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**The 'Yobiko': The institutionalized supplementary educational  
institution in Japan: A study of the social stratification process**

Tsukada, Mamoru, Ph.D.

University of Hawaii, 1988

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THE YOBIKO: THE INSTITUTIONALIZED SUPPLEMENTARY  
EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION IN JAPAN: A STUDY  
OF THE SOCIAL STRATIFICATION PROCESS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE  
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN SOCIOLOGY

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By

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the social stratification process by utilizing a case study of ronin in a yobiko in Japan. As a supplementary educational institution, the yobiko enables those high school graduates who failed to pass the college entrance examination to study for an additional year or more in preparation for the next examination.

The methods used for data collection included participant observation as a teacher, unstructured interviews (n=71), self-administered questionnaire (n=1343), an analysis of students' files (n=1373) in the yobiko, and twenty self-report essays written by students.

The effects of family background, gender, and high school subculture upon students' educational aspirations and achievement, and self-evaluation before becoming ronin are discussed. The dissertation then examines the changing psychological state and aspirations of ronin students over time, and the mechanisms the yobiko uses to adjust ronin students' aspirations to their actual academic performance during the ronin year.

Finally, the consequences of the ronin and yobiko experience are analyzed by examining the social relationships formed, as well as the relationship between family status, tracking within the yobiko, and gender with students' aspirations and self-evaluation and by placing them in a larger social context.

Findings suggest that the revisionist view explains the ronin and yobiko experience better than the meritocratic view. The yobiko as a

class-biased institution reproduces the tracking of high schools and thus social stratification through the college entrance examination competition. However, the yobiko as a second chance school provides a chance for some losers to win, unlike Rosenbaum's tournament thesis. The yobiko plays an important role in stratifying students and legitimizing the stratification. The yobiko also reproduces gender division in Japan through the college entrance examination.

The theoretical implication of this dissertation is that social stratification is a product of the interplay among the macro social structure, organizational arrangements, and individuals' interpretation of the structure and arrangements and that this social stratification process is best understood by investigating individuals' accounts of reality in a longitudinal model.

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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

What is the relationship between individuals and social stratification? How do individuals come to recognize an idea of stratification in their society? This dissertation attempts to understand the social stratification process by utilizing a case study of ronin students in the yobiko in Japan. As a supplementary educational institution, the yobiko enables those high school graduates who failed to pass the college entrance examination to study for an additional year or more in preparation for the next examination. Students in the yobiko are neither high school students nor college or university students. As ronin students, they prepare themselves for the next year's college entrance examination. The name ronin derives from the term for masterless samurai in the feudal era of Japan. The ronin students belong to neither a high school nor a college and thus are similarly masterless.

Because it is mainly for high school graduates, the yobiko is different from the juku. The ronin students in the yobiko attend classes full-time, from morning until afternoon. The juku provides supplementary education for those who are still in junior and senior high schools, and even elementary schools. Classes in the juku start after formal school ends in the afternoon Monday through Saturday and on Sundays (see Imazu, 1978; Mainichi Shinbunsha, 1977; and Rohlen's discussion of juku, 1980).

The education industry as a supplement to the formal education system in Japan arises out of special social arrangements in the society which excite the status strivings of a large part of the population and concentrate that striving on the entrance examinations of hierarchically ranked colleges. The social status of ronin, and the supplementary educational institution of the yobiko, epitomize this problem of status striving and the resultant allocation of people into lifelong positions in the social stratification hierarchy.

This dissertation attempts to shed light on the dynamics of the social stratification process by studying the ronin who attend a particular yobiko and placing them within the context of the larger social setting. To do this, it must examine chains of causation and effect through macro and micro levels of society. This is accomplished by the following strategy: (1) The development of the contemporary education industry is outlined in connection with the formal educational system, so that its scope and impact on the society are made clear, along with the social demands it meets and creates; (2) The two archetypical elements of the industry are described by a case study: the institution of the yobiko and the lifestyle of the ronin students who attend the yobiko; (3) At a more micro level, the study then examines the self-concept of ronin, the changing psychological state of ronin over time, and the mechanisms the yobiko uses to adjust the ronin's aspiration to his or her actual performance; and (4) The ultimate effects of the ronin and yobiko experience are measured by examining the relationships among family social status, the tracking system of high schools and tracking within the yobiko, the students' entering academic status, their aspiration, and their performance on tests.

By examining the applicability of sociological and social psychological theories and concepts to a particular educational phenomenon in a non-Western society, the dissertation also contributes to an understanding of Japanese society and youth life. First, it provides an exploratory description of the emerging education industry and its effect on the Japanese educational system. How this education industry has developed and why the phenomenon took place in Japan are important in understanding the educational systems in other modern societies. For example, the emergence of the education industry and competitive college entrance examinations are social phenomena in other developing countries such as Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, Sri Lanka, and China (Dore, 1976 and Thomas and Postlethwaite, 1983).

Second, an ethnographic study of ronin life can provide an understanding not only of the psychology of youth in problematic situations,<sup>1</sup> but also an understanding of what ronin life is really like from the actors' viewpoint without imposing societal images upon them as "the victims of examination hell."<sup>2</sup>

Third, the dissertation as a case study of school selection process can help us interpret the mechanism of social stratification through the schooling process. The case study allows us to interpret specific empirical results which depart from expectations. As the yobiko is a less complex setting than society's overall educational system, the schooling process is more visible so that we can examine the structure, process, and consequence of societal selection specifically (Rosenbaum, 1976:5).

Fourth, since the ronin phenomenon expresses the extreme form of competition for entrance to prestigious universities, it is a vehicle for examining the sociological problem of the relationship between social stratification and educational success.

Chapter II depicts the historical development of the Japanese educational system from the Meiji Restoration (1868) to the present time, and locates the position of the yobiko in the formal education system. One section discusses the characteristics of contemporary Japanese society in terms of education. As background for discussion of the yobiko, the characteristics of the Japanese entrance examination system are described.

Chapter III delineates the research setting and its characteristics, and discusses the theoretical orientation and methods used in the field-work.

Chapter IV focuses on the social and educational characteristics of ronin students before they became ronin. The discussion centers on the effects of family background, gender, and high school status on the educational aspirations and attainment of the ronin.

Chapters V, VI, and VII deal with the psychological changes in students during their ronin year. Each chapter describes a distinctive period during which changes occur in the lifestyle and psychology of ronin students. These chapters also deal with the subjective individual process of social stratification in the educational institution. Changes in aspirations, daily activities, and social relationships in ronin life are discussed. These chapters also deal with the relative effects of family background and gender on ronin students' academic aspirations and attainment, while taking into consideration the influence of tracking

within the yobiko. They address the "revisionist-meritocratic debate" using the yobiko in Japan as a case study. They also focus on the effects of tracking on the students' self-evaluation.

Chapter VIII examines the consequences of ronin life. First, it describes the social relationships formed in the yobiko and discusses especially the teacher-student relationship and student-student relationship. Second, it evaluates the results of ronin students' performance in the college entrance examination and categorizes the ronin students into four groups. Third, it discusses ronin students' reflections on their ronin life retrospectively, after they have become college students as a retrospective perspective. Fourth, consequences of ronin experience and college entrance examination are discussed in connection with a larger social context of Japan.

Chapter IX summarizes the previous chapters, delineates the social stratification process for ronin students, and discusses the role and function of the yobiko and ronin life for individuals and for Japanese society as a whole.

## CHAPTER I--NOTES

1. The term "problematic situations" is not used to indicate that there is a problem. But the problematic situations are situations which allow actors to make decisions among alternative choices. The situations are not taken for granted, but actors are called on to make their decisions. Ronin life does not require ronin students to fulfill any obligation, rōte, and responsibility unlike students in the formal schooling. The ronin students do not have any regulations to observe. There are no mechanisms to punish the students for failing to observe any rules in the yobiko. Ronin students have to decide what to do among all alternatives in this problematic situation (see Becker's discussion of problematic situations applied to an analysis of medical students at an American university).

2. In popular magazines and mass media, students preparing for the college entrance examinations, especially ronin students are viewed as the victims of "examination hell." As an example of such a view, people believe that there is a high correlation between the number of adolescent suicides and the intensity of the examination competition. But actually, in terms of suicide rate, more drop-outs from high schools than students in high schools are likely to commit suicide in contemporary Japanese society (see Rohlen's appendix, 1983).

## CHAPTER II

### THE HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT OF YOBIKO AND RONIN

#### Is Japan a Gakureki Shakai?

Japanese scholars describe Japanese society as a Gakureki Shakai. The term is similar to a credential society but in the Japanese context it refers to the characteristics of the Japanese historical, social, and cultural system. The university from which a person graduated is important in addition to the value of the educational credential itself. Universities in Japan are visibly ranked in terms of social prestige. In recruiting their prospective employees, large corporations and companies use the names of universities as screening devices. Second, there is no mobility across universities and departments. Once students are admitted to a specific department of a specific university, they cannot transfer to another department or another university without taking its entrance examination and beginning again as freshmen. So the name of the university they graduated from becomes their status symbol (Amano, 1984; Aso, 1983; Iwauchi, 1980; Takeuchi, 1981; and Ushioji, 1978).

Aso (1983), in arguing that Japanese society is a Gakureki Shakai delineated six distinctive bases for the Japanese educational system. First, Japanese historically have had faith in education per se. They have believed that education is an activity by which to improve people's morality and through education they improve themselves in any way that they want.

Second, education has had three different but interrelated values in itself: an instrumental value to learn technical skills and to obtain a certain profession or occupation, an order value to certify educated individuals as prestigious and important, and a screening value to select "men of talent."

Third, a hierarchical structure among universities has existed historically. Since the establishment of the Imperial University, the hierarchical structure has been established among universities.

Fourth, the employment system or recruitment process in companies and governmental bureaucracy is highly correlated with the hierarchical structure of the educational system. Historically company employees have been categorized into three main types: regular employees, semi-regular employees, and temporary employees strictly according to educational credentials. Seniority and life employment are generally practiced in companies and bureaucracies except for small factories. Among companies there is a distinction between "Parent companies" and "Child companies," and educational credentials play an important role in being employed by "Parent companies" (Uratsu, 1987).

Fifth, salary men or "the new middle class" (Vogel, 1963) have increased in number due to the structural changes of occupation in Japan. Members of the new middle class expect their children to have higher education.

Sixth, the Japanese cultural pattern based upon the "principle of dependence" and "the principle of vertical social relations" provides a cultural basis for the educational system. In accordance with "the principle of vertical social relations," Ba or "frame" is more important

than attributes in locating people in social relations in Japan (Nakane, 1970). If individuals are defined by "frame," they can belong to only a single group. Within this framed single group, the rank order system has to develop for the organization to function efficiently and effectively. Educational credentials have become one of the accepted or reasonable criteria by which to rank employees in companies in addition to seniority, since they are not directly related to employees' attributes. "The principle of dependence" strengthens the vertical relationship psychologically. Because of amae (Doi, 1962) or the dependence relationship between a child and his mother, the child tends to strive for educational attainment supported by his mother psychologically and together they fight or face the outside society, such as schools and companies, with mutually dependent feelings (Kiefer, 1974 and Vogel, 1979).

Koike and Watanabe (1979) and Takeuchi (1981) argue that Japanese society is not a Gakureki Shakai when compared with other societies which tend to have a greater value gap and emphasis on prestige according to credentials than Japan has. According to this view of the Japanese educational system, the prestige of the university which one graduated from is not a crucial factor because there are many opportunities for promotion after being employed by any company. Therefore, they contend that people in general believe that Gakureki-shugi or credentialism exists in the Japanese labor market but actually this is only an illusion of overemphasized importance of education in the society.

This argument, however, ignores the existence of Shiteiko-sei or the appointment system among the hierarchy of universities for

recruitment. Second, it fails to recognize that a higher percentage of graduates of prestigious universities are likely to be employed by larger firms or companies than are graduates of less prestigious universities, which produces a significant difference between the two groups in social prestige and salary.

The aforementioned two opposing views about Gakureki Shakai both argue that the college entrance examination competition has been intensified partly due to the characteristics of credentialism in Japan, whether people only believe its existence in their minds or Japanese society is actually characterized as such.

Several scholars emphasize Japanese cultural factors more than social factors as bases for the Japanese educational system (Shimahara, 1979; Vogel, 1979; and Yamamura, 1983). Shimahara (1979) argues that Japanese group orientation is the basis for the educational system. Thus, the most significant factor underlying the competitive college entrance examination and Gakureki-shugi or credentialism in Japan is the expression of the cultural pattern of group orientation.

Shimahara defined groups as social organizations based upon Nakane's concept of "frame." The Japanese concept of group is characterized by a strong orientation toward homogeneity--stress on the conformity of motivational orientation and a strong tendency toward exclusiveness vis-à-vis other groups. Once individuals with different attributes become members of a group, the group exerts a lasting pressure on them to conform to its orientation or "frame." Japanese clearly perceive educational experience as a process of socialization guided by a concern with one's placement in a group. Japanese schools reflect this orientation,

particularly at the college level. University graduates are evaluated and their prestige is determined in terms of the institutions from which they graduated. Prestigious academic institutions claim their exclusiveness vis-à-vis other institutions (Shimahara, 1979:21-24).

However, the characteristics of Gakureki Shakai do not explain why the intensity of "examination hell" still remains or has escalated recently, when the value of credentials has decreased in terms of economic return rate as perceived by people and reported in the mass media (Okachi, 1986). Several scholars attempt to explain the persisting or increasing "examination hell" by social, psychological, and cultural factors (Iwata, 1979; Kajita, 1983; and Mimizuka, 1980).

