my life (Yuta, 06.02.2023).

Although they did not have a clear vision and plan about their future, at least they seemed that they are detached from the possibility that they might face a situation that is no longer possible to maintain, “minimum level of cultural and healthy life”, if I borrow Yuta’s word. Among the eight informants, Yuta expressed the strong disgust toward Japanese society and people’s lifestyle that he thinks is far from the quality of life. This contradiction of “perfect life in the disgusting society” implies that he is not considering the socio-political conditions around him as the elements that also compose and shape his private life. In other words, he is clearly segregating the private life from the public. Because these two are different matters for him, his life can be perfect although Japan is the place where “I really do not want go back (Yuta, 06.02.2023)”.

During the era of Japan's economic growth, the picture of one’s successful life path was completing their studies, securing a highly qualified and well-paying job, getting married, and having children (Galan, 2012). Although socioeconomical conditions have drastically changed in Japan from their parent’s or even older generations as reviewed in the chapter 2, Nanami’s future vision was very close to this conventional “ideal” life path as an adult in Japan.

> Well, [in the future] I will have my husband, my kids, and…maybe live close from my parents' house […] I want to spend all my energy to realize a rich life after retirement. Like, going to a cruise trip with the saved money (Nanami 21.02.2023)

In contrast to their vision toward future, financial constraints such as poverty or low parental income and the fact that university degrees no longer guarantee secure and well-paying careers in Japan and will serve as a defining factor for both young generation and future generations (Galan, 2012). Thus, such standardized life that the generation became a dream that only a limited layer of privileged people can attain. In such socioeconomical setting of current Japan, the mindset "everything will be alright (何とかなる,*nantoka naru*)" or the belief that Ken has "I have an optimistic mindset that everything is going to turn out well. I am also thinking that I can manage everything somehow. (Ken 28.02.2023)" is not attainable for many people. Thus, here I argue that future vision among the youth is highly classed matter.

My data indicates that one of their confident attitudes toward their future is supported, or "inherited" by their parents. In Japan, educational attainment in Japan is largely determined by the family's economic and cultural capital (Okada, 2001; Kariya, 2012). In fact, most of the informants had a very supportive parents with financial affluence and liberal thoughts, and they were clearly benefitted from their existence both materially and mentally. Many of them mentioned that their parents usually do not interfere to their life, but are not hesitant to invest on their children's lives. For example, Yuta explained:

> My family does not give me such a thing as pressure. What kind of family are we…my parents never gave me any pressure and also never interfered with my life. But I think they provided me some information at some points of my life. For example, like, "hey, here is an interesting book", or "do you know this interesting person?" […] But they never interfere with my decision making. (Yuta, 06.02.2023)

Mina also told me:

> They do not interfere with my life. […] I say "what we have seen in the life is very different, our generation is different, so our ways of thinking will be very different [to my parents]. I listen to their opinions, but I don't follow them. (Mina, 09.02.2023)

Their attitude toward their children's decision of studying abroad seemed also very supportive, for example, as Haruka and Nanami's parents.

> My mother and sister were like "that's a good idea!", especially my mother. My father was worrying about me for going abroad for a year...I mean, there was the whole Ukraine thing going on. My grandparents were a little sad, but they all supported me (Haruka, 15.02.2023).

> They were just like "go if you want." […] I did not persuade my parents [to send me abroad]. My parents wanted me to get some scholarship, if possible. But my university grants students some money anyway…(Nanami, 02.02.2023).

Although they are stressed from relentless challenges of being an elite in Japanese society, they are protected by their parents. Even though their parents' intention might be just investing both material and non-material recourses for their personal development and future, they are at the same time "protecting" their child from the harsh and unequal reality in the current Japanese society.

Another point to mention is their relationship with gender issues in Japan. In Japan, gender discrimination is highly evident in male-dominated corporate world (Mizra, 2022: North, 2012: Ueno, 2021), researchers point out that there is a negative relationship between high spec background and femininity in Japanese corporate culture (Nemoto, 2016: Steel, 2019). Even in such circumstance, Mina expressed her dream of becoming a *barikyari* (バリキャリ, "career women" who especially strive to devote her life in working).

> My ideal is to become a *barikyari* who leave work on time […] I don't want to lose to men in the workplace, well, I don't like that kind of atmosphere [that sacrifice the private life] … I might get paranoid by the gender-related course I took in the previous semester […] I also don't like the pressure that it's better for female students to wear skirts, so I always wear pants-style suit. I just…I just don't like it. […] When I was in Japan, I could not detect that kind of pressure. I became more sensitive about that, but maybe men will say that I am overreacting (Mina 09.02.2023).

Her ideal future is to be competitive by achieving work-life balance, and she believes that it is a way to be superior to men. Dalton (2017) also argues that womenomics under the Abe administration is deepening the divide among Japanese women, creating two distinct groups: a privileged minority able to adapt to male-dominated work structures, and a much larger majority confined to precarious, low-paying 'non-regular' jobs that lack essential benefits.

In case of Mina, or other female informants who are striving to getting a regular job through *shukatsu* will be the latter more or less as long as they enter the male-dominated business work in Japan. In fact, some female students recognized having children will be a constraint for their life as an adult and self-realization in the future. Sakura told me:

> Well, how can I say, because I love children, I know that my lifestyle will be limited if I have children, and I think that there are many things that I should experience on my own before I have my own family. (Sakura, 22.02.2023)

Airi and Rei similarly mentioned:

> I am not desperate for getting married, or to have children, but maybe I would like to get married. I might be greedy, but I want to cherish my own life, and I also want to travel, and I don't have a specific age for this, but if I were to say a normal life, a very normal life, I don't think children would come into it, freewheeling. I don't want to be tied down (Airi, 01.03.2023).

> I don’t really want to get married, I don’t know, it might change when I turn 30, but at least for now, I think it’s okay to be a single for my entire life. I don’t know why everyone want to get married (laugh). (Rei, 10.02.2023)

Especially Sakura was already thinking about her life plan seriously.

> I am sceptical about staying with the same company that I graduated from for a long time, so I am also not sure if the company will support me when I get married or have children, to be honest. My family tells me that I should look at the company's maternity and childcare leave system, and that I should definitely look at how easy it will be for women to work there, and I agree with them, but I haven't fully thought about the maternity and childcare leave system. For now, I just have the feeling that it would be nice to have such benefits in my life as a single person, or that I would enjoy working if the company supported me in this way, but that's about all I can say […] I cannot really think about the future because it makes me nervous, so I just believe that everything will be alight and do what I can do right now (Sakura, 22.02.2023).