Iwata (1979) argues that students try to enter prestigious universities in order to prove that they are potentially capable in any field. In Japanese society people are evaluated by their potential in general, rather than in specific fields, as opposed to the situation of the United States where specific skills and experiences are valued highly. In this Japanese system the evaluation of general potentiality is regarded as that of the person as a whole person. As a result, students attempt to prove in a college entrance examination that they are potentially competent or capable people in general, to themselves as well as to others. This view of human competence or capability in the Japanese value system encourages students to enter more prestigious universities regardless of the economic return rate of the credentials themselves.

Kajita (1983) and Mimizuka (1980) argue that credentials or the university from which one graduates are the core of self-concept. In one's interactions with others, the prestige of the university or the

fact that one has not attended any university play an important role in determining how one is viewed by others. If one is a graduate of a prestigious university, the others react with a positive or respectful attitude. On the other hand, the very fact that one is a junior high school graduate causes others to view one negatively. The prestige of universities becomes a key factor in determining others' manazashi<sup>1</sup> or attentive and evaluative views. The hierarchical ranking of universities in Japan is common knowledge shared by young people who know which universities are more prestigious, especially since the standardized value of test scores in mock exams are utilized as a counseling device to select an appropriate university to apply to.

In sum, even though the economic return from having attended higher-ranked universities is decreasing, many different sorts of social pressures and cultural ideas still support the fierce examination competition for entry into the top universities. To understand the system, we must first look at the historical process through which the yobiko and ronin students emerged, and then examine how the contemporary examination system has expanded and institutionalized both.

#### Historical Background

Japanese socio-cultural and historical factors created the social phenomenon of the yobiko and the ronin, during the Meiji era (1868-1912) when the modern Japanese educational system was being established. There was no systematic modern school system before the Meiji Restoration although education was valued and more children attended school in Japan than in Western countries (Reichauer, 1980:168).

It was in 1871, the fourth year of the new government's existence, that an Education Ministry was created, which adopted in the following year an ambitious plan by Education Minister Mori for a highly centralized and uniform school system based upon selective models of Western countries and leading to universal literacy.

Mori's concept of education consisted of the following three pillars:

. . . (i) education for enriching and strengthening the State, (ii) education for enlightenment designed to alter the old consciousness and (iii) education for the maintenance of Japan's traditional national polity. . . . (Aso and Amano, 1972:17)

His plan for a new educational system was built upon a strict distinction between "academic pursuits" and "education." The purpose of academic pursuits was to delve deeply into the truth of things or to foster those persons who will engage in skilled occupations. By contrast, "education" was intended to train the people so that each individual person may fully understand his duty as a Japanese "subject."<sup>2</sup> In operating this dual system of education, Mori attached importance to education at normal schools and a schooling system for fostering the elites (Aso and Amano, 1972:20-21). This is one example of how the institution of education categorizes people into the elite and the masses, and provides them with a sense of being members of the State (Meyer, 1977; Meyer et al., 1981).

Minister of Education Mori organized the Imperial University as a university to train bureaucrats for the State. Thus, the Imperial University was a gateway to becoming an upper level government bureaucracy, since the newly established government was still in need of recruiting men of talent from throughout Japan. As feeder schools

to the Imperial University, he established five higher schools, plus a middle school in each prefecture. Students had to take competitive entrance examinations to enter a school of each level.

The entrance examination to the higher schools, which were the gateway to the Imperial University, was very competitive and difficult. In 1889 the number of applicants to higher schools was twice the number of entrants. The entrance examination of the higher schools was so difficult that middle school graduates rarely entered them immediately after graduation. It was common for students to become ronin for one or two years to prepare for the entrance examination of higher schools, which became a "selective examination" to a higher level of schooling that in turn led them to become "elites" in the government offices (Amano, 1986:61-66).

By 1900 about 81.5 percent of all children were entering primary schools. But the route into the higher levels of education was highly selective. In 1900 the number of applicants to middle schools was 46,000 and the number admitted was 28,000, but only about 8,000 students graduated from the middle schools. In the same year about 4,000 applied for higher schools and only 1,400 entered; 564 applicants were admitted to the Imperial University and only 389 graduated from the Imperial University (Amano, 1986:73).

Only a small number of students were involved in the entrance examination to higher schools but they went through "the examination hell" in order to become successful businessmen or leaders in the Japanese government (Passin, 1982:104).

Japan in the 1920s was a country of "agriculture." According to the census of 1930, company employees comprised only 6 percent and laborers about 7 percent of the working population. The vast majority of people at that time were engaged in commerce, family factories or in agriculture. For them credentials were irrelevant. Only a small number of the sons of the middle class were involved in the entrance examination of all the school levels.

Yobiko was a part of the Meiji educational system from the beginning, designated for the elite who aspired to enter the Imperial University. In the beginning the yobiko was not set up to prepare students to compete with one another in the entrance examination, but rather to provide them with sufficient background knowledge before receiving professional training and education in a higher educational institution.

The first yobiko was founded in 1894. There were five kinds of yobiko: (1) schools for "Chinese studies" or mathematics; (2) schools for English; (3) preparatory schools for private universities; (4) preparatory schools for higher schools and "professional schools"; and (5) preparatory courses in the middle schools (Ikeda and Yabana, 1982:16).

The number of yobiko increased during the 1910s and 1920s due to the increase of applicants to higher education. In 1943, the Japanese Ministry of Education conducted a survey of "miscellaneous schools," a category that included various small- to medium-sized schools such as those for teaching tea ceremony, flower arrangement, abacus, and martial arts. Among the 2,303 miscellaneous schools listed, 98 were yobiko (Hiroshima Seminar, 1985:59).

After Japan was defeated in World War II, both the American Occupation Authorities and a select group of liberal Japanese leaders who were asked to help in reforming the nation agreed that the educational system required fundamental changes. Indicative of their determination is the preamble to the Fundamental Law of Education (1946), which states:

Education shall aim at the full development of personality, striving for the rearing of the people, sound in mind and body, who shall love truth and justice, esteem individual value, respect labor, and have deep sense of responsibility, and be imbued with an independent spirit, as builders of a peaceful state and society.  
(Passin, 1982:302)

The prewar educational system of Japan came under severe criticism for its undemocratic stratification and its past blind adherence to policies of military expansionism and ultra nationalism. Consequently, in 1949 the Occupation Authorities initiated a total reform of the Japanese educational system. All institutions of higher education, from Imperial Universities at the top down to the technical colleges, were transformed under a unified system of higher education into four-year undergraduate colleges, with or without graduate schools or research institutions.

By 1952, when Japan gained her autonomy, her future prospects became clearer. It was generally recognized that the survival of Japan, in view of the limited land and natural resources, would depend heavily on her industrial capabilities. Both the industrial sector and the government were quick to address this problem. The recommendations of the government's committee of 1951 and the Japanese Management Union of 1952 and 1956 strongly emphasized the need for vocational and technical education. These recommendations were followed by the resolution of

the House of Representatives in 1957 regarding the promotion of education in science and technology and by the recommendations of the Central Council on Education of the Ministry of Education in the same year on the same subject.

The shortage of technicians and skilled workers was alleviated as a result of the Industrial Training Law of 1958. However, higher level industrial personnel still needed to be increased. The technical college was to train middle level engineers and to provide them with more practical training than that offered in the universities. By 1970 the number of such colleges had increased from the original number of 19 to 60.

Student enrollment in universities and the number of universities increased rapidly after World War II. The student enrollment in higher education in 1950 was only about 240,000 whereas the figure climbed eight-fold to over two million in 1975.

The number of four-year universities increased from 48 in 1945, to 201 in 1950, and to 420 in 1975. The government encouraged the private sector to found universities (Pempel, 1973 and 1982). As a result, only 19 public or national universities were established during the period between 1950 and 1975 whereas 200 new private four-year universities were founded. Despite the educational reforms after World War II, the hierarchical structure of the educational system was strengthened by the establishment of new high schools and universities.

Private companies also played a role in maintaining and reproducing the prewar hierarchical structure of higher educational institutions. The larger companies abolished salary distinctions based on the specific

universities from which their employees graduated, but they gave priority to "first rank" and "prestigious" universities in their recruitment so that the structural correspondence between "first rank" universities and "first rank" companies was formed visibly. Students therefore tended to compete with one another in the college entrance examinations to enter the more prestigious universities in order to eventually be employed by the "first rank" companies (Amano, 1985:31-32).

The phrase "four hours' sleep for success, but five hours' sleep for failure," indicating the high competition in the college entrance examination, became popular in the society, especially in the mass media. The entrance rate of ronin in comparison with high school graduates was 35.2 percent in 1953 and increased to 48.4 percent in 1957. People said that the Japanese educational system should be called 6-3-4-4 instead of 6-3-3-4 (Beauchamp, 1978).

In 1960 yobiko was viewed as serving a "hospital function" for ronin students. Students experienced mental suffering because they lived without belonging to any group. It was said that there were a number of cases in which young men tired of ronin life and had killed themselves in questioning the meaning of life. It was the yobiko which played an important role in saving young men from isolation and inferiority in their ronin life. This was a general view of the yobiko in the 1960s when many students attempted to enter universities, failed to do so, and became ronin.

As time went by, the image of ronin changed and to become ronin was taken for granted. By 1967, ronin was called Hitonami, or something ordinary, as everyone does it in order to enter a good university. An

article entitled "Beautiful Contemporary Ronin's Character, in one of the weekly magazines said, "(1) I have found my teacher among yobiko teachers; (2) Abstinence is also fun; (3) Idle slumber is a secret for success." In 1973 in the same magazine it was said, "Falling in love well and sleeping well are secrets to success in entering Tokyo University and Kyoto University." It used to be said, "five hours' sleep for failure and four hours' sleep for success" and now it is said, "seven hours' sleep for success and five hours' sleep for failure" (Hiroshima Seminar, 1985:204).

The college entrance examinations in general were criticized for asking difficult questions which were not covered in the high school curriculum. The national common examination was implemented by Nyushi Senta or the Center for the College Entrance examination to normalize the college entrance examination. The national common examination comprises standard questions in seven subjects which high school students can learn from their texts. This national common examination is required for students to apply to a national university. The results are sent to the universities, but not to the students. Furthermore, no overall rankings are published.

In order to meet students' demand for getting information on the results of the national common examination, larger yobiko developed methods for debriefing students after the exam and providing estimated scores with the aid of a computer. This new service became the impetus for the large yobiko to expand their network nationally. For example, Surugadai Yobiko, which was located in Tokyo and was famous for its specialization of sending students to Tokyo University, established a

branch in Kyoto. Kawaijuku, which started in Nagoya, established a Tokyo branch. The largest yobiko, Tokyo's Yoyogi Seminaru started a branch in Nagoya where Kawaijuku already had a monopoly in recruiting students. This recent phenomenon was brought about mainly by the implementation of the National common examination (Nakayama, 1980:144).

The development of the yobiko can be explained by the hierarchical structure of the Japanese educational system from its beginning. The hierarchical structure created discrepancies between the number of students accommodated and the kinds of universities the applicants wanted to enter. Even though the number of universities and colleges increased, the applicants did not necessarily apply to the newly established universities because of their negative reputation in the society. Hence the number of ronin students did not decrease drastically after the expansion of the higher educational institutions but instead increased. Although the yobiko is a supplementary educational institution to the formal educational system, it has attained its own position and is now institutionalized as "the mediating institution" between high schools and higher educational institutions.

#### The Contemporary Entrance Examination System

This section first describes the general characteristics of the contemporary entrance examination system, which serves as a context in which students are engaged in examination competition. Then the nature of exam preparation in this particular entrance examination will be discussed. Finally, the yobiko's position in the entrance examination will be discussed.

There has been a distinctive difference between national or public universities and private universities with regard to the entrance examination system since the entrance examination system started in the Meiji era. In the 1985 college entrance examination system<sup>3</sup> students applying to national universities could apply to only one department of a university. Two types of examinations were required: an applicant had to take the national common examination on January 23 and 24 and take the entrance examination of the national university of his or her choice early in March. Students applying only to private universities could take as many entrance examinations as they wanted to. They were not required to take the national common examination, but only the entrance examination of the departments of the universities they applied to.

Usually, those students who apply to a national university also take the entrance examinations of several private universities before taking the national university exam. The entrance examinations of private universities are regarded as easier than those of national universities in general.

A second difference between private universities and national universities is the number of required subjects in the entrance examinations. In general, private universities require applicants to take tests on three subjects in their entrance examinations. The specific subjects depend on the department that an applicant is applying to. If the departments are social sciences and humanities, then the required subjects are English, Japanese, and one of the social studies subjects (which include Japanese history, world history, geography, ethics, and

political economics). On the other hand, if the departments are in the natural sciences, applicants are required to take English, mathematics, and one or two natural science subjects (chemistry, physics, geology, and biology).

The multiple choice national common examination covers a wider range of subjects. Japanese language and literature, mathematics, and English are required of all students. In addition, students must take two subjects out of five social studies subjects (Japanese history, world history, geography, ethics, and political economics) and two subjects from four natural science subjects (physics, chemistry, geology, and biology). There is some variation in terms of weighting of test scores between the national common examination and the second examination across universities. Some universities reject applicants who do not reach certain minimum test scores in the national common examination without letting them take their second examinations.

In addition, there is variation in the number and nature of the required subjects in the second examination among different national universities and even among the divisions and departments of one national university. A few national universities require applicants to take four subjects in the university-administered second examination. These universities are generally difficult to enter. It appears that they do not trust the results of the national common examination to select their applicants, but prefer to evaluate them on their own examinations.

The majority of national universities require their applicants to take examinations of two or three subjects in the university-administered second examination. The subjects are usually determined specifically

according to the nature of the departments. For example, if a student is going to apply to the department of physics, a test on physics is required. In another case, if the student will apply to the department of literature, he is expected to take both Japanese and English in the second examinations. In general the more the required subjects, the more difficult the second examination is for students.

There are divisions and departments of universities which require only one subject in the second examination. These departments choose one subject most relevant to the respective department and for the other subjects they consider the applicants' test scores in the national common examination and combine both test scores according to their own weighting system. This information is publicized in the major newspapers so that applicants know how the weighting is done as a criterion for admission.

Or as an alternative, some departments only require applicants to write an essay on a given topic within a limited time (usually 90 or 120 minutes for an 800 word essay). Another choice for the second examination is to test applicants' specialities such as in music, art, and athletics. These choices are confined to specialized departments only.

Generally students consider several factors when applying to a department of a university. First, they must decide whether to apply to private universities or national universities or both. Second, they determine what division they are applying to, either the division of natural sciences or the division of social sciences and humanities. Third, if they are applying to a national university, they consider the weighting system of a specific department of a university between the

national common examination and its own second examination. Fourth, they think of their own strengths and weaknesses in terms of the required subjects in the second examination.

This is the college entrance examination system under which ronin students make any decision regarding their application to a specific department of a university. The examination system, the standardized value of the ranking of the departments of universities throughout Japan, and the standardized values of the student's test scores in a series of mock exams are always impinging upon their consciousness during the ronin year.

#### The Nature of the College Entrance Examination

It is said that the college entrance examination is designated to evaluate applicants' potential as college students by examining their knowledge of subjects and topics that are covered in a high school curriculum. The basic nature of the college entrance examination is an achievement test, not an aptitude test.

Historically several aptitude tests were tried out to evaluate applicants' academic and scholastic ability in the entrance examinations at different levels of schooling. However, the aptitude test did not become established in the entrance examination in Japan. This is related to the general cultural value system of effort in Japanese society. It is believed that anyone can do anything if he makes a full effort. Hence, one's ability is considered to be one's actual accomplishment.

In Japan the entrance examination is also a symbol of equal opportunity for education, so that it should be a fair and objective

competition. The college entrance examination examines how perfectly applicants have mastered what they are supposed to learn in high school. If the exam questions in any entrance examination of a university are outside of the high school curriculum, these questions are regarded as bad questions and the mass media, high school teachers, and the yobiko will be critical in that the university tested applicants on impossible questions. The public monitors the nature of the entrance examination as to whether or not it is fair and objective for all the applicants. Thus, the nature of the entrance examination should be objectively symbolized as an arena for an equal opportunity for education.

Some private negotiations regarding an easy entry to a specific department of a university may take place. But when bribes or unfair conduct are revealed in connection with the college entrance examination, the parties involved in the conduct are punished socially as violators of a norm of fairness or even sometimes as perpetrators of a criminal act. In viewing the scene of the entrance examination being taken by applicants in classrooms at any university, it is apparent that every effort is made to ensure that the entrance examination is fair and objective for each applicant.

The questions asked in the college entrance examinations are concerned with applicants' knowledge of facts in each subject, and mastery of the patterns of solving problems in each subject. Students preparing for the college entrance examinations prepare themselves by studying previously-asked questions in the entrance examinations. The students usually have reference books and exercise texts to study for the examinations, along with their high school texts of each subject. What the

students try to learn by studying with the reference books specializing in the college entrance examinations are patterns of frequently-asked questions. For example, in mathematics there is a reference book called "Chart Mathematics" which contains step-by-step procedures for the previous entrance examinations. It also points out how frequently similar problems appeared and which universities asked similar questions, with an explanation of what students should memorize.

The yobiko texts also consist mainly of previously-asked questions in each subject of the university entrance examination or the national common examinations. The yobiko teachers' goal is to show how to solve the questions within a limited time by including important points for each answer. Experienced teachers know specific points to be included in good and correct answers. The questions asked in the entrance examinations may be different, but the points tend to be very similar. By studying with the reference book and attending classes in the yobiko, students learn basic patterns of questions and memorize basic materials. Students try to learn how to answer and solve specific questions as efficiently as possible since the time allowed in the examination is limited. The brightest students know the key points to include in their answers by looking at the nature of the questions. Thus, the entrance examination is basically to examine students' ability to answer each question within a certain limited time based upon what they have memorized in patterned ways.

### The Entrance Examination and the Yobiko

During the period of expansion of higher education in Japan, more high school graduates became ronin while the number of yobiko remained unchanged. There were local yobiko in medium-size cities in each prefecture. In metropolitan areas, large-scale yobiko emerged. These yobiko established their branches in other cities and expanded their total student enrollment. The development of this type of yobiko is described in the mass media as "the education industry" (Trucco, 1984). They established nation-wide networks of their branches as well as collaboration with other yobiko in other places. Out of 272 yobiko listed in the Yobiko Guide (Keisetsujidai, 1986), 50 percent of them are located in five prefectures which contain large cities. Similar to the concentration of higher educational institutions in big cities, yobiko are also located in big cities.

There are three distinctive types of yobiko. The most common are small yobiko which enroll less than 500 students. This type of yobiko comprises 67.6 percent of the total number of yobiko in Japan.

The second type are large-scale yobiko, sometimes called "mammoth yobiko." Four yobiko are categorized as this type and each one has at least 10,000 students in various branches nationally. The students enrolled in these four yobiko constitute about 40 percent of the total yobiko students throughout Japan.

The third type is a specialized yobiko, which prepares students for entrance into medical school (in Japan, students enter a medical science department as college freshmen). Such yobiko explicitly mention this goal, although other general yobiko also have a medical school

preparatory course. Specialized yobiko are usually limited to less than 100 students, and charge high tuition. The average tuition for the general yobiko ranges from \$2,400 to \$3,600 per year (exchange rate \$1=125 yen). By contrast, the yearly tuition of a specialized yobiko ranges from \$10,000 to \$32,000.

The mass media reported that there were "yobiko wars" in large cities such as Sapporo, Nagoya, Fukuoka, Yokohama, and Osaka. For example, in Fukuoka city Kawaijuku, one of the nation-wide yobiko, established a branch in 1981. Then another nation-wide yobiko established a branch there in 1986. In this prefecture historically since the prewar period hoshuka<sup>4</sup> have been attached to high schools as fourth supplementary year programs. On each high school campus, high school graduates from the school study for the entrance examination for an additional year as fourth year high school students. Three hoshuka in the prefecture were closed recently due to the invasion of the mammoth yobiko. One local yobiko, which had a long tradition beginning as hoshuka had over 350 ronin students yearly until the large-scale yobiko established its branch in Fukuoka. Subsequently the number of students enrolled in the yobiko decreased by half each year, to 183 in 1981 and 75 in 1983.

The large-scale yobiko employed special strategies to "defeat" the local yobiko. One of these was to offer a special scholarship to those high school graduates who had achieved high test scores in a mock exam. In so doing, these yobiko recruited students who may otherwise have gone to a local yobiko.

Another strategy was to invite famous yobiko instructors from Tokyo. These famous instructors are used to attract ronin students, since high

school students have become familiar with the names of famous yobiko teachers by reading their reference books for the college entrance examination.

The prefectural authorities in Fukuoka stepped in to defuse the war between the large yobiko and 15 local yobiko with two new regulations. First, the new large yobiko are required to limit their student enrollment to a certain number. Second, they are not allowed to offer scholarships to high school students with high test scores (Chunichi newspaper, 1986).

Another incident indicates the penetration of the supplementary educational institution of the yobiko into the formal educational system. One of the largest yobiko founded a private high school in Yamanashi Prefecture. The newly founded private high school sent no graduates to Tokyo University in 1984 but seven of its graduates entered Tokyo University in the following year. This school has seven hundred male students, 55 percent of whom came from other prefectures. It has a strict tracking system in classes according to their academic achievement. Students have finished all the high school curriculum by the end of the second year of high school. In the third year students are divided into different tracks according to the type of universities they attempt to apply for and study for the college entrance examinations exclusively by using the same textbooks as those used in the yobiko.

The entrance examination system for senior high schools in this particular city is sogo senbatsu<sup>5</sup> or an integrated system of selection of applicants for public high schools by which the local ministry of education attempted to equalize the level of public high schools.

Consequently, there are no "prestigious" high schools with regard to the college entrance examination. The new private high school has won its prestige and has recruited a large number of "brighter" students away from the public high schools. In response to this phenomenon, the principal of one public high school planned to send its students for their third year of high school to the main Tokyo branch of the yobiko, which has the private high school. This attempt was stopped by the Ministry of Education and local government as inappropriate conduct by a public school. But it indicates how each high school is eager to send its graduates to prestigious universities by which it wins its prestige as a high school (Kubota, 1985:113-116).

High schools and universities are structured hierarchically in various ways. High schools as well as universities form several different "pyramid" structures. The education industry developed to help college applicants enter a university by identifying their chances of entering it.

The education industry plays a role in providing college applicants with the objective or comparative data about universities, because Japanese universities do not recruit their potential applicants by advertising. They only provide a system of testing to select the applicants. Applicants, however, need to assess their entrance examination ability objectively, and to know what level of academic achievement is required to enter a specific university. In order to provide this objective data for applicants, the education industry has developed nation-wide networks of mock exams (Amano, 1985:213-225).

Major yobiko and publishers which specialize in entrance examination materials provide students preparing for the college entrance examinations with mock exams several times per year. Students take the mock exams in order to assess their academic achievement. About 200,000 students, both ronin students and the third year students of high schools, take nationally administered mock exams. The students participate in the mock exam individually and in groups by high schools or yobiko. As soon as the students take the mock exam, each student's answers are corrected by the instructors of yobiko and workers hired for this task. If a mock exam consists of only multiple choice questions, the correcting process is computerized. The multiple choice exam matches the nature of the national common examination.

The test scores are then standardized by computer with a mean of 50, so that students know their relative position in each test in comparison with all others who took the same mock exam. Standardization for each test is taken to obtain his relative position in a mock exam regardless of the degree of difficulty of the specific mock exam.

The standardized value of the mock exam functions to evaluate the rank of each department of universities throughout Japan, as well as the individual student's academic achievement. It is used to predict the student's chance to enter a specific department of a university throughout Japan. When taking the exam, each student lists three university departments he or she would like to apply to. Each university department is ranked by the standardized test scores of the students who listed that department.

The yobiko or the publishers determine the minimum standardized value necessary to pass the entrance examination of a specific department of a university based upon each mock exam. The minute ranking of departments of universities throughout Japan is published in the form of a pamphlet which is sent to the individual test takers and teachers of high schools which participate in the mock exam. This process is done within a month after the exam. Each student receives his raw test scores on each subject, its standardized value, and the total scores with some comments on success potential of entering specific departments of universities of the student's first choice. The comments are written in a standardized statement with such expressions as, "Your test score is within the boundary of success so study hard at this pace," "Your test score is on the boundary between success and failure so study harder to reach within the range of success," or "Need to reconsider the department of a university of your choice and to rethink of your way of studying." After receiving their standardized value on the mock exam, students consult the pamphlet to see which department of which university they are likely to enter, given their academic ability as measured by the mock exam.

The published rankings of university departments are organized so that students can quickly determine which departments fall in the same test score range. Therefore, they acquire a clear sense of the relative ranking of university departments throughout Japan. The standardized value of test scores of each mock exam is now so institutionalized that it has become a criterion to evaluate the rank of a department of a university as well as a student's relative position in a specific mock exam.

The education industry has expanded its size further due to the implementation of the national common examination in 1979. The Center for the College Entrance Examinations, the Nyushi Senta sends the applicants' test scores in the examination to the national university to which the applicant applied. However, the applicants cannot obtain their own test scores, and thus cannot know their relative position among those who also are going to apply to the same department of the university. There is very high demand for this information, so that applicants can estimate their chances of entering a specific department of the university.

It is here that the education industry plays an important role for the applicants. A report in a weekly magazine on the six busiest days in a yobiko describes how the yobiko functions in connection with the national common examination (Shukan Asahi, 1988):

1. Students planning to take an entrance examination of a national university take the national common examinations on January 23 and 24 throughout Japan;

2. On the following day the Center for the College Entrance Examination publicizes correct answers to all the questions asked in each subject in major newspapers and the students who have taken the examination remember their answers and check them against the correct answers in the newspapers;

3. The yobiko staff members estimate the weight of test scores of sub-questions. The Center for the College Entrance Examination gives a general weighting of scores to the main questions, but it does not give a weighting system of scores to sub-questions. In each yobiko,

staff members and teachers of each subject meet and determine the weight of test scores of sub-questions. This is done in the headquarters. After reaching a consensus on the weight of detail scoring of sub-questions, the yobiko makes a list of the weight of test scores of each subject and sends it directly to its branches, the other yobiko, and high schools throughout Japan;

4. The yobiko and high schools which have received the list of weighted test scores will spend one class period in which students estimate their test scores according to the list;

5. Each student writes his estimated test scores for each subject on a standard form along with the schools he or she plans to apply to. Each yobiko and high school sends the filled-out forms to the headquarters of the yobiko;

6. All the collected forms of students' estimated test scores on the national common examinations are entered in a computerized system in the headquarters of the yobiko. The computerized system produces estimated distributions of test scores for each department of universities throughout Japan;

7. The experienced yobiko teachers have a series of conferences to determine boundary lines for success for each university and university department on the basis of the distributions of all the estimated test scores; and

8. After determining specific test scores for the boundary line for success for each university department the headquarters of the yobiko prints all the statistics regarding the ranking of universities along with their ranking of the standardized value of each university

department throughout Japan. This pamphlet contains specific test scores of labeled "successful line," the "boundary line," and the "minimum line" in the college entrance examination. The pamphlet is sent to each student and to high schools which participate in this program. The entire process is done within a week, so that students can obtain data on the ranking of the departments before taking the second examination of a university department they are planning to apply to.