She also mentioned that “society's supportive environment” (Sakura, 22.02.2023) is what she desire for the place where she lives in , and considers Finland has a better environment for family life compare to Japan.

> After I actually came to *Hokuou*, where I had always wanted to come, I got to think that the quality of life in *Hokuou* is far better than in Japan if I had a family there. *Hokuou* is far superior in terms of the environment for raising children and working. I would like to live in a country with such a welfare system when I have a family... It's a small thing, but it's also about the time when people leave the office. I think it's because the idea that family should be together in the evening is widely shared. I heard they don't get any e-mails from anyone during the weekend. I don't think that's a bad thing. I started think that it is strange that Japanese companies respond to e-mails at any time of the day, and I have come to wish that I could come back to a society that respect the quality of life. (Sakura, 22.02.2023)

Although most of them are only vaguely imagining their future when it comes to the vision about family and children, they are surely “sensing” the difficulty to live as a woman with family and children in Japanese society especially while they are working for a regular

position at a company. However, I noticed that it is still challenging for them to express or realize the serious gender inequality existing in Japan. I argue that this is partly because they are again "protected" by their parents who do not hesitate to invest on their daughter's challenges and future.

To summarize this chapter, I investigated Japanese young lives as an elite by analysing their constant aspiration and idealization of Finnish society and Finnish way of living. As a result, I found out that they have been under the pressure not to deviate from "the only right way" of obtaining a decent life in Japan. They emphasized their disgust toward the poor quality of life in Japan and often mentioned that life in Finland is more affluent and fulfilling. However, their life back in Japan is not miserable if I consider their privileged social position as a highly educated youth with a strong support from their family. Although Japanese society after the 3.11 Fukushima triple disaster and following political disruption, and the pandemic have facing to economic stagnation and increasing precariousness (Mizra, 2022: Ueno, 2021), they are segregated and protected from the outcome of such sociopolitical, or economic situation.

As a result, their sociological imagination---an ability to connect their "private" in the "public" is less likely to be cultivated among them as I will discuss in the next chapter.

6 Discussion

In the previous chapter, I analyzed the empirical data and described how students idealize the perceived Finland/*Hokuou* compared to the stressful elite life in Japan. While many of them enjoy the environment without the pressure they were still striving to fitting into the mold of an ideal youth in Japan. In this chapter, I will extend the discussion to what is implied but not explicitly mentioned during the interview—politics. Kitamura (2013) argues that researchers should interpret not only what has been said in the interview, but also what has been said or what could not be said by the informants. Throughout the interview, students talked about their lives and experiences in Japan and Finland. However their ideas and self-reflections rarely went beyond the scope of their private everyday life even though I tried many times to approach their political attitude from different angles by different questions. In my informants' case, the time in a foreign country cannot be analyzed as the liminality---a period of transformation into a new being (Turner, 1969).Rather, their oversea experience only enhanced their positions as elite Japanese youth.

Here I bring up the word politics or political to indicate not only a direct sense of politics such as political ideology or election, but also to describe how they recognize themselves as a political and historical being in the society they live in. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to discuss about the political attitude of elite Japanese youth from the perspective of sociological imagination.

6.1 **Cannot be political, or no need to be political?**

My data indicates that there are some reasons behind their apolitical attitude. First, their everyday life as an elite youth have been always extremely busy to keep eyes on public matters around them. As the data from the interviews with shows, elite students' minds are always occupied with what they have to do to stay on the right path in Japanese society. They have so many things to deal with in front of them in addition to study at school such as private education, club activities, part-time jobs, and *shukatsu*-related activities. Gonon (2018) argues that young people in Japan are likely to show interest in the corporate world and their working life in the future, and not in politics or public matters. In addition, the neoliberal ideology created the situation that one should be responsible for attaining a happy life by self-governance (Holthus & Manzenreiter, 2015). During the interviews, I found out that this tendency continues even they are physically abroad and witnessing a different, or eye-opening logic behind people's everyday life in Finland. Also, they tended to attribute the perceived Finnish/*Hokuou* way of living to people's mindset in almost essentialist way, and did not expand their imagination to socio-political or economical structure under which people are living in.

Kato (2010) argues that in Japanese society, youth are raised up with a belief that being an adult means getting a job and becoming a *shakaijin*---a member of Japanese corporate family while many Western societies associate an adult with the concept of citizenship that is "entering into a contractual or reciprocal relationship with the state (p.53)." In these societies, becoming an adult signifies those who have duties toward the state and holding rights to obtain benefit from the state (Kato, 2010). Gonon (2018) also argues that Japanese society expects corporations to give "freshly" employed youth the opportunity to exercise their ideas

on socio-political and economic issues (Gonon, 2018). If so, Japanese education is aiming at "producing" competitive potential workers for the Japanese corporate world, and young people face with the society and the world through a filter that is created by the neoliberal value for profit making than public benefit. Thus, even those who are on the elite track are not equipped with enough vocabulary to bridge their private life, or what they experienced during the exchange study in a broader context. From the interviews, I discovered that informants are surely bearing with the enormous stress and questions toward Japanese society and lifestyle, it is challenging for them to have a belief of "personal is political." It is of course possible that students recognize that talking about politics and their political idea is a taboo even though they have some thoughts in their mind. However, even if this is a case, it delivers an important political implication for Japanese society because collective coming-together that is necessary for political and social change are less likely to be formed among the people (Allison, 2012).

Another attributing fact is that their lives are segregated from or protected from being exposed to the inequal and unfair world out there. Because of their privileged social position, they have rarely faced an unfair situation that they need to insist for their rights in the society. Kariya (2012) insists that it is fact that social class disparities in scholastic achievement and educational attainment are persistent in Japan today, such disparities are hard to see from people's sight. Teichler (1992) also argues that the Japanese education system is advantageous for those who are privileged to start with the competition for a good life. The informants in this research are not necessarily the most privileged layer of Japanese society, but at least they are financially or culturally capable of university education and even studying abroad. Many of their parents are financially and mentally supportive for their children's education and do not bind them with a conventional family or gender role. In addition, they have been surrounded by a cohort with similar background in both Japan and Finland. In such

situation, it is reasonable that they hardly imagine the precarious lives that even tomorrow is uncertain (Allison, 2015). The fact that students only find a rosy aspect of Finnish society shows that bubble that surrounds them is very thick and keep them away from realizing that what there are a number of social layers.