This service is free of charge for students and teachers of high schools. Students need these data to decide which department of a university they should apply to. Teachers also need the data to advise students on where to apply. On the other hand, the yobiko wants to enhance its reputation for getting students into universities successfully, a process which is enhanced by the increasing accuracy of the yobiko's data. At the same time, it will be able to gather vital information concerning the students participating in this program such as their addresses and test scores. If the students are high school students, they are potential clients the next year.

Thus, the yobiko has developed as a mediating institution which rationalizes and institutionalizes the system of processing students from high schools to colleges and universities by providing students with the ranking of all university departments as well as their own relative position, through the use of the standardized value of the mock exams and the distribution of the test scores in the national common examinations.

## CHAPTER II--NOTES

1. Mita (1979) applied the concept of "manazashi" for analyzing its effect upon people's behavior in Japanese society. In his article, "Marazashi no Jigoku (Hell of Evaluative Views)," he made a sociological analysis of how people's manazashi in Tokyo changed a junior high school graduate and worker in a factory from a rural area into a bloody murderer at the end.

2. Japanese people were regarded not as citizens but as Emperor's subjects at that time. Education was not for the sake of students but for the sake of the State. The central government elites believed that ordinary Japanese subjects had to be educated and guided into the modern world. It was argued that the interests of each subject would be best served if all cooperated in realizing the goals of the State (Cummings, 1980:22).

3. The college entrance examination system for national and public universities are in the process of reform. Before the National First Common Examination was implemented in 1979, students could apply to two national universities with different time schedules. The students took only the entrance examinations of the universities that they applied to. After the implementation of the National First Common Examination, students are allowed to apply only to one department of a national or public university. The students have to take the National First Common Examination on January 23 and 24 for seven subjects in multiple choice exams and take the entrance examination of the university that they applied to.

In 1986 Daigaku Nyushi Kyokai decided that students were allowed to apply to two national universities of different groups. All the national and public universities are divided into two groups by considering their geographical location and tradition. But this grouping of the universities created a political debate in choosing the date for the entrance examination of each university. This two-group system of the entrance examination was intended to give two chances to the students. However, in practice it produced a great number of students, about 100,000 students who could not take the entrance examination of certain universities that they applied to because they did poorly in the National First Common Examination and did not clear the minimum test scores in the examination set by the certain universities (Shukan Asahi, 1987). Then in 1987 the Center for the College Entrance Examination is in the process of reforming the two-group system. In this reform, students will not obtain admission from two universities so that the other students have more opportunities to obtain admission to universities.

4. The term Hoshuka literally means supplementary program at high schools. In such rural prefectures as Shimane, Okayama, Fukuoka, and Tottori no yobiko developed because of a small number of ronin students there. Prestigious high schools there have historically had Hoshuka as their fourth year program which is designed to prepare their graduates

for the college entrance examinations. The basic function is the same as that of the yobiko. But the tuition for this program is much less expensive, 200 dollars, than that of the yobiko. Teachers in the Hoshuka are the teachers of the high schools. Students at Hoshuka attend the program in one of the buildings of the high schools as the fourth year high school students.

5. Sogo Senbatsu literally translated as an integrated system of selection was implemented in order to equalize the level of public high schools in big cities. Due to the competitive entrance examination to senior high schools by a unified test in each prefecture, the hierarchical structure of public high schools was formed in a specific area. Historically the different academic levels of high schools had been enlarged. This reform is practiced on the basis of the democratic principle to reduce difference among high schools. For example, in Hiroshima City students take a unified entrance examination to public high schools. The students who achieved certain test scores in the examination obtain admission to one of six public high schools in Hiroshima City. But which high school a student will be assigned to is decided by these six public high schools by considering their home address and academic achievement in order to equalize the levels of six public high schools in Hiroshima City.

CHAPTER III  
STUDYING YOBIKO AND RONIN STUDENTS

The research presented here derives from a case study of the ronin students who attended a particular yobiko during the 1985 academic year (April, 1985-March, 1986). This chapter first describes the research setting and then outlines the theoretical approach and specific research methods used in the study.

Research Setting

Hiroshima Seminar is located in Hiroshima City, Japan. Hiroshima City was particularly chosen as a research site because a yobiko there may represent an "average" yobiko in Japan, not just those in major metropolitan areas. Hiroshima Seminar is also appropriate since it is a branch of one of the three largest yobiko in Japan, not a local Hiroshima institution. Hiroshima City is the center of the Shikoku and Chugoku areas, therefore Hiroshima Seminar can recruit students throughout these two areas in the southwest part of Japan.

Hiroshima Seminar began as a school authorized by the Japanese Ministry of Education. It had eight classrooms and about 550 students with 11 instructors in 1955. The following year, the number of classrooms increased to 19 and the number of students to 1,325.

Hiroshima Seminar began systematizing its network by establishing branches to accommodate the increased number of ronin students in the 1960s and 1970s. The number of students in all branches of Hiroshima Seminar was 2,000 in 1965, and two years later in 1967 it had increased

to 5,000. The number climbed to 8,000 in 1973 and 20,000 in 1985. In 1973 it established an information center which gathered data regarding the college entrance examinations. By collaborating with other yobiko throughout Japan, it organized a nation-wide mock exam system.

The Hiroshima City branch of Hiroshima Seminar was founded in 1977. There are also three local yobiko in Hiroshima City. One is very small and has not experienced a decline. However, because of the well-known name of Hiroshima Seminar throughout Japan, the enrollment of the other two yobiko has dropped drastically. There are now roughly 4,000 ronin students in the Hiroshima area attending the three yobiko. Hiroshima Seminar has about 2,000 ronin students, or half the total, in addition to junior and senior high school students attending supplementary courses after school and on Sundays.

Hiroshima Seminar is located close to Hiroshima. When you leave the station, you can see its name prominently displayed on nearby buildings of the school. All branches of Hiroshima Seminar throughout Japan are located close to a train station. Its closeness to a station is designed to increase the possibility for students to commute from as far as possible. Urban areas have good transportation systems in Japan so that students are able to commute from nearby cities. Commuting is much less expensive than living in a boarding house, apartment, or dormitory.

Hiroshima Seminar has three buildings for instruction. Two of them are ten-story buildings and the other is a two-story building. The three buildings are located close enough for ronin students and teachers to go to another building during intermissions between classes. Each

building has about six large classrooms, each of which accommodates about 150 students.

Each building has a cafeteria where students eat lunch together. There are offices for administrative staff members on the first and second floors, and there is another large common office for all teachers. Ronin students are encouraged to ask questions of their teachers in this office during the intermissions between classes and during lunch time.

One of the buildings is equipped with personal computers, which provide students with information regarding university departments throughout Japan. Ronin students have free access to the computers to acquire data on particular universities which they are planning to apply to.

There is no student lounge, but several classrooms are regarded as study halls where students bring their texts and study by themselves. Usually study halls are crowded with students studying quietly and seriously.

Each classroom has a microphone and a large blackboard both at the front and at the back so that it can be divided into two smaller classrooms. The classroom is equipped with a videocamera by which staff members in the main office sometimes observe students' behavior and reactions to their teachers and evaluate the teachers.

### Students

Tables 3.1 and 3.2 compare student profiles between Hiroshima Seminar and a nation-wide survey of 18 yobiko from various parts of Japan (Daigaku Shingaku Kenkyukai, 1986).

As shown in Table 3.1, ronin students tend to come from families of higher economic status. The fathers of ronin students tend to have completed a higher educational level than the equivalent age group in the general population. About 40 percent of ronin students' fathers in Hiroshima Seminar and 33.6 percent of ronin fathers in the nationwide survey completed college, whereas only 7.8 percent in the general population did so. About 40 percent of ronin students' fathers engage in occupations with high social status occupations, while only 14.3 percent of the fathers in the general population have equivalent high status occupations.

Ronin students are more likely to be graduates of college preparatory high schools (see Table 3.2). The college entrance rate throughout Japan was 37.6 in 1986. However, nearly two-thirds of Hiroshima Seminar and over half in the national survey attended high schools with a 90 percent college entrance rate. Second, more male high school graduates became ronin than their female classmates. In both studies about five times as many males as females. Thus, ronin students in Hiroshima Seminar have a similar pattern to those in the nation-wide survey, but students show a slightly more extreme version of the ronin pattern. This can be attributed to Hiroshima Seminar's position at the top of the hierarchy of yobiko in Hiroshima. The findings in this study can reasonably be generalized to other yobiko in Japan. Hiroshima Seminar is thus a representative yobiko which has characteristics of both local yobiko and mammoth yobiko in metropolitan areas.

Table 3.1

Family Background of Ronin Students: Comparison Among  
Hiroshima Seminar, Nation-wide Survey, and General Population

	Hiroshima Seminar	Nation-wide Survey	General Population
Fathers' Education:			
Junior high school	7.4	12.5	48.1 <sup>a</sup>
Senior high school	41.6	39.9	41.1
Junior college	2.3	6.6	3.0
College or above	39.2	33.6	7.8
No response	9.5	5.9	-
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Fathers' Occupation:			
Managerial	21.7	27.3	7.1 <sup>b</sup>
Professional	9.8	13.6	7.2
Teachers	8.0	-	-
White collar	36.9	6.5	13.9
Blue collar	15.6	40.6	59.0
Primary industry	1.0	4.2	2.8
No response	7.3	13.9	0.0
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

<sup>a</sup>Somucho, Nihon Tokei Nenka, 1984, males age-group 45-49, p. 44.

<sup>b</sup>Somucho, Nihon no Tokei, 1985, males age-group 45-54, p. 32.

Table 3.2

Distribution of Ronin Students by Sex  
and College Entrance Rate of High School:  
Comparison between Hiroshima Seminar and Nation-wide Survey

a. Ronin Students by Sex

	Hiroshima Seminar	Nation-wide Survey
Males	87.0	84.4
Females	12.7	15.5
No response	0.3	0.1
Total	100.0% (n=1616)	100.0% (n=3604)

b. Ronin Students by College Entrance Rate of High School

Hiroshima Seminar		Nation-wide Survey	
College entrance rate of high school		College entrance rate of high school	
Almost 100%	32.6	More than 90%	54.9
More than 90%	31.9	40% - less than 90%	37.9
70% - less than 90%	16.6	Less than 40%	7.2
50% - less than 70%	10.3	No response	7.6
Less than 50%	4.7		
No response	4.7		
Total	100.0% (n=1616)	Total	100.0% (n=3604)

### Curriculum and Texts

There are 16 home or assigned classes in Hiroshima Seminar. They are grouped into three types of courses: (1) National University--natural science; (2) National University--humanities and social sciences; and (3) Private University--humanities and social sciences.<sup>1</sup> The class size generally ranges from 100 to 160 students, except for two smaller classes for the Tokyo University course (55 students) and the Kyoto University course (79 students). Students in each class attend the assigned classroom together, then go to different classrooms for a few elective subjects. Ronin students are assigned to each home class by their test scores on a screening test given on entry to the yobiko, combined with their choice of type of course. (See Table 3.3 for detailed classes.)

Generally, they attend classes from 9:00 A.M. to 2:45 P.M., five days per week with an additional few elective subjects after 3:00 P.M. The typical time schedule for the three types of courses is described in Table 3.4. The courses for humanities and social sciences tend to emphasize English and social science subjects whereas the courses for natural sciences tend to stress mathematics and natural science subjects.

Texts are edited by yobiko teachers of Hiroshima Seminar. They include questions previously asked in the college entrance examinations of specific universities and the national common examinations. Similar questions to those previously asked in the entrance examinations are likely to appear in college entrance examinations of the next year.

In each class yobiko teachers give instructions as to how to solve each question and provide correct answers with some explanations.

Table 3.3  
Classes and Ranks in the Yobiko

Ranking	Specific Class	Number of ronin	Standardized (Average) Value of Test for Class (English)
Rank 1	1. Tokyo University . . . . . Natural & Humanities Social Sciences	(55)	(67.8)
	2. Kyoto University . . . . .	(79)	(66.6)
Rank 2	3. Special Class for National University . . . . . Humanities Social Sciences	(130)	(62.7)
	4. Special Class for Department of Medical Sciences (A) . . .	(120)	(62.6)
	5. Special class for National University (A) . . . . . Natural Sciences	(158)	(59.4)
	6. Waseda University . . . . . Humanities Social Sciences	(132)	(60.1)
Rank 3	7. Hiroshima University (A) . . Humanities Social Sciences	(119)	(57.7)
	8. Special Class for National University (B) . . . . .	(131)	(57.1)
	9. Hiroshima University (A) . . Natural Sciences	(155)	(55.5)
Rank 4	10. Hiroshima University (B) . . Humanities Social Sciences	(119)	(51.7)
	11. National University . . . . .	(116)	(48.8)
	12. Hiroshima University (B) . . Natural Sciences	(158)	(49.9)
	13. National University (A) . . Natural Sciences)	(138)	(50.7)
	14. Special Class for Private University . . . . .	(138)	(51.7)
Rank 5	15. National University (B) . . Natural Sciences	(129)	(45.1)
	16. Private University . . . . . Humanities Social Sciences	(122)	(44.6)
	Total . . . . .	(1,999)	(55.8)

Table 3.4

## Typical Class Schedule by Type of Courses\*

## a. Humanities and Social Sciences (National University Course)

	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
9:00- 10:30 A.M.	Classic Chinese	English Composition	English Translation	Basic Math	Classic Japanese
10:45- 12:15 P.M.	Math (Analytic)	Geometry	Japanese	Comprehensive English	English Grammar
1:15- 2:45 P.M.	English Words	Chemistry for the First Exam	Statistics	Japanese History	
3:00- 4:30 P.M.	Essays		Modern Japanese	High Level Math for Humanities	

## b. Natural Sciences (National University Course)

	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
9:00- 10:30 A.M.	Math (Analytic)	English Transiation	Classic Japanese	Classic Chinese	Comprehensive English
10:45- 12:15 P.M.	English Composition	Japanese	Geometry	English Grammar	Basic Math
1:15- 2:45 P.M.	Physics	Calculus	Chemistry for the Second Exam	Physics Exercise	Chemistry Exercise
3:00- 4:30 P.M.	Statistics		Geography for the First Exam	English Words	High Level Math for Science

\*Note: Sunday and Monday are holidays.