Here I emphasise that I am not criticizing them for the lack of sociological imagination or political indifference: rather, I argue that the problem is the corporate-centred structure of Japanese society that confines elite's attention within the personal success in life rather than the society they are living in. It is not possible to detect the exact reason that keep them away from politics from the qualitative data I gained. However, I insist that being politically indifference is a highly political attitude in a sense that the authority is not bothered by them thanks to the elite youth's silence.

6.2 Political implication for Japan

Norris (2002) defines political participation as "any dimensions of activity that either designed directly to influence government agencies and the policy process, or indirectly to impact civil society, or which attempt to alter systematic patterns of social behavior." Based on this definition, Liu (2011) adds youth generation's employment of the internet and online space for political purposes should be considered when discussing about political participation today. Edmunds and Turner (2005, p.572) also argues that the world is now witnessing "the formation of the second global generation, the Internet generation, which both shares its information and ideas across borders and acts with global impact." Allison (2012, p.349) asserts "precarity is insecurity in life: material, existential, social. But, as life itself becomes a central concern, precarity can also be the conditions for social change, new forms

of collective coming-together, even political revolution." Looking around the world, youth-led political activism and social movements have been happening everywhere in the recent years. For example, Black Lives Matter protest in the United States (Hemenway, 2020), European countries' climate activism (Zamponi et al., 2022), Hongkong's Umbrella Movement for protecting democracy in 2014 and 2019 (Griffiths, 2019), or South Korea's candlelight movement in 2016 that even resulted in president's resignation (Hasunuma& Shin, 2019)---the youth around the world are actively leading the political and social movements (Carnegie, 2022). During the exchange period, many of the informants actually participated, or at least observed student-led demonstrations and gatherings in Finland motivated by curiosity and surprise.

In comparison to the world trend of youth engagement in political and social movements, Japanese young generation's silence seems peculiar. Of course, it is pointed out that only a minority of young people are participating in direct/indirect political actions (Abrahams& Brooks, 2018: Pilkington& Pollock, 2015). However, in the era of the internet, information circulates beyond the borders everyday by news media~~s~~ and individual posts on SNSs, and young people can easily access or are automatically exposed to the world trend no matter where they are.

The most vivid memory of youth-led activism in Japan might be SEALDs' anti-nuclear protest under the Abe second administration around 2015 (Gonon, 2018). O'Day (2015, p.7) recognized their movement positively in the context of Japanese politics, saying they were "essentially showing other students that it is acceptable to seriously engage political ideas, without become radical, or having to completely devote themselves to the cause." Falch and Hammond (2020, p.445) also remarks while "Japanese higher education seemingly failed to accommodate their need for political discourse, SEALDs embodied the 'do-it-yourself' spirit

to create their political agency." Gonon (2018) argues that the 3.11 Fukushima triple disaster invited the youth into the public sphere and triggered the birth of a politicized generation.

However, I argue that their activities failed in provoking a long-lasting youth's attention and participation in the public sphere. Researchers argue that one of the underlying reasons for university students' ignorance or hesitance in political participation is that in Japan, university life has "often been regarded as a time for 'responsibility-free' living before entering the workforce" and "politics has often been seen as 'uncool' and 'unwelcoming' (Falch& Hammond, 2020, p.445)." In Japanese, there is a belief that corporations tend to avoid hiring university graduates who participate in political activism, and this perception acts as a significant deterrent for students contemplating involvement in grassroots movements for change (Okunuki 2015; McCurry 2015). As discussed in the previous chapters, it is reasonable that Japanese corporations tend to avoid hiring students with their clear political views because they are looking for students that can harmonize with the corporate culture as a member of the corporate "family."

Of course, direct participation to political activism and social movements are not the only way to be responsible in the public sphere as a member of society. However, considering the current Japanese society with piling up social problems under the neoliberal, right-leaning LDP politics, political indifference and a lack of imagination toward other people's lives among the highly educated youth only function as an acceptance of the inequality and precariousness in Japanese society.

7 Conclusion

In this thesis, I examined Japanese young elites' sociological imagination from a generational point of view that "provides a useful frame within which to recognize age as a sociological variable, the meaning of which is given through social, economic, and political relations (Andres and Wyn 2010, p. 33)."

I conducted the in-person semi-structured interviews with eight Japanese exchange students in Finland. The qualitative data I acquired from the interviews indicated that students perceive Finland/Hokuou as the place of true affluence and quality of life. In such an environment, students often expressed their realization that their lives as highly educated youth are extremely busy, and they cannot focus on "what they really want to do." In contrast, in Finland, many of them mentioned that they appreciated the time for self-reflection or being free from the gaze of others who do not allow them to think outside the box.

However, at the same time, students' minds were bonded by the pressure or obsession for catching up with the ideal life course that many people in Japan believe is successful, especially by going through *shukatsu*, one's single way to reach adulthood (Kato, 2010). Even if they are physically in Finland and witnessing totally different "orbits of lives (Mills, 1959, p.3)", it is hardly imaginable for them to find an alternative way other than the process of stressful shukatsu to get a permanent position at Japanese companies.

Departing from the data analysis, I further expanded the discussion to Japanese young elites' political ignorance and its implications for Japanese society. Although youth around the world have started to engage in political demonstrations and social movements in a social context that is different from the older generations by utilizing the internet as a communication and

mobilization tool (Liu, 2011), Japanese elite youth are indifferent, or less likely to equip with the imagination and vocabulary to recognize themselves as a political being. They sense that Japan and Finland or people's lives in each society are somehow different and their lives in Japan, they understand the differences in an essentialist way, rather than considering about socio-political, or economic background of each society.

I argued this is because they no need to be political due to their privileged social position in Japan or they cannot be political because their lives as elite students in Japan are extremely busy, and their minds have been occupied with relentless challenges such as private education, entrance exam(s), internships, and job-hunting activities so that they will not be "deficit" being. I also pointed out that my informants are segregated or protected from being exposed to the unfairness and precariousness of current Japanese society mostly thanks to their privileged and supportive family background. This segregation from the precariousness spreading all over Japan with many social layers restricts young elites' ability to understand their private problems in the broader socio-political context. In addition, my data indicated that it is very difficult to cultivate sociological imagination even though they had an opportunity to live in a different socio-economic environment from Japan and witness people's different ways of living.