Students are expected to solve the questions on scheduled pages of the texts before coming to classes and listen to their teachers' explanations about important points in each question.

The yearly schedule is divided into five terms, as summarized in Table 3.5. Ronin students pay additional fees for the summer and winter sessions in which high school seniors also attend classes.

Ronin students in the yobiko are expected to take five mock exams a year. The schedule of dates for each mock exam and activities in the yobiko are summarized in Table 3.5. From the results in the mock exam, ronin students decide on the department of a university to apply for in the college entrance examination.

### Teachers

Data on the number of teachers in Hiroshima Seminar for all the subjects were not available, but when I attended the meeting and party at the beginning of the term, there were more than 100 teachers present. Information about the teachers' background was regarded as confidential since some of the teachers illegally or secretly teach there. Because I was a teacher of English, I could make the best estimation of the teachers of English and their backgrounds through informal conversations and self-introduction at several meetings.

There are two distinctive groups of yobiko teachers. One is a group of full-time yobiko teachers with long-term experience. They sometimes teach at other branches of Hiroshima Seminar. They usually earn quite a high salary, which is determined through a year term contract with the yobiko. They edit texts and make questions for mock exams.

Table 3.5  
A Yearly Schedule for the Yobiko

---

The Basic Term

- |       |   |
|-------|---|
| April | -Nation-wide basic term for class assignment<br>-Admission ceremony to Hiroshima Seminar  |
| May   | -Nation-wide multiple choice mock exam<br>-Sports day   |
| June  | -First nation-wide essay-type mock exam   |
| July  | -Three person conference (consulting session for<br>parents and students)<br>-Test for reorganization of classes for fall<br>-First essay-type mock exam for private university |

Summer Sessions

- |        |  |
|--------|--|
| August | -Summer session I, II, III, IV, V<br>-Second nation-wide multiple choice mock exam<br>-First mock exam for particular universities |
|--------|--|

The Advanced Term

- |           |  |
|-----------|--|
| September | -Second nation-wide essay-type mock exam   |
| October   | -Sports day<br>-Second essay-type mock exam for private university<br>-Third multiple-choice mock exam<br>-Individual counseling with tutors |
| November  | -Third nation-wide essay-type mock exam<br>-Second mock exam for particular universities   |
| December  | -Second three-person conference<br>-Fourth nation-wide essay-type mock exam<br>-Fourth nation-wide multiple-choice mock exam                 |

Winter Sessions

- |         |   |
|---------|---|
| January | -Winter sessions I, II, III<br>-Application to the National Common Exam |
|---------|---|

Immediately Before Exam Sessions

- |             |  |
|-------------|--|
| January     | -National Common Exam (January 23 & 24)  |
| February    | -Entrance Exams to Private Universities  |
| March 3 & 4 | -Entrance Exams to National Universities |

The other teachers in the English section consisted mainly of graduate students majoring in English at Hiroshima University who worked part-time at the yobiko. They usually neither edit texts nor make questions for mock exams, except for a few long-term part-time teachers. Some experienced part-time teachers teach six courses or more, whereas others teach four or fewer courses.

Because the yobiko is organized for the purpose of preparing ronin students for the college entrance examination, its curriculum covers only the subjects and topics relevant to the entrance examinations. Instruction is explicitly designed to improve the students' chances to succeed in the entrance examination. Teachers review important points students should include in their answers. Students also try to learn what the relevant points are in each subject in the entrance examinations. Organizational arrangements such as taking several mock exams per year and guidance conferences with parents and students are to help the students to be successful in the examination. This is a schooling context in which ronin students lead their lives aspiring to study for the purpose of entering department and university of their first choice the next year.

#### Theoretical Orientation

The research questions that guided this study are derived from the theoretical perspective of symbolic interaction. According to Blumer (1969) it rests in the last analysis on three simple premises. He states:

The first premise is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them. . . . The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out

of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters. (Blumer, 1968:2)

This theoretical orientation emphasizes the more conscious aspects of human behavior or the subjects' own interpretation of social reality. It assumes that human behavior is to be understood as a process in which the person shapes and controls his conduct by taking into consideration the expectations of others with whom he interacts (Becker, 1961:19-20). Social reality is not there outside of the actors' interpretation of it. Social reality can exist as long as they interpret it as "real."

In this theoretical orientation, the most important concern in research is thus the actor's point of view (Schwartz and Jacobs, 1979: 4-5). I studied the matters that seemed to be of importance or of interest to the actors, ronin students. Second, I studied aspects of conflict or tension in social relationships in the yobiko.

Based on the analytic framework of Becker and others (1961) in their study of medical students, my task was to investigate the yobiko and ronin students by looking for what was important or interesting to the ronin students in a collective way, and/or the views of conflict which ronin students expressed. I studied what was of concern or of interest to those students I was investigating because I felt that in this way I would uncover the basic dimensions of the yobiko as a supplementary educational institution by way of its effect on the students. I also studied phenomena that seemed to produce group tension and conflict because it seemed that the study of tensions was most likely to reveal basic elements of the social relationships in the yobiko.

I employed two modes of analysis: a sociological analysis and a social psychological analysis. With the sociological mode of analysis, I was concerned with the collective perspectives shared by ronin students in the yobiko and the organizational arrangements and social "structure" at the macro-level. In the social psychological mode of analysis I dealt with the effects or consequences upon ronin students of the organizational and societal arrangements. These two modes of analysis were mainly conducted by interviewing and observing ronin students, administering questionnaires to them and reviewing documents related to them. The organizational and societal arrangements were introduced when they were seen as important to the students.

Two concepts--"perspectives," "student culture" (Becker et al., 1961)--were used to help describe and interpret ronin students in the yobiko.

"Perspectives" are defined as ". . . co-ordinated views and plans of action people follow in problematic situations" (Becker et al., 1961: 33). Becker and others defined "perspectives" in more detail:

We use the term perspective to refer to a co-ordinated set of ideas and actions a person used in dealing with some problematic situation, to refer to a person's ordinary way of thinking and feeling about and acting in such a situation. These thoughts and actions are co-ordinated in the sense that the actions flow reasonably, from the actor's point of view, from the ideas contained in the perspective. Similarly, the ideas can be seen by an observer to be one of the possible sets of ideas which might form the underlying rationale for the person's actions and are seen by the actor as providing a justification for acting as he does. . . . Note that we avoid specifying either actions or beliefs as prior and causal. In some cases, the person may hold the beliefs and act so as to implement them. In others, he may take some actions and develop the ideas as an after-the-fact justification. In still others, ideas and actions may develop together as the person

attempts to build a new approach to an unfamiliar situation. The person, of course, may not be aware of the connection between his thoughts and deeds that the observer perceives. This requires the analyst to give concrete and reasonable grounds for labeling any given act or ideas as part of a given perspective. (Becker et al., 1961).

This concept of perspective is quite applicable to ronin students in the yobiko who are in "problematic situations."

The other concept was "student culture." It is defined as ". . . the body of collective understandings among students about matters related to their roles as students . . ." (Becker, 1961:47). In the analysis of student culture I examined their basic assumptions and views of the society. The student culture is the reflection of their social reality which was impinged upon by the organizational arrangements in the yobiko and indirectly but strongly by the institutional arrangements or cultural values in the Japanese society.

#### Theoretical Frameworks

In this study two analytic models were utilized to investigate ronin students of the yobiko in the Japanese society. One was a longitudinal model which focuses changes in perspectives on the part of ronin students with the passage of time. It is the time order or careers model in which everything has a natural history with a beginning, a middle, and an end (Wiseman, 1974). In this model my focus was on changes in students' perspectives due to the passage of time in five areas: (1) on being ronin students; (2) on what and how to study for the college entrance examination; (3) on ambition to enter a particular university; (4) on daily activities; and (5) on the yobiko and yobiko teachers. I attempted to describe and interpret changes in the perspectives that ronin students

share by investigating what was of importance and interest to them and what kind of conflicts or tensions they experience in a sequence of time during ronin life. Through this analysis the year of ronin life was divided into three distinctive periods to include: (1) The Initial Perspective; (2) The Middle Perspective; and (3) The Final Perspective. This model forms the basis of Chapters V, VI, and VII, but also inform the overall sequence of chapters.

The second analytic model was a model of the social stratification process at both the macro and micro levels. In the macro-level background I have particularly described the social and cultural background of the Japanese society which facilitated the development of a particular educational system. Secondly, I examined the characteristics of the formal educational system with a focus on the tracking system of high schools and the hierarchical structure of educational institutions. This investigation of the structure of the formal educational system shed light upon why supplementary educational institutions such as juku and yobiko emerged and are institutionalized in contemporary Japanese society. Thirdly, the family background of ronin students was investigated to identify the effects of social stratification on educational opportunity. Fourthly, at an organizational level of analysis, the organizational arrangements in the yobiko were explored to understand what kind of arrangements tended to shape students' perspectives. Special attention was given to tracking system and counseling system in the yobiko. Fifthly, dominant sex role values in the Japanese society were discussed as vertical as well as horizontal social stratification (Gaskell, 1985) in order to examine gender differentiation with regard

to ronin and the yobiko. Finally, at the individual level of analysis, ronin students' self-concepts were explored in relationship to the effects of the organizational and institutional arrangements in the yobiko and in the society.

#### Methods in Data Collection

My fieldwork began with a two weeks' trip to Hiroshima late April, 1985, as a pilot study and a way to get contact with staff members at Hiroshima Seminar. I was employed as a teacher of English in the middle of July in order to teach summer sessions. On the basis of a one-year contract, I taught there until August, 1986. I taught English at Hiroshima Seminar for two years when I was a graduate student in Hiroshima. Since Hiroshima Seminar had an evaluation record of me as a capable teacher, I could easily obtain the position.

A pragmatic fieldworker utilizes all the possible techniques of data collection available in the field setting. Two most crucial questions that we should ask in doing our fieldwork are (1) What kinds of methods and what kinds of information are relevant? and (2) How can the 'goodness of fit' of different methods for different purposes be evaluated? (Zelditch, 1982:168). Each technique of data collection suffers from inherent weaknesses that can be corrected only by cross-checking with other techniques. No research method is without bias (Sieber, 1982:177). All feasible and available methods were utilized in the fieldwork to validate the data collected by different methods and to extend the generalizability of the findings, as well as to enrich the description of the subjects I studied.

### Participant Observation and Unstructured Interviews

The methods of participant observation and unstructured interviews are appropriate for unexplored research areas (Berstein, 1983; Gray, 1973; Leibow, 1967). The purpose of these methods is to gain insiders' account of a social phenomenon instead of imposing social scientists' predetermined categories of concepts upon the actors in understanding them (Schwartz and Jacobs, 1979:4-33). For example, Rohlen (1974) conducted participant observation and unstructured interviews in a Japanese bank. His goal was ". . . to explore, illustrate, and interpret the vocabularies of daily, particular reality as found in the company's organization and as given in the explanation and actions of Uedagin people" (Rohlen, 1974:2-3). The perspectives of ronin students could be explored, illustrated and interpreted by participant observation and in-depth interviews with ronin students themselves in natural settings, since the topic has not yet been well explored.

Participant Observation. This method is designed to observe subjects' actual behavior which may be different from what the subjects would say in interviews. As a teacher of English I had the liberty of observing students' interaction in classrooms and in other settings. My presence did not change students' behavior because yobiko teachers do not evaluate students' activities unlike high school teachers. As a result, observations with their daily activities were conducted in a natural environment. Since I taught at Hiroshima Seminar for over a year, I could conduct a long-term observation of the same classes so that I could observe changes in students' behavior over time. I was a ronin student myself before entering a university in 1974, my ronin experience was used to understand students' behavior and consciousness.

Unstructured Interviews. Unstructured interviews with ronin students were mainly conducted at a coffee shop where we had no interruption from others. In Japanese society, coffee shops are places where people are likely to stay long enough to do their business or to read over a cup of coffee.

I revealed my identity as a researcher to my subjects at the beginning of each interview. Although I was a teacher of English in the yobiko and taught several classes there, the role of being a teacher in the yobiko does not have any power to officially evaluate his students. Instead, he is being evaluated by his students and the staff members of the yobiko. I could engage in chat-like unstructured interviews despite the role of being a teacher.

The first 12 subjects were contacted by me in May 1985 as part of a pilot study for this fieldwork. In interviewing these 12 ronin students, I tape recorded the interviews.

From August 1985 through December 1985, I conducted unstructured interviews with ronin students. Two of the 12 ronin students interviewed in May became key informants who brought their friends to be interviewed. In this style of "snowball" sampling, bias may occur because interviews are being conducted by interviewing homogeneous circles of friends. But in this situation, the two informants had quite different circles of friends.

The total number of ronin students who were interviewed at least once was 71, plus two college students who worked as student aides in the dormitory. Thirty of the students were interviewed more than once. The length of interviews ranged from two to over four hours. For the

first interviews with new ronin students I tape-recorded the interviews with the subjects' permission. Following the first interview, no tape-recording was done. (See Appendix A for the characteristics of the 78 subjects.)