One of the key elements that shaped this research is the researcher's positionality. My "insiderness" helped in understand students' stress and pressure to relentless challenges from private education, entrance exams, extremely busy university life, and, especially, the hardship of shukatsu. The fact that I was also an international student studying in Finland of a similar age to my informants helped me approach and talk to the exchange students just as a friend. Also, I was from a middle-class family as most of the informants were At the same time, I was an outsider. I was too old to be a student without a permanent position in a Japanese company. I already decided not to go through or give up the typical procedure of

shukatsu because it was too painful for me. Also, I recognize myself as a student with constant interest and opinions in political and social issues happening both in Japan and other countries. Throughout the thesis project, this researcher's positionality of being an insider and outsider at the same time helped me understand the students' feelings, ideas, and backgrounds that have shaped them in an analytical way.

Another point that directed this research was the complexity of the field. Although my initial attempt was to approach elite female students in Japan to investigate the function of femininity during the student-to-work transition. However, by facing the challenges in informants' recruitment and students' hesitance in sharing their actual experience in shukatsu-related activities, exchange students in Finland became the targeted group and the political attitude of the elite youth became the main topic of this paper. The trial and error in the data collection process already provided me with insights into elites' lives in Japan and helped me clarify the focal point of this paper.

This research was able to provide several contributions to the academic knowledge of the youth. First, I added knowledge about the life and political attitudes of highly-educated youth in Japan to the field of youth study. As Toivonen and Imoto (2012) argue, Japanese youth study has been focused on those who have "failed" to stick to the ideal life path, and those who are smoothly "on track" have not attracted both academic and public interest. However, I argue that my focus on highly educated youth who are less likely to face the insecurity of life is valuable because as long as they are segregated from the socio-political issues in precarious Japan, Japanese society will continue to be the place where a small number of winners takes all.

Second, a generational approach of my research demonstrated that generational discourse is not just oversimplified labelling to a specific age group of people, but it is an approach to

understanding their experiences and lives in association with a larger socio-political or economic background in a specific location. In this research, the generational "unit" was an age group of

Finally, I demonstrated that Mills' theory of sociological imagination which was introduced more than a half century ago still provides a valuable framework to investigate people's relationships with political and social issues that are piling up all over the world. I believe that the theory that he developed in the time of significant social and political change in the 1950s United States that called for bringing private matters into the sphere of the public needs to stand in the spotlight once again today. Especially, I argue that the cultivation of sociological imagination among the youth is extremely important in because they are the generation that is inevitably required to deal with the outcome of unstable international political balance, demographic changes, digitalization, or accelerating climate changes and disasters. In such a situation, the current young generation needs to "'rethink' or 'think differently' on every basic issue of their lives – their relationships to study, to work, to money, to partnership, to sexuality, to consumption, to family, etc (Galan&Heinrich, 2018, p.224)."

In the context of Japan, I insist that the concept of adulthood must be reconsidered to cultivate the sociological imagination widely among the public because more and more people are suffering from the insecurity of everyday life (Allison, 2015), while LDP maintains its political hegemony despite their neoliberal ideology that underestimates or even ignore the lives of vulnerable people and minorities.

Becoming an adult or *shakaijin* in Japan is almost equal to being financially independent by becoming a member of a Japanese corporate family. Even though fewer and fewer people can actually embody such an ideal adult in Japan today (Allison, 2012), the ideal is still strongly shared among highly educated youth. However, as Kato (2010) suggests, it is important to

cultivate a sense of citizenship that recognizes own duty to the society and rights that one owes to the state or the idea that an adult is someone society recognizes as being responsible – for themselves, for their family, and for others (Galan, 2018, p,46).” Eventually, the youth elite must cultivate the consensus that life is not just a private affair, it is also a public matter that is entailed by the broader socio-political and historical context.

References

Abrahams, J., & Brooks, R. (2019). Higher education students as political actors: evidence from England and Ireland. Journal of Youth Studies, 22(1), 108–123.

Allison, A. (2012). Ordinary Refugees: Social Precarity and Soul in 21st Century Japan. Anthropological Quarterly, 85(2), 345–370.

Allison, A. (2013). Precarious Japan. Durham: Duke University Press.

Allison, A. (2015). Precarity and Hope: Social Connectedness in Postcapitalist Japan. In Japan (Vol. 1, pp. 36–57). New York, USA: NYU Press.

Anderson, E. R. (2021). Positionality, Privilege, and Possibility: The Ethnographer "at Home" as an Uncomfortable Insider. Anthropology and Humanism, 46(2), 212–225.

11–33). Routledge.

Andres, L., & Wyn, J. (2010). The making of a generation : the children of the 1970s in adulthood. Toronto, [Canada] ;: University of Toronto Press.

Aronsson, A. S. (2014). Career Women in Contemporary Japan: Pursuing Identities, Fashioning Lives. Taylor and Francis.

Bamfield, L., & Horton, T. (2009). Understanding attitudes to tackling economic inequality. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Benedicto, J. (2013). The political cultures of young people: an uncertain and unstable combinatorial logic. Journal of Youth Studies, 16(6), 712–729.

Benson, M. & O'Reilly, K.,(2009). Lifestyle Migration: Escaping to the Good Life? In Lifestyle Migration (pp. 11–24). Routledge.

Berger, R. (2015). Now I see it, now I don't: researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research. Qualitative Research : QR, 15(2), 219–234.

11–33). Routledge.

BLUMENTHAL, T. (1992). JAPAN JUKEN INDUSTRY. Asian Survey, 32(5), 448–460.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77–101.

Breaden, J. (2014). Global attributes or local literacy? International students in Japan's graduate employment system. Japan Forum (Oxford, England), 26(4), 417–440.

Brinton, M. C. (2010). Lost in Transition: Youth, Work, and Instability in Postindustrial Japan (pp. xxi–xxi). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Carnegie, M. (2022, August 7). Gen Z: How young people are changing activism. *BBC Worklife*. Retrieved from https://www.bbc.com

Chiavacci, D., & Obinger, J. (2018). Towards a new protest cycle in contemporary Japan?: The resurgence of social movements and confrontational political activism in historical perspective. In Social Movements and Political Activism in Contemporary Japan: Re-Emerging from Invisibility (pp. 1–24).

Collins, P.,& Gallinat, A. (2010). The ethnographic self as resource writing memory and experience into ethnography. New York: Berghahn Books.

Costa-Lopes, R., Dovidio, J. F., Pereira, C. R., & Jost, J. T. (2013). Social psychological perspectives on the legitimation of social inequality: Past, present and future. European Journal of Social Psychology, 43(4), 229–237.

Dalton, E. (2017). Womenomics, "Equality" and Abe's Neo-liberal Strategy to Make Japanese Women Shine. Social Science Japan Journal, 20(1), 95–105.

Dasgupta. R. (2013). Re-reading the salaryman in Japan: crafting masculinities. Routledge.

DUNHAM, C. C. (1998). GENERATION UNITS AND THE LIFE COURSE: A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON YOUTH AND THE ANTI-WAR MOVEMENT. *Journal of Political & Military Sociology*, *26*(2), 137–155.

Edmiston, D. (2018). Welfare, inequality and social citizenship : deprivation and affluence in austerity Britain. Bristol: Policy Press.

Edmunds, J., & Turner, B. S. (2005). Global generations: social change in the twentieth century. The British Journal of Sociology, 56(4), 559–577.

Emerson, Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (2011). Writing ethnographic fieldnotes (Second edition.). The University of Chicago Press.

Ergun, A., & Erdemir, A. (2010). Negotiating Insider and Outsider Identities in the Field: "Insider" in a Foreign Land; "Outsider" in One's Own Land. Field Methods, 22(1), 16–38.

Falch, D., & Hammond, C. D. (2020). Social activism and "spaces of autonomy" in the context of Japan: an analysis of the student movement known as SEALDs. Globalisation, Societies and Education, 18(4), 435–448.

Fong, E., & Tsutsui, J. (2015). The high cost of missing a boat under the Japanese recruitment practices: Timing of regular and non-regular employment after school completion in Japan. Research in Social Stratification and Mobility, 42(42), 1–10.

Fraser, A., & Hagedorn, J. M. (2018). Gangs and a global sociological imagination. Theoretical Criminology, 22(1), 42–62.

Furlong, A., & Cartmel, F. (2006). Young People and Social Change (2nd ed.). Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Education.

Furlong, A. (2008). The Japanese hikikomori phenomenon: acute social withdrawal among young people. The Sociological Review (Keele), 56(2), 309–325.

Gabriel, M. (2006). Youth Migration and Social Advancement: How Young People Manage Emerging Differences between Themselves and their Hometown. Journal of Youth Studies, 9(1), 33–46.

Galan, C. (2018). From youth to non-adulthood in Japan: The role of education. In Being Young in Super-Aging Japan (1st ed., pp. 32–50). Routledge.

Galan, C., & Heinrich, P. (2018). Social rejuvenation and change: The resilient generation of the Heisei period. In Being Young in Super-Aging Japan (1st ed., pp. 217–227). Routledge.

Giustini, D. (2021). “I thought I could get away from gender discrimination”: linguistic instrumentalism and self-actualisation of female interpreters in temporary employment in Japan. *Japan Forum* (Oxford, England), 33(4), 522–552

Goldfarb, K. E. (2016). “Self-Responsibility” and the Politics of Chance: Theorizing the Experience of Japanese Child Welfare. Japanese Studies, 36(2), 173–189.

Goldstein-Gidoni, O. (2019). The Japanese Corporate Family: The Marital Gender Contract Facing New Challenges. Journal of Family Issues, 40(7), 835–864.

Gonon, A. (2018). The Fukushima event, or the birth of a politicized generation. In Being Young in Super-Aging Japan (1st ed., pp. 102–116). Routledge.

Griffiths, J. (2019, June). The return of Hong Kong’s umbrella movement. CNN. https://edition.cnn.com/2019/06/12/asia/hong-kong-umbrella-extradition-intl-hnk/index.html

Hasunuma, L., & Shin, K. (2019). MeToo in Japan and South Korea: #WeToo, #WithYou. Journal of Women, Politics & Policy, 40(1), 97–111.

Hemenway, J. (2020, September). YOUNG ACTIVISTS STAND UP FOR JUSTICE AT BLACK LIVES MATTER PROTESTS. Unicef USA. Retrieved November 7, 2023, from https://www.unicefusa.org/stories/young-activists-stand-justice-black-lives-matter-protests

Higuchi, N. (2021). Social movement studies in post-3.11 Japan: A sociological analysis. International Sociology, 36(2), 183–193.

Hironimus-Wendt, R. J., & Wallace, L. E. (2009). The Sociological Imagination and Social Responsibility. Teaching Sociology, 37(1), 76–88.

Holthus, B., & Manzenreiter, W. (2017). Introduction: Making sense of happiness in “unhappy Japan.” In Life Course, Happiness and Well-Being in Japan (pp. 1–28).

Hommerich, C. (2017). Anxious, stressed, and yet satisfied? The puzzle of subjective well-being among young adults in Japan. In Life Course, Happiness and Well-being in Japan (1st ed., pp. 72–94). Routledge.

Imai, J. (2018). Struggling men in emasculated life-courses: Non-regular employment among young men. In Being Young in Super-Aging Japan (1st ed., pp. 84–101). Routledge.

Imoto, Y., & Toivonen, T. (2012).Making sense of youth problems. In A Sociology of Japanese Youth. United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis Group.

Ipatti, L. (2019). AT THE ROOTS OF THE “FINLAND BOOM”: The Implementation of Finnish Image Policy in Japan in the 1960s. Scandinavian Journal of History, 44(1), 103–130.

Ishikawa, M. (2021, July 15). コロナが変える不合理なマナー　男女の違い浮きぼりに [COVID Changes Irrational Manners: Highlights Gender Differences]. Asahi. https://www.asahi.com/articles/ASP7F6250P6ZUPQJ00T.html

Izawa, S. (2022, September).「有名企業への就職に強い大学」トップ 200 校 [Top 200 universities for employment]. Toyo Keizai Online. Retrieved November 7, 2023, from https://toyokeizai.net/articles/-/615500

Johansson, T., & Herz, M. (2019). Youth Studies in Transition: Culture, Generation and New Learning Processes (1st ed. 2019., Vol. 1). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Kano, A. (2015). The Future of Gender in Japan: Work/Life Balance and Relations between the Sexes. In Japan (Vol. 1, pp. 87–109). New York, USA: NYU Press.

Kato, E. (2010). True Self, True Work: Gendered Searching for Self and Work among Japanese Migrants in Vancouver, Canada. Japanese Review of Cultural Anthropology, 11, 47– 66.

Kato, E. (2015). When a man flies overseas: corporate nationalism, gendered happiness and young Japanese male migrants in Canada and Australia. Asian Anthropology, 14(3), 220–234.

Kelly, P., Campbell, P., & Howie, L. (2019). Rethinking Young People’s Marginalisation: Beyond Neo-Liberal Futures? (1st ed.). Milton: Routledge.

Kingston, J. (2017, May 26). Under Abe, are we heading toward a beautiful Japan or an ugly future? The Japan Times. Retrieved from https://www.japantimes.co.jp

Kingston, J. (2022). Abe Leaves Behind a Toxic Legacy. Global Asia (East Asia Foundation), 17(3), 100–103.