Beginning in early December, ronin students were too busy to come for the interviews so that a different strategy was necessary. I was asked to tutor four different groups of ronin students. One of the groups consisted of six female ronin students from my English class. The second group was made up of two male ronin students who belonged to the same class as the six female students. The third group was composed of two male ronin students who aspired to enter the medical science department, the most competitive department of all. The fourth group consisted of two male students, one of whom had been the key informant who recruited his friends for interviews. I met each group once a week. These four groups were specifically observed and interviewed in order to understand their experiences and psychological state prior to taking their entrance examinations. This method was employed partly because I was asked to help them and partly because this was the only way in which I could share the feeling and psychology of the impending entrance examination. On these occasions, it seemed that the students regarded me as a teacher and not as the researcher.

I did not use a structured interview schedule, but I did have a general list of questions to be covered. After a self-introduction, I generally asked three questions: (1) What were your high school days like? (2) What has happened to you since you became a ronin student? (3) What are your future plans? In order to facilitate questioning in

the interview, the questions in the Interview List (see Appendix B) were used.

### Free Writing Methods

In addition, several other data collection methods were used in which respondents provided written responses.

Self-report Essay. I asked ronin students to write about their views by giving three key words: "ronin, the college entrance examination, and myself." They were encouraged to write about their own views given these key words without any further instruction. I gave this vague instruction since the purpose was to understand what ronin students themselves thing of as important and interesting. More than two-thirds of these essays were collected by the two key informants who assisted by asking friends to write them. Those who wrote the essays were interviewed either before or after writing them. Twenty essays were collected, varying in length from two to ten pages.

The self-report essay data collection technique was specifically designed to understand ronin students' inner consciousness independent of the influence of others' presence. By contrast, a group interview was appropriate to grasp the shared perspectives or views among ronin students, since each one expressed his views on a given topic and they usually reached some consensus. Because of others' presence, some ronin students did not say things that they did not want their friends to hear. Generally, ronin students did not express their anxiety to others and tried to present themselves as cheerful ronin students in the eyes of the others, unless they became close enough to someone to share their anxiety and talk about it. From these essays and group meetings, common

denominators could be constructed in terms of students' consciousness and interpretation of the social reality.

Diary-Interview Method. Another method was that of the "diary-interview" (Zimmerman and Wieder, 1977). In this method I regard a diarist not only as a native performer but also as a reflective informant. I selected one of the ronin students who had written a self-report essay. This ronin student showed an interest in educational problems and had the ability to express his views well in a written form. I asked him to keep a diary for a week in the middle of October covering what happened to him and what he thought of on each day. He agreed to do so and produced 45 pages of his diary of the week. After I read his diary, I went over it with him to clarify ambiguous points.

#### Data for Quantitative Analysis

In addition to qualitative data, quantitative data were collected to extend the plausibility of the findings in the qualitative data analysis.

Self-administered Questionnaire. One of the quantitative data collection methods was a self-administered questionnaire which was conducted following six months of observation in the field. In the first week of December, 1985, the self-administered questionnaires were distributed to all the ronin students attending the classes at that time. All the questions had been previously reviewed by several staff members of the yobiko and several informants among the ronin students. They had agreed that all of the questions were reasonable and important to them. (See Questionnaire in Appendix C.)

### Non-reactive Methods

All of the above methods are "reactive" in nature so that the data collected could be biased toward "normative" answers.

An Analysis of Students' Files. As a method of non-reactive data collection, I utilized the "students' files"<sup>2</sup> in the yobiko. Ronin students had filled out the forms and the content had been confirmed by their parents. The students' files contain information regarding their family background, academic and occupational aspirations, and their test scores in the national common examination (see Appendix D). This method was employed because it is difficult to ask sensitive questions in Japan regarding family background.

Document Analysis. Another non-reactive data collection technique was an analysis of pamphlets of Hiroshima Seminar and several newspapers regarding topics related to ronin and credentialism in Japan and letters to me from ronin students. This data collection is supplementary to the findings by the other methods. This method was particularly appropriate in investigating ronin students' retrospective views of their ronin life. I was interested in whether their perspectives one year later had changed.

In summary, seven data collection techniques were employed to reconstruct these actors' social reality from as many dimensions as possible. When there are contradictions among the data sources, I tended to trust what actors told me simply because that reality is real and significant to them in their interpretation. But actors embedded in complicated social reality and "trapped" in the web of social relationships sometimes cannot see what is going on in the world through

reflective interpretation. Social scientists are therefore able to offer their interpretations of the actors' social behavior and social phenomena by going beyond what the actors understand their social reality to be in a historically specific situation.

## CHAPTER III--NOTES

1. In 1985 when the fieldwork was conducted there were only three courses, but in 1986, Hiroshima Seminar added one course for National university for natural science course.

2. The students' files contain information regarding ronin students' academic achievement test scores, family background, and educational and occupational aspirations. The students' files of the 1985 school year was in use. I used the students' files of the previous year. According to a staff member at Hiroshima Seminar, the characteristics of ronin students are the same between two years.

CHAPTER IV  
FAMILY BACKGROUND, GENDER, AND HIGH SCHOOL TRACKING

Family background and gender are the most important determinants of one's educational aspirations and attainments, although other social and social psychological factors such as tracking in schooling and the presence of significant others may intervene. In this chapter I will discuss the effects of family background and gender on one's selection of high school and the likelihood of becoming ronin. Through this discussion, it will become clear who is most likely to become ronin and what they experienced in high schools of different tracks in Japan.

Family Background and High School

Family background is a crucial factor in differentiating students' tracks in Japanese secondary education (Amano, 1983; Bowman, 1981; Kokuritsu Kyoiku Kenkyusho, 1981; Rohlen, 1983 and Tai, 1984). Students of a higher family social status are more likely to go to academic high schools which are more college oriented than technically-oriented high schools which offer industrial, commercial, agricultural, fishery, and home economics courses.

It is argued that this tendency is related to students' "cultural capital" accumulated at home and with significant others in the family. Theories of cultural reproduction in education argue that cultural capital in the family is a crucial determinant in students' academic aspirations and performance in school, since the hidden curriculum in school represents the dominant cultural values in society (Bourdieu, 1977;

Collins, 1971 and 1977; Dimaggio, 1982; Giroux, 1983; and Willis, 1977). Another theoretical perspective argues that significant others at home promote students' educational aspirations and thus educational attainment (Sewell et al., 1969). Whether it is cultural capital or significant others, family background is definitely related to students' educational aspirations and attainment.

This point is also applicable to ronin students at Hiroshima Seminar. Table 4.1 shows the relationship between family background and high school tracks. Based upon a shared ranking system of high schools in Hiroshima, there are six distinctly ranked groups of high schools from which ronin students graduated. High School 1, High School 3 and High School 6 are private boys' high schools. High School 2 is a group of national high schools. High School 4 and High School 5 are public co-educational high schools in Hiroshima. In general, it can be said that the higher the father's educational attainment, the higher the rank of high schools from which ronin students graduated in the Hiroshima area. Among ronin students from top ranked High School 1, there was no father with only a junior high school diploma. By contrast, in High School 6, the lowest ranked high school, the percentage of fathers with a junior high school education is 10.9 percent. High School 1 students also had the highest percentage of college-educated fathers (61.5 percent) with High School 6 again the lowest (32.6 percent).

Father's occupational attainment is also related to the ranks of high schools from which ronin students graduated. A higher percentage of fathers of ronin students who attended lower ranked high schools are engaged in blue collar occupations.

Table 4.1  
High School Rank by Family Background

	HS1 n=70	HS2 n=51	HS3 n=151	HS4 n=266	HS5 n=144	HS6 n=44
<sup>a</sup> Father's Education						
Junior High School	0.0	4.0	5.5	6.5	8.2	10.9
Senior High School	38.5	56.0	45.5	47.9	44.4	56.5
College or Above	61.5	40.0	48.9	45.6	47.4	32.6
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<sup>b</sup> Father's Occupation						
Managerial	17.2	27.5	25.2	30.1	18.1	31.8
Professional	21.4	7.8	15.2	7.9	8.3	2.3
Teachers	7.1	3.9	8.0	4.1	6.9	9.1
White Collar	51.4	51.0	34.4	42.1	46.5	36.4
Blue Collar	2.9	9.8	16.6	15.8	18.8	20.4
Primary Industry	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.0	1.4	0.0
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<sup>c</sup> Mother's Employment						
Worker	12.3	20.3	23.1	19.9	21.3	25.5
Professional	8.2	5.1	3.9	5.9	9.0	2.0
Housewife	79.5	74.6	73.0	74.2	69.7	72.5
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

<sup>a</sup>chi-square = 19.265    df = 15    p = .202

<sup>b</sup>chi-square = 49.717    df = 25    p = .002

<sup>c</sup>chi-square = 9.915    df = 10    p = .448

These differences are of course much smaller than the differences in the overall populations of the various ranks of high schools, because family background is also an important factor whether or not high school graduates become ronin.

Family background is an important factor determining whether or not high school graduates become ronin. The higher the family social status, the higher the likelihood of becoming ronin. This is not because the children of the higher social status family are likely to fail in the college entrance examination due to their lower academic achievement. Rather, they tend to apply to a more difficult department of a university than their academic achievement scores predict that they will be able to enter, because they can afford another chance to try with economic and psychological support from their parents.

Table 4.2 shows the socioeconomic background of ronin students at Hiroshima Seminar compared with young people of similar age groups in a nationwide survey of ronin and in the general population. Fathers of ronin students had a higher educational attainment than did men of the same parental age groups in the general population. Only 10.8 percent of the age group between 45 and 49 years old completed college or higher education in the census study. However, about 40 percent of ronin students of Hiroshima Seminar and in the nationwide survey came from families whose fathers completed college or higher education.

This finding of the socioeconomic background of ronin students is consistent with findings in a follow-up study of high school seniors two years after their graduation from high school. The study found a high correlation between the family background and the likelihood of

Table 4.2

Family Background of Ronin Students: Comparison Among  
Hiroshima Seminar, Nation-wide Survey, and General Population

	Hiroshima Seminar	Nation-wide Survey	General Population
Father's Education			
Junior high school	7.4	12.5	48.1 <sup>a</sup>
Senior high school	41.6	39.9	41.1
College or above	41.5	40.2	10.8
No response	9.5	5.9	-
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Father's Occupation			
Managerial	21.7	27.3	7.1 <sup>b</sup>
Professional	9.8	13.6	7.2
Teachers	8.0	-	-
White collar	36.9	6.5	13.9
Blue collar	15.6	40.6	59.0
Primary industry	1.0	4.2	2.8
No response	7.3	13.9	0.0
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

<sup>a</sup>Somucho, Nihon Tokei Nenka, 1984, males age-group 45-49, p. 44.

<sup>b</sup>Somucho, Nihon no Tokei, 1985, males age-group 45-54, p. 32

entering higher educational institutions, but the correlation was higher two years following graduation than at the time of graduation. The institution of the yobiko and ronin life play a role in increasing the likelihood that children of higher social status families will enter higher educational institutions, especially the more prestigious universities (Kokuritsu Kyoiku Kenkyusho, 1981).

Gender and Educational Differentiation

Gender differentiation can be seen in the secondary education process (Gaskell, 1985). In Japan, there are different types of courses or tracks in high school and female students consider their futures and choose appropriate career and educational choices. Table 4.3 shows student enrollment distribution by gender across various high school curricula. Although the great majority of students of both sexes choose the academic curriculum, the remaining programs are heavily sex-typed. Courses for industry, fishery and agriculture are selected by male students whereas courses for commerce, home economics and nursing are selected by female students.

Table 4.3

Student Enrollment and Types of Programs in High School  
by Sex

Type of Programs	Sex	
	Males	Females
Academic	70.3	74.0
Agriculture	4.1	1.9
Industry	17.6	0.7
Fishery	0.6	0.1
Commerce	6.4	16.2
Home Economics	0.1	5.4
Nursing	0.5	1.0
Others	0.8	0.7
Total	100.0% (n=2,607,072)	100.0% (2,564,715)

Source: Monbusho Tokei Yoran (Statistical Survey of the Ministry of Education).

Educational differentiation between males and females is also expressed by the student enrollment in higher education. Table 4.4 shows historical changes in student enrollment in higher educational institutions by sex. In Japan more female students tend to go to junior colleges than male students do and the proportion has become more lopsided. Females remain in the minority in four year higher educational institutions although the ratio of female students has been increasing over time.

Another mechanism of educational differentiation between males and females is gender preference in choice of an academic major in higher education, which is considered to stem from the dominant sex role orientation in Japan. Female students are likely to major in humanities, education, and home economics both in universities and junior colleges. Only a small percentage of female students major in natural sciences, engineering, and social sciences.

Table 4.4  
Distribution of Female Student Enrollment by  
Higher Educational Institutions

	University		Junior College	
	Total Enrollment	% Female	Total Enrollment	% Female
1955	523,355	12.4	77,885	54.0
1960	626,421	13.7	83,457	67.5
1965	937,556	16.2	147,563	74.8
1970	1,406,521	18.0	263,219	82.7
1975	1,734,082	21.2	353,782	86.2
1980	1,835,312	22.1	373,124	89.0
1985	1,848,698	23.5	371,095	89.8

Source: Monbusho Tokei Yoran (The Statistical Survey by the Ministry of Education), pp. 72, 73, Monbusho, 1986.

The yobiko as a social institution contributes to reproducing the gender division. Up to the high school level females have aspired to study hard like their male classmates. Especially in the college entrance exam oriented high schools, males and females share a similar value, aspiration for higher academic achievement.