Klien, S. (2015). Young urban migrants in the Japanese countryside between self-realization and slow life? The quest for subjective well-being and post-materialism. In Sustainability in Contemporary Rural Japan: Challenges and Opportunities (pp. 95–107).

Klien, S. (2019). Entrepreneurial selves, governmentality and lifestyle migrants in rural Japan. Asian Anthropology, 18(2), 75–90.

Klien, S. (2020). Urban Migrants in Rural Japan: Between Agency and Anomie in a Post-Growth Society. Champaign: State University of New York Press.

Klien, S. (2021). Japan's younger generations look for a new way of living. In Current history (1941) (Vol. 120, pp. 240–245). OAKLAND: Univ California Press.

Kushida, K. E. (2014). The Fukushima Nuclear Disaster and the Democratic Party of Japan: Leadership, Structures, and Information Challenges During the Crisis. Japanese Political Economy, 40(1), 29–68.

Liu, F. (2011). From Political Indifference to Vehement Nationalism: Chinese Young People Negotiating the Political Self in the Internet Age. In Urban Youth in China: Modernity, the Internet and the Self (pp. 171–189). United Kingdom: Routledge.

Livingstone, S., Bober, M., & Helsper, E. J. (2005). Active participation or just more information?: Young people's take-up of opportunities to act and interact on the Internet. Information, Communication & Society, 8(3), 287–314.

Mannheim, K. (1952). The Problem of Generations. In P. Kecskemeti (Ed.), Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge (pp. 276-320). London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Mathews, G. (2012). Seeking a career, finding a job: How young people enter and resist the Japanese world of work. In Japan's Changing Generations: Are Young People Creating a New Society? (pp. 121–136).

May. T. (2011). Social research: issues, methods and process (4th ed.). McGraw Hill.

McCurry, J. (2015). New Generation of JAPANESE Anti-war Protesters Challenge Abe. The Guardian. Accessed November 10, 2023. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/16/japanese-anti-war-protesters-challenge-shinzo-abe.

Mills, C. W. (1959). The sociological imagination. New York: Oxford U. P.

Mirza, V. (2022). Autonomy and responsibility: Women's life and career choices in urban Japan. Contemporary Japan (Berlin, Germany), ahead-of-print(ahead-of-print), 1–17.

Mishima, S. (2023). *Z 世代のアメリカ [Generation Z and the United States]*. NHK Books.

Mitsui, H. (2012). Moomintroll and Finland in Japan's social imaginary. Suomen Antropologi : Suomen Antropologisen Seuran Julkaisu = Antropologi i Finland : Antropologiska Sällskapet i Finland, 37(1), 5–21.

Mori, S. (2012). What happens when they come back: How Japanese young people with foreign university degrees experience the Japanese workplace. In Japan's Changing Generations: Are Young People Creating a New Society? (pp. 155–170).

Morris-Suzuki, T. (2013). The Re-Branding of Abe Nationalism: Global Perspectives on Japan. The Asia-Pacific Journal, 11(28).

Nagano, Y. (2018). 就職活動おける性的マイノリティ（LGBTQ）学生の支援---服装規範を中心に[Supporting Sexual Minority (LGBTQ) Students in Job Hunting: Focusing on Dress Codes]. *Kyariakyōikukenkyū* [*Career Education Research*], 36, 31–39.

Nagatomo, J. (2015). Migration as transnational leisure : the Japanese lifestyle migrants in Australia. Leiden, Netherlands: BRILL.

Nakahara, J. (2021). Deconstructing Abe Shinzo's "Take Back Japan" Nationalism. Japan Focus, 19(24).

Narayan, K. (1993). How Native Is a "Native" Anthropologist? American Anthropologist, 95(3), 671–686.

Nemoto, K. (2016). Too few women at the top : the persistence of inequality in Japan. Ithaca: ILR Press, an imprint of Cornell University Press.

Nomura, K. (2017). Methods and Methodology in Social Research. Nagoya University Publication.

North, S. (2012). The Work-Family Dilemmas of Japan's Salarymen. In Men, Wage Work and Family (pp. 27–43). United Kingdom: Routledge.

North, S., & Morioka, R. (2016). Hope found in lives lost: karoshi and the pursuit of worker rights in Japan. Contemporary Japan (Berlin, Germany), 28(1), 59–80.

O'Day, R., Slater, D. H., & Uno, S. (2018). Mass media representations of youth social movements in Japan. In Social Movements and Political Activism in Contemporary Japan: Re-Emerging from Invisibility (pp. 177–197).

OECD (2022), Education at a Glance 2022: OECD Indicators, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/3197152b-en.

Okada, A. (2001). Japan as a Prototype of the "Degreeocracy" Society? Educational Review (Birmingham), 53(3), 303–312.

Okunuki, H. 2015. "Should SEALDs Student Activists Worry about Not Getting Hired?" The Japan Times. Accessed October 25, 2023. Retrieved from https://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2015/08/30/issues/sealds-student-activists-worry-not-getting-hired/#.W5Qp4JNKiRs.

Osawa, M., & Kingston, J. (2015). Risk and Consequences: The Changing Japanese Employment Paradigm. In Japan (Vol. 1, pp. 58–86). New York, USA: NYU Press.

Palz, M. (2021). Okinawan Coral Politics, Henoko Base Construction and a Japanese Political Strategy of Ignorance. Japan Focus, 19(24).

Pillow, W. (2003). Confession, catharsis, or cure? Rethinking the uses of reflexivity as methodological power in qualitative research. International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 16(2), 175–196.

Pilkington, H., & Pollock, G. (2015). “Politics are bollocks”: youth, politics and activism in contemporary Europe. The Sociological Review (Keele), 63(S2), 1–35.

Roberson, J.E. (1995). Becoming Shakaijin: Working-Class Reproduction in Japan. Ethnology, 34(4), 293–313.

Sato, T., & Hodge, S. R. (2015). Japanese exchange students’ academic and social struggles at an American university. Journal of International Students, 5(3), 208–227.

Senoo, A. (2023). 就活の社会学: 大学生と「やりたいこと」[Sociology of *Shukatsu*: University Students and “What I want to do”]. Koyoshobo.

Shibusawa, T., Ishii, C., Nakamura, S., Tamura, T., & Watanabe, T. (2021). The COVID‐19 Pandemic and Families in Japan. Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy, 42(1), 58‐69.