However, males and females tend to take different "tracks" or paths in their decision-making processes for the future. Females begin preparing for their prospective futures, not by considering achieving social status or occupational status in the society much, but by considering the expectations for being good wives, a reflection of the dominant sex role orientation in the Japanese society.

The gender differentiation has already begun when high school students decide to apply to a higher educational institution. More female students tend to start working following high school graduation than male classmates. What type of higher educational institution high school students try to apply to also depends upon gender. Female high school students are more likely to choose to apply to junior colleges or special technical schools than male students. A critical gender differentiation takes place if high school students fail to pass the entrance examination of any university at their graduation from high school. Those male students who fail to pass the entrance examination of the prestigious university of their first choice are encouraged to become ronin and try for it again. By contrast, their female classmates are discouraged from becoming ronin.

Female high school students tend to take several entrance examinations so that they will be assured of entering at least one of them

when they apply to universities. If they cannot pass the entrance examination of any university, they would rather go to a junior college than become ronin. To enter a junior college is considered respectable for females. It is even seen as practical for them to work several years after their graduation from college. If they go on to a university, they would be unable to find an appropriate job afterwards since they are considered too old or sometimes overeducated for the position. In addition, there are only a few professional jobs available for female college graduates. The only exception is to become teachers at various levels of schooling.

Even if females have not passed the entrance examination to the junior colleges, they may still have respectable alternative choices. These include nurse training schools and various kinds of technical schools specializing in such courses as English conversation, secretarial skills, and computer programming. In these various kinds of special schools they can learn enough work skills for an appropriate<sup>1</sup> position in a company.

Upon failure to pass the entrance examination of the university of their first choice, females are less likely to become ronin than males. Table 4.5 shows student composition in the yobiko by sex. Only 12.7 percent enrolled in Hiroshima Seminar are females whereas 87.3 percent are males. This tendency is confirmed by the nation-wide data in the Shingaku Kenkyu Kai survey, which show that females comprise 15.5 percent of the total ronin students of the yobiko studied.

Table 4.6 presents students' responses to the question, "What was the ronin rate of your high school for males and females? Students'

Table 4.5

Distribution of Ronin Students by Sex:  
Comparison between Hiroshima Seminar and Nation-wide Survey

	Hiroshima Seminar	Nation-wide Survey
Males	87.0	84.4
Females	12.7	15.5
No response	0.3	0.1
	100.0% (n=1616)	100.0% (n=3604)

Table 4.6

Distribution of Estimated Ronin Rate of High School by Sex

<u>Ronin</u> Rate of High School	Males	Females
More than 50%	25.2	1.0
40% - less than 50%	17.9	1.1
30% - less than 40%	13.4	2.8
20% - less than 30%	11.4	7.4
10% - less than 20%	9.0	12.9
5% - less than 10%	5.7	24.3
Little	1.5	23.5
No response	15.9	27.2
Total*	100.0% (n=1360)	100.0% (n=1180)

\*Note: Differences in total cases are due to the fact that more students graduated from boys' high schools.

estimate of ronin rate of their high school indicate that more male students become ronin than female students. Over half of the respondents reported that their high school had a 30 percent or higher ronin rate for male students, but only 5 percent of the respondents reported equally high ronin rates for female students. It is evident in their estimation that overwhelmingly more male students than female students become ronin.

This tendency for females to be discouraged from becoming ronin is indicative of the dominant sex role orientation in Japanese society. Becoming ronin is a more serious stigma for females than males. They are not expected to aspire to achieve educational success by entering a prestigious university as males are. Overachievement is a disadvantage for females considering their role in the society.

Upon their failure to pass the university of their choice, some females may decide to spend an additional year on preparation for the entrance examination rather than lower their academic aspirations. But they usually encounter surprising or unexpected opposition to their decision to become ronin. The most severe opposition usually comes from their parents. The parents will say to them, "You don't have to go to a university by becoming ronin because, after all, you are a girl." This expression, "because, after all, you are a girl," symbolizes the dominant sex role orientation assumed by the parents. The Japanese parents in general expect their daughters to make good wives or mothers in the long run, which is considered to be the happiest choice for their daughters. The parents do not want their daughters to become over-achievers or to compete with men. To become good wives, an education at a prestigious university is not necessary. Some may think that

spending a year as a ronin would be disadvantageous to their careers considering their prospective marriages.

The parents try to persuade their daughters not to become ronin, sometimes by refusing to pay tuition for the yobiko. These female students had to persuade their parents by expressing their wishes, future plans, and determination. One of the female ronin students asked for the yobiko's tuition from her parents by giving up the Kimono<sup>2</sup> to be given by her parents on Adult's day. She said:

My parents told me never to become ronin. Since my parents were going to pay for the yobiko's tuition, I persuaded them by saying that I would never need Kimono to wear at Adult Day's ceremony and instead I want to go to the yobiko.

(female, interview, July, 1986)

The majority of female ronin students made every effort to persuade their parents to allow them to attend the yobiko. They were not led by their "education mother."<sup>3</sup> Instead, they themselves decided to spend an additional year on the entrance examination preparation out of their own desire. What made them aspire to do so? They would answer, "I have a university to go to and I have what I want to do there."

The dominant sex role for women in the Japanese society discourages females from achieving higher educational goals by way of becoming ronin. This is especially true of women from the rural areas. If a female student becomes ronin, she should go out of the area. Expressing a socially shared view on females, one male student said:

If a female student becomes ronin (in our area), she has to be gloomy. There are no female ronin in Tokushima City. When female students take the entrance examinations, they are likely to take the entrance examination of a university ranked lower than they definitely pass or enter special junior colleges or schools for nurses in order to avoid

becoming ronin there. . . . Ronin life there is not as free as here in Hiroshima City. People tend to look at you in a peculiar way without saying anything about you.

(male, interview, October, 1985)

Instead of going to a prestigious university, it is therefore seen as better for female students to go to a junior college or special college where they can acquire cultural learning which is necessary for a good marriage.

Female students cannot help feeling negative societal eyes upon them, especially those from high schools with a low ronin rate who feel as if they have deviated from the majority of their female classmates.

One female ronin said about her difficulty in becoming ronin:

Because of the characteristics of our high school there was a feeling of contempt for females to become ronin. Others around us and the school were the same. If we go to the yobiko, we have to come to Hiroshima City (from Iwakuni City forty minutes by train). Such people are the top group of students in our high school. . . . after I failed to pass the entrance examination of the university, I didn't have any place to go. But I didn't think of working since I went to the high school designated for the college entrance examination. I couldn't find such people (around me). . . . In our high school only 10 female students became ronin. The other female students "escaped" to junior colleges or nurse training schools.

(female, interview, July, 1986)

Graduates from girls' high schools are even less likely to become ronin. These female students talked about the ronin rate of the other girls' high schools:

In girls' high school A about 50 female students became ronin but the number of ronin was forced to decrease to 30 by the second chance examination in April.

(four females, interview, July, 1986)

In this girl's high school, teachers and parents made a tremendous effort to lessen the number of ronin students by encouraging their students to take the second chance entrance examination late in March.

However, some female students received encouragement from their mothers. They are professionals so that they want their daughters to become professionals to live financially better or independently. One female ronin student in this situation said:

. . . my case is completely different. In my case I decided not to become ronin in my senior year. Because I am a girl, I thought that a pharmacist was an appropriate profession so that I applied to the department of pharmacy. When I failed, I didn't want to study any more. But looking at friends go to universities, I felt like living such a life. I felt that my parents asked me to become ronin. They told me to go to a university and obtain a certificate as a pharmacist [her mother is also a pharmacist] consideration for my future.

(female, interview, July, 1986)

Female ronin from high schools in Hiroshima City, however, tend to experience less negative social pressure than those in the other cities. These females say that it was natural for them to become ronin in their high schools simply because their male classmates would become ronin.

### Tracking and High Schools

Studies on tracking attempt to contribute new insight into the effect of social stratification by considering the internal mechanisms through which students are sorted and selected in schooling, independently of any effect of family background or any interpersonal and subjective processes discussed in the status attainment models (Alexander, Cook and McDill, 1978 and Heyns, 1974). Alexander, Cook and McDill propose three general questions in studying education:

. . . (1) what are the mechanisms by which socioeconomic background affects curriculum placement; (2) what effect does curriculum placement have upon senior high school achievements (absolute and relative), goals, and behaviors designed to implement these goals when pre-enrollment controls are included; and (3) how severely biased are estimated curriculum effects when pre-enrollment motivations and achievements are not controlled. (1978:53)

In the studies of tracking, there are two competing perspectives on these questions: the meritocratic view and the revisionist view. These competing views make different arguments about the role of choice, the role of guidance counselors, and the end result of these processes. The meritocratic view argues that students freely choose their track placement or that the student's choice is a function of many factors, one of the most important of which is aspirations for further education. The guidance counselor plays an important role in providing students with accurate information about their educational and occupational opportunities and unbiased assessment of their academic ability. The final placement of students serves to tighten the link between ability, aspiration, and school curricula, and to loosen the link between family background and school instruction.

By contrast, the revisionist view argues that student choices play only a minor role in the process, and the assignment of the students to tracks is based on class-related criteria. The guidance counselors play an important role in assigning students into tracks and tend to "cool-out" lower-class students and lead them to choose the lower level of tracks. Due to this process, the results of tracking are related to family background differences (Davis and Haller, 1981).

### The Revisionist View

Rosenbaum (1976) points out the unique independent effect of tracking upon high school students' academic ability by presenting different environments to students in different tracks. The effect on academic ability is brought about by the organizational arrangements in the school which reflects class-bias of the family background of the students. The track assignments are made by way of student consultations with counselors.

The counselors play an active role in assigning students to different tracks by considering their family background. Those students from high socioeconomic status families are encouraged in counseling to select college track curriculum. But those students from a lower socioeconomic status family are discouraged from choosing college track curriculum by being shown their previous grades and their future job possibilities. The crucial factors considered by the counselors are students' family background which are filed in the students' records (Cicourel and Kitsuse, 1963).

Curriculum and teaching methods in different tracks vary enormously. By developing their individualistic strategies to negotiate the institutional contexts in schools, teachers shape and maintain tracking. The gifted and advanced classes concentrate heavily on classical literature, literary analysis, and expository writing which are traditional, college preparatory curricula. At the other extreme, remedial classes are designed to improve literacy and teach survival skills such as job application format. Between them, in the middle-track

classes, teachers teach concepts from the traditional curriculum without literary content (Finley, 1984:234).

Students in high-track classes are exposed to high status content-literature, expository and thematic writing, library research, and mathematical ideas. In contrast, students in lower-track classes are not expected to learn those topics and skills. This wide curricula differentiation increases throughout the years of schooling which differentiates students in terms of academic performance, self-esteem, and aspiration (Oakes, 1986:63).

Rosenbaum (1975) points out different socialization effects of tracking upon students. College tracks lead to differentiating processes within a track. Those students in the college preparatory tracks are socialized to be self-directed personalities whereas those students in vocational tracks learn how to follow orders or regulations set by others. Through this socialization process, tracking contributes to producing different types of personalities, either leaders or followers, to fit the labor market in the capitalist society.

Studies on tracking in France and Canada support the revisionist view. Hout and Garnier (1979) point out the independent effect of curriculum tracking in reproducing class division in France. Education affects status attainment both by mediating the effects of origin status on destination status and by producing variation in attainments that are unrelated to social origin. Much of the effect of education operates through certification, a process which begins with the separation of students into different curricula. The students in the college preparatory curriculum enjoy advantages which increase the likelihood of going

to universities (Hout and Garnier, 1979). Tracking to which students are assigned has the strongest impact on their educational intentions in a Canadian national sample of 360 secondary schools (Breton, 1970). Since tracking assignment has class-bias, ". . . in high-school-to-college transition, the academically and socioeconomically 'rich' become 'richer' . . . while the academically and socioeconomically 'poor' become 'poorer'" (Hearn, 1984:28).

Placing tracking as the core of American secondary education, Rosenbaum characterizes American high school selection as the rule for educational tournament. What he meant by tournament is that ". . . when you win, you win only the right to go on to the next round; when you lose, you lose forever, . . ." (1976:40). The tournament selection has two distinctive attributes. First it creates a process of continual selection; each year selection shifts some students out of the college preparatory tracks. Second, it works in only one direction: students are eliminated from college tracks, but they never enter them (Rosenbaum, 1976:40).

#### The Meritocratic View

Heyns (1974) argues against the class-biased interpretation of tracking. The principal determinant of curriculum placement and grades is a verbal achievement test score, not the father's occupation, education, or family size. Although family background is related to tracking placement, it is almost entirely mediated by differential achievement. Thus, track placement largely results from differential performances on achievement tests.

Based upon their longitudinal study of junior high school students, Davis and Haller (1981) suggest an important modification of Rosenbaum's notion that the high school selection process is a contest where contestants can either be eliminated or enter it. The movement can be in both directions, and to the extent that this two-way movement continues after initial placement through it, the tournament thesis should be modified.

Temple and Polk (1986) also criticize the tournament thesis. By investigating a sample cohort of young men aged 16 through 31, they found that competition for a college degree and graduate school attendance required success at every stage in the process. However, early academic losers did not abandon educational pursuits but continued to struggle. Education is not a tournament. Even if an individual is out in the competition once, he does not necessarily stay out. At least some unsuccessful students work their way back into the success flow and attain a high level of education.

The Japanese educational system is described as a tracking system in a broad sense (Iwaki and Mimizuka, 1983). More specifically, high schools are an institutionalized tracking system (Fujita, 1980). In Japan the tracking system between high schools is much more influential than the tracking within the schools themselves (Yoshimoto, 1984). Differences in the self-concept of academic ability and academic differentiation are much larger between high schools of different levels than are those within the schools. The social prestige of the schools determines the treatment of academic differentiation in the respective high schools, and they tend to be labeled on the rank of the schools *within* the region.