Shire, K.A. (1999). Socialization and Work in Japan: The Meaning of Adulthood of Men and Women in a Business Context. International Journal of Japanese Sociology : IJJS, 8(1), 77–92.

Smith, M. D., & Samuell, C. (2022). Neoliberalism and the social imaginary: interpreting study abroad policy in Japanese higher education. Pedagogy, Culture & Society, ahead-of-print(ahead-of-print), 1–19.

Soler-i-Martí, R., & Ferrer-Fons, M. (2015). Youth participation in context: the impact of youth transition regimes on political action strategies in Europe. The Sociological Review (Keele), 63(S2), 92–117.

Steel, G. (2019). Beyond the Gender Gap in Japan (Vol. 85). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Takahashi, K. (2022). COVID‐19 Pandemic and Non‐standard Employees in Japan. Japanese Journal of Sociology, 31(1), 23‐41.

Tamaki, T. (2019). Repackaging national identity: Cool Japan and the resilience of Japanese identity narratives. Asian Journal of Political Science, 27(1), 108–126.

Tanaka, T., & Okamoto, S. (2021). Increase in suicide following an initial decline during the COVID-19 pandemic in Japan. Nature Human Behaviour, 5(2), 229–238.

Takeda, H. (2008). Structural Reform of the Family and the Neoliberalisation of Everyday Life in Japan. New Political Economy, 13(2), 153–172.

Turner, V. (1969) Liminality and Communitas. In: The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti Structure, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 41-49.

Ueno, C. (2021). Why do Japanese women suffer from the low status?: The impact of neo-liberalist reform on gender. Japanese Political Economy, 47(1), 9–26.

Valaskivi, K. (2013). A brand new future? Cool Japan and the social imaginary of the branded nation. Japan Forum (Oxford, England), 25(4), 485–504.

Woodman, D., & Wyn, J. (2014). Youth and Generation: Rethinking Change and Inequality in the Lives of Young People. London: SAGE Publications, Limited.

Yamaguchi, T. (2017). The Mainstreaming of Feminism and the Politics of Backlash in Twenty-First-Century Japan. In Rethinking Japanese Feminisms. University of Hawai'i Press.

Yoder, R. S. (2011). Introduction: power, inequality and deviance in Japan. In Deviance and Inequality in Japan (pp. 1–18). Policy Press.

Yoshitake, N. (2003). 日本人は北欧から何を学んだか: 日本-北欧政治関係史 [What did Japanese learn from the Nordics?-Japan-Nordic Political History]. Tōkyō: Shinhyōron.

Zamponi, L., Baukloh, A. C., Bertuzzi, N., Chironi, D., della Porta, D., & Portos, M. (2022). (Water) bottles and (street) barricades: the politicisation of lifestyle-centred action in youth climate strike participation. Journal of Youth Studies, 25(6), 854–875.

About Tobitate! Study Abroad initiative. (2023). MEXT.https://tobitate-mext.jasso.go.jp/about/english.html

COVID-19 pandemic drastically changing job hunting for university students in Japan. (2021, March 7). The Mainichi. https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20210305/p2a/00m/0bu/001000c

Editorial: Japan's parties must face young people's worries to stop slide into voter apathy. (2021, October 19). The Mainichi. Retrieved from https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20211019/p2a/00m/0op/025000c.

Generation Z: Who are they and what do they want? (2018, August 21). Retrieved from https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p06j1j3c.

Pandemic survey finds students in college cut off, alone, depressed | The Asahi Shimbun Asia & Japan Watch. (2021.). The Asahi Shimbun. https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/14417200

Poll: Distrust in politics strong among young, neutral voters | The Asahi Shimbun Asia & Japan Watch. (2023, April). The Asahi Shimbun. Retrieved from https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/14897731

The University of Tokyo 2019 Matriculation Ceremony Congratulatory address by Chizuko Ueno. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://wan.or.jp/article/show/8348#gsc.tab=0.

This is how Japanese youth view climate change today. (2023, March 10). World Economic Forum. https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/11/japan-youth-climate-change/

What is Gen Z? (2023, March 20). Retrieved from https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/mckinsey-explainers/what-is-gen-z.

稼得能力の回復を目指すローカル・アベノミクス [Local Abenomics for Recovering Earning Capacity]. (2016). Cabinet Office of Japan. Retrieved November 1, 2023, from https://www5.cao.go.jp/j-j/cr/cr16/chr16_02-01.html.

大学入学者数等の推移 [Trend in University Enrolments]. (2020, November). MEXT. https://www.mext.go.jp/content/20201126-mxt_daigakuc02-000011142_9.pdf

データでみる日本の留学 [Statistic data of Japanese oversea study]. (2022). Tobitate Ryugaku Japan. Retrieved September 9, 2023, from https://tobitate-mext.jasso.go.jp/about/case/.

東日本大震災から１２年 [12 years after the Great East Japan Earthquake] (2023, March). NHK. Retrieved October 6, 2023, from https://www3.nhk.or.jp/news/html/20230310/k10014004491000.html.

コロナ下の就活の関門ウェブ面接　表情・声はオーバーに [*Shukatsu* under the pandemic; over expressing face and voice]. (2020, May). *Nikkei*. Retrieved October 6, 2023, from https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXMZO59501750T20C20A5X98000/.

マナビジョン- Benesse の大学・短期大学・専門学校の受験、進学情報. (n.d.). https://manabi.benesse.ne.jp/

Appendices

Appendix 1 Information Sheet

調査参加にあたっての留意事項

研究者:

松井日奈子（まついひなこ）トゥルク大学東アジア研究所修士２年

研究題目:

（仮）日本のジェンダー規範を見つめ直す：在フィンランド日本人交換留学生の国際体験と内省から

研究概要:

- 概要: この研究は、フィンランドの大学で勉強する日本人交換留学生を対象とした調査から、高学歴学生の国際移動および留学体験を通した内省と母国に向ける眼差しの変化を、特に「ジェンダー規範」に注目し分析することを目的としています。
- 参加者: データは個人インタビューによって収集されます。インタビュー対象者は、フィンランドに滞在する交換留学生とします。
- データ使用:研究成果は、論文完成後トゥルク大学の UTUPub データベース（https://www.utupub.fi）において、研究者氏名の下で論文またはその要旨が掲載され、適宜公表されます。

参加要件:

- 任意性:希望しない限りこの研究に参加する必要はなく、気が変わった場合は理由を言わずに調査への参加を辞退することができます。もし参加者が辞退した場合、取得したデータは論文執筆に使用されず、速やかに破棄されます。
- 協力内容:調査参加者は個人インタビューへの参加が求められ、参加者が同意した場合には依頼者は音声の録音をします。
- 期間:インタビューは対面で行われ（特別な事情がある場合はオンライン）、2022 年 11 月から 12 月の間に一回１時間のインタビューが２回行われます。また、追加のデータ収集が必要になった場合、追加のインタビューの依頼がある可能性があります。
- リスク:インタビューから得たデータは、第三者から個人の特定がされないように適宜必要な加工をした上で使用します。研究者は参加者の身元特定を防ぐため最善の努力をしますが、完全な匿名性の保証をすることはできません。

守秘義務:

- 個人情報およびデータは研究者と研究者の論文指導者のみがアクセスできます。研究者はインタビューで知り得た内容を第三者に口外することはありません。また、個人の特定につながる名前や組織名などは偽名で表記されます。

データ保持

- 場所: 参加者の個人情報及びデータは、大学より提供されているデータストレージ（Seafile）に保管されます。研究者個人のストレージはパスワードで保護されており、部外者や第三者からのアクセスは遮断されます。また、紛失の恐れのある外付けメモリー媒体は使用しません。
- 期間: 研究者は、参加者が同意した場合、修士論文完成後も、インタビューで得たデータを保持します。その場合、個人情報や個人の特定につながる情報は削除され、匿名性が確保された状態でデータが保存されます。参加者がデータ破棄を望む場合、指定された期間内にデータを破棄します。
- データの再使用:研究者は、本調査で得たデータを将来再度使用する場合は、必ず参加者の同意を得ます。

問い合わせ:

- 調査について問い合わせや相談がある場合は、himats@utu.fi まで連絡してください。

Appendix 2 Informed Consent Form

インタビュー調査についての同意書

研究題目（仮）　日本のジェンダー規範を見つめ直す：在フィンランド日本人交換留学生の国際体験と内省から

トゥルク大学東アジア研究所修士２年　松井日奈子　himats@utu.fi

私は、別紙の調査依頼説明書の内容を理解しましたので、調査に回答者として参加する際、以下のことに同意します。

私は、調査への参加が完全に任意によるものであり、いかなる理由なくいつでも参加を中断できることを理解しました。　はい　いいえ

私はインタビュー時の録音に同意します。　はい　いいえ

私は、研究成果物において、以下のように身分が記載されることに同意します。

仮名　はい　いいえ

_____	_____	_____
参加者氏名	日付	署名
_____	_____	_____
依頼者氏名	日付	署名

Appendix 3 List of Questions for 1st interviews

1. 現時点でフィンランドに来てどのくらい経ちましたか？

How long have you been living here?

2. 交換留学に行こうと思った契機を教えてください。

What made you decide to go on an exchange program?

3. 留学することに対して積極的になる要因はありましたか。

Were there any factors that positively affect your decision to study abroad?

4. 留学することに対して消極的になる要因はありましたか。心配事・悩み

Were there any factors that negatively affect your decision to study abroad?

5. フィンランドに来る以前に海外に行ったり住んだりした経験はありますか？

Have you been or lived abroad before coming to Finland?

6. なぜその専攻を志したのですか？

Why did you choose the major?

7. 留学先としてフィンランドを選んだ理由はなんですか？

What were the reasons why you chose Finland as your study destination?

8. . 専攻分野とフィンランドに何か関連はありますか？

Is there any connection between your major field and Finland?

9. . 専攻分野に関して、留学生活を通して何か新しい視点を得ましたか？

Have you gained any new perspectives on your major after coming to Finland?

10. 留学生活で最も印象的だった経験を教えてください。

What is the most impressive experience in Finland?

11. 留学を通して自分の視野が広がったと思いますか。

Do you think study abroad experience has broadened your mind?

12. 留学に来る前にフィンランドに対するイメージはありましたか？

Did you have any images of Finland before coming here?

13. Yes そのイメージは実際にフィンランドで勉強して変わりましたか？

Yes-Did those images change when you actually studied in Finland for a certain period?

No フィンランドに来てどんな印象・イメージを抱きましたか？

No-What impression or image did you get after coming to Finland?

14. フィンランドと日本を比べた時、似ていると感じる点はありますか？

Do you find any similarity between Finland and Japan?

15. フィンランドと日本を比べた時、一番大きな違いはなんですか？

What is the biggest difference between Finland and Japan?

16. 留学生活に何か不満がありますか？

What any complaints do you have about your life in Finland?

17. 留学生活と比較して、日本が恋しいと思ったことはありますか？

Do you miss Japan compared to your life in Finland?

18. 具体的に恋しいと思うものはありますか？

Do you have any specific things that you miss?

19. 日本に帰国後のプランはありますか？

Do you have any specific plan for when you go back to Japan?

20. 留学生活での学びは帰国後どのように自分の生活に影響を与えると思いますか？

In what way do think that what you learned in Finland will affect your life after you return to Japan?

21. 将来、日本以外の国で勉強したり働きたいと思いますか。

Do you want to study or work outside of Japan in the future?

Appendix 4 List of Questions for 2nd Interviews

1. 最近の留学生活はどうですか？

How is your exchange study going recently?

2. 最近気になるニュースはありますか？

Do you come up with any news that caught your attention recently?

3. 理想的だと思う将来のライフスタイルはありますか？

Do you have an idea about ideal lifestyle in the future?

4. 就職先を選ぶ基準はありますか

Do you have any criteria to choose the company that you will work for?

5. 将来の生活でもっとも大切にしたいことはなんですか？

What do you think is the most important thing in your life in the future?

6. 将来に対して楽観的ですか？悲観的ですか？

Are you optimistic or pessimistic about the future?

7. 大人になるとはどういうことだと思いますか？

What do you think is the meaning of becoming an adult?

8. 学生と社会人の違いは何だと思いますか。

What do you think is the difference between student and *shakaijin*?

9. 留学を通して、自分自身に変化はありましたか？

Through your exchange study in Finland, have you seen any changes in yourself?

10. 留学を通して社会を見る目は変わりましたか？

Through your exchange study in Finland, have your view of society changed?

11. 日本帰国後のプランはありますか？

Do you already have any plans after you go back to Japan?

12. 日本に帰るにあたって、楽しみなことはありますか？

Is there anything that you are looking for the most when you go back to Japan?

13. 日本に帰るにあたって、嫌なことはありますか？

Is there anything that you will do not like when you go back to Japan?

14. もうすぐ社会人になるにあたり、何か思うところはありますか。

As a soon-to-be *shakaijin,* do you have anything in your mind?