### School Subcultures in the Tracking System of High Schools

There are different subcultures within a high school by different tracks and academic achievement. In the United States the subcultures are usually related to social classes to which students belong in the United States (Hollingshead, 1949). Although there is variation in subcultures within a high school by academic ability in Japan (Ishido, 1982; Kariya, 1985; Matsubara et al., 1980; Mimizuka, 1980; and Takeuchi, 1981), there is a greater difference in subcultures between high schools because the academic and socioeconomic background of students in each high school is homogenized by the entrance examination to senior high schools.

The ranking of senior high schools in a specific area is so institutionalized that junior high school graduates are allocated into specific high schools by their academic achievement as a result of teachers' guidance with students (Yamamura, 1983) or as a result of self-selection process of students (Kariya, 1986). School subcultures affect student schooling experiences importantly. The academic ranks of high schools reflect the characteristics of instruction, hidden curriculum, teachers' attitude, and students self-concepts (Rohlen, 1983 and Shimahara, 1979). Although ronin students graduate mainly from academic college oriented-high schools, there is variation in terms of their school experiences according to the high schools from which the students graduated.

School subcultures here are described as students perceive and interpret their social reality despite their biases or mistakes in reflection. The objective school organization and teachers' perspectives are not discussed simply because all the illustrations come from ronin students.

Through an analysis of field notes on the descriptions of the high schools from which the ronin students graduated, five ideal type profiles of high schools can be derived in relation to preparation for the college entrance examination process.<sup>4</sup> It appears that the school subcultures reported and perceived by students promote particular emphases in relation to preparation for the college entrance examination during the high school year. These five "ideal-type" high schools include: Type I, "The Private-Super Elite" High School; Type II, "The National-Liberal Elite" High School; Type III, "The Public-Urban" High School; Type IV, "The Public-Local<sup>5</sup> Elite" High School; and Type V, "The Marginal-Average" High School.

I. The "Private-Super Elite" High School. This type of high school wins social prestige because of the number of its graduates entering Tokyo University and Kyoto University, which are known as the two best universities in Japan. One of these types of high school sends about 30 graduates to Tokyo University and many of them go to the medical science department of national universities. One ronin student graduating from this type of high school said:

Our high school is a Catholic school, so it is different from ordinary schools. The college entrance rate is 100 percent. Half of our graduates, 100 out of 210, became ronin (among our classmates this year). Ninety percent of those ronin students have come to Hiroshima Seminar.

(male, interview, November, 1985)

The entrance examination to this type of high school takes place at the end of elementary school and no admittance is allowed later than that. Most of the pupils who enter this type of high school have an experience of attending Shingaku Juku or juku for entrance examination,

specially designed for the preparation for prestigious junior high schools. Examination questions are so difficult that they sometimes include enigmatic or puzzle-like questions. They say that the questions in the entrance examination to this type of junior high school are more difficult than those of public senior high schools.

The students in the high school come predominantly from upper or at least middle class families. They are the children of the wealthy and professionals, especially medical doctors. One of the ronin students described the general family background of his classmates:

One-fourth of the students in our high school commute from their homes, but three-fourths were the children of the wealthy. They were all bonbon or spoiled children of the wealthy. . . . They threw out the crust when they ate bread. I was surprised to see it. They were sent a lot of money, 100,000 yen (equivalent to \$800) as junior high school students. They had a lot of clothes in their closet. . . . There was a snack bar in the dormitory and it sold a lot. Some of the students drank 10 bottles of juice. However many bottles of juice they might drink, their parents would send enough money to them. . . . My family is not rich but half of students commuting from their homes are the sons of medical doctors.

(male, interview, September, 1985)

This type of high school employs a faster curriculum than the other types of high schools. The high school finishes all the curriculum of junior and senior high school by the end of the second year of the senior high school. The third year is devoted to preparing students for the college entrance examination by using additional exercises and practice texts. Two ronin students from this type of high school said about their curriculum:

Students in our high school were all serious in the class since the class went so fast. At the third year of junior high school the texts for the first year

of senior high school were finished. All was finished by the end of the second year of senior high school. (male A)

Students started preparations for the college entrance examination very early. They would concentrate on the preparation for the entrance examination exclusively at the beginning of the third year of high school . . . Those who wanted to go to Tokyo University had special supplementary instruction. (male B)

Teachers taught students consciously referring to the college entrance examination. From the first year we had six English classes per week. . . . Yobiko teachers are not much different from our high school teachers. (male A)

(two males, interview, November, 1985)

This type of high school provides its students yobiko-like instruction, offering six English classes per week whereas three English classes per week are offered in an average junior high school.

The dominant values among students in the Private Super-Elite High School are heavily oriented to the college entrance examination and rivalry or competitiveness. Students in this type of high school started being conscious of the college entrance examination when they took the entrance examination to the high school. The class is run on the principle of competition. One ronin student reflected upon his elementary school days in saying:

I liked reading a family encyclopedia since I was in the third grade and I came to read a variety of literature in my childhood. If I studied hard and leveled up my academic record and thus came to have a superiority feeling toward the others. Then studying itself became fun. That's why I studied that hard.

(male, interview, August, 1985)

As this illustration shows, for students in this type of high school, studying itself is not difficult, but it is fun as a means to show that they are superior to the others as a "whole person." They are motivated

to study harder to show their academic ability to the others and thus indicate that they are morally superior persons.

Another ronin student from this type of high school wrote about his former classmates in his high school on the day when he had a discussion with me concerning why they wanted to go to a university. He wrote in his diary:

Such a high school like high school B (our high school) selected only smart students at the entrance to the junior high school. Students tend to compete with one another for such purposes as winning security in life and glory by becoming the employees of large corporations, medical doctors, or an upper-class national civil servant and so forth. They regard going to a university as the means to this. I assume that if a student has a strong desire to compete with others, he will be easily assimilated into the environment to obtain the glory. Why do we aim at Tokyo University and Kyoto University? It is true that we have what we want to do there as we think, but I think that we have a feeling of gaining confidence that we are superior to others at the bottom of our heart by entering such prestigious universities.

(male, diary, October, 1985)

In the school subculture of this type of high school, students are judged in terms of their academic record or achievement. They are seated according to the level of academic achievement. Assimilated into this subculture of competition, they aspire to aim at the most prestigious universities so that they tend to think that if the university is not beyond a certain level of social prestige, it is not worth entering. They wait for another chance to enter the best possible university by becoming ronin for a year.

II. "The National-Liberal Elite" High School. This type of high school is a national high school attached to a national university in a given area. There are only 17 such high schools throughout Japan.

The social prestige of the high school is high, due to its affiliation with the national university and the number of its graduates entering prestigious universities. Their college entrance rate and ronin rate have a similar pattern to the Private-Super Elite High School. The school recruits students at the beginning of elementary school by aptitude tests and a "drawing lottery" and additionally selects students at its highly competitive entrance examination at the completion of junior high school. The school is basically a co-educational six-year high school.

The curriculum in the National-Liberal Elite High School is liberal, as an experimental high school or a model high school for the other high schools in the area. Two female ronin students described the school climate of their respective national high schools as follows:

Because our high school was a national one, our teachers hardly gave us any guidance for the entrance examination. They said that it depended upon our own will. Of course they did not provide any special instruction for the college entrance examination. For example, in Private High School A you can ask for supplementary instruction by paying for it. But we cannot do it since our high school is a national one. . . . Teachers did not "interfere" with what we decide on and the school climate is just like free. When we are asked about our school climate, we feel that we should answer that it is freedom."<sup>6</sup> (female A)

Teachers in our high school devoted themselves to doing their own research so that they didn't teach us with ardor. (female B)

(two females, interview, December, 1985)

As this illustration shows, there is a distinctive difference between the National-Liberal Elite High School and the Private-Super Elite High School in terms of schooling. The question is why the National-Liberal Elite High School tends to produce a similar level of college entrance rate and ronin rate.

This question is also answered by the subculture of this type of school resulting from highly selective admission of students to a national high school. Because students there knew that they won in a difficult entrance examination competition, they tend to think they are selected persons. Ronin students from this type of high school talked about their consciousness of ranking:

Students in our high school . . . are a cluster of persons with pride. Even I didn't want to have such consciousness, I felt bad when I realized that I had such a feeling. (female A)

I would say that all of them (us) in the high school are foolish so that they failed to see others. We acted boastfully by ourselves. I guess that we had elite consciousness. (female B)

(two females, interview, December, 1985)

The subculture in "the National-Liberal Elite" high school shared by the majority of students there socializes them in such a way that they should be proud of themselves and act as such. Consequently, when they apply to a university, they would not apply to any university which does not match their status as elite persons. As a result, they would rather become ronin than go to an alternative, lower-status university.

III. "The Public-Urban" High School. The college entrance rate and ronin rate in this type of high school are similar to the above two elite high schools. One ronin student from this type of high school said:

In our high school, among male students in my class fifteen out of twenty classmates became ronin . . . usually the number becoming ronin per class is about fifteen among male students. Our high school is like four-year high schools.

(male, interview, June, 1986)

Another ronin student from this type of high school also said, "Hiroshima Seminar is the fourth year course for our high school."

Unlike graduates from the Private-Super Elite and the National-Liberal Elite" high schools, ronin students from this type of high school do not aspire to aim for the top universities such as Tokyo University and Kyoto University. The universities of their choice are generally local national universities, especially Hiroshima University in Hiroshima.

This category of high school consists of coeducational public high schools in Hiroshima or in urban areas in big cities. Because of the Sogo senbatsu system<sup>7</sup> for equalizing the quality of students among public high schools in a given city, the level of all the six high schools are equalized so that there is virtually no difference among them. One ronin student remarked on changes after the Sogo senbatsu system was initiated:

Our high school A used to be famous for its tradition in Hiroshima city. But after the Sogo senbatsu system was implemented, the level of the high school is almost the same as the other high schools. The high school was good only a long time ago.

(female, interview, December, 1985)

After "democratization" or "equalization" by the democratic educational reform of the high schools in Hiroshima City, teachers in this type of high school are not motivated to increase its prestige by sending their students to prestigious universities. The same female student further described teachers in her high school:

There were many elderly teachers in our high school. This high school used to be famous so that if teachers retired from this high school, they would be given social prestige for it. There were also young teachers who were smart but were not good at teaching yet. . . . An interesting event took place at the commencement

ceremony. A student representative criticized our teachers for not having taught us seriously. After that students and teachers discussed it. . . .

(female, interview, December, 1985)

The instruction in the school is not entrance examination oriented.

Two female ronin students complained about their former teachers:

Our high school teachers did not teach us with ardor. The contents of classes were not interesting to us. Especially the classes on English and Japanese and Japanese literature were terrible. We were surprised to learn that we should study this way by attending the classes in the winter session of Hiroshima Seminar last year. I thought that I should have come to the yobiko earlier. In the English class in our high school we could take 100 full point scores in the mid-term examination if we memorized everything in our text. I felt that it was worthless (uninteresting).

(two females, interview, December, 1985)

As the above illustration shows, the school climate of this type of high school can be described in the following way. It is coeducational in an urban area with a liberal reform emphasis on equality of education. The school is not organized for the college entrance examination. The teachers teach students what is in the school texts. Some students may have applied to "the Private-Super Elite" and "the National-Liberal Elite" high schools but failed to pass their entrance examinations. Attendance at the public urban high school was their alternative choice. Students aspire to a national or famous private university, but not the most prestigious ones. Academic achievement is but one aspect of their total identity. They enjoy high school life with some preparation for the entrance examination.

IV. The "Public-Local Elite" High School. This type of school is coeducational and would be located in a small or medium size city. It wins the highest prestige in the local area because of its history and

the numbers going on to the national universities in the local area. Though its college entrance rate is high, its ronin rate is substantially lower than the above three types of schools. This is because being ronin is more stigmatized in rural areas than in urban areas.

Instruction in this type of high school is organized for the purpose of the entrance examination. During the summer vacation supplementary classes are offered for students to attend frequently, sometimes everyday. This type of high school employs a rigid tracking system within the school in order to prepare its students better for the college entrance examination. Two ronin students mentioned these topics:

Our high school has a 100% college entrance rate. We didn't have summer vacation and went to school to attend supplementary classes everyday. We didn't have winter vacation, either. The winter vacation was for supplementary classes at school. . . . Those who were planning to apply to private universities did not take a class of "ethics and society." By taking an English class, they regarded it as a credit for "ethics and society." (male A)

Our teachers were so enthusiastic or eager that they tried to save any student. They tried to direct all of us in the school to some extent. It was a wonderful high school. There were different classes in the school. Four classes were for natural science department courses and six classes were for humanities and social sciences department courses (in terms of applying to the departments of given universities). (male B)

(two males, interview, October, 1985)

This type of high school is mainly organized for the college entrance examination in practice, while it maintains educational guidelines from the Ministry of Education as a public high school.

The strict examination-oriented curriculum in this type of high school is due to its rivalry situation with other "public-local elite" high schools in given local areas. It is organized to win more social

prestige than rival high schools in the area. This rivalry consciousness is mainly held by teachers of the high school. One female ronin student attending this type of high school wrote about her reflection upon her high school:

. . . I entered High School A which is the best high school in our area. I didn't doubt that I would become closer and familiar with our teachers and enjoy studying more in the senior high school than in the junior high school. But I realized that it was a big mistake and became very disappointed with it. Our teachers talked only about the college entrance examination. They only talked about how many of the graduates of the high school entered Tokyo University or Kyoto University this year or that our high school was behind in terms of college entrance rate in comparison with other high schools. They only talked about what I despised most. Then in the end they said that so-called juvenile delinquents were not "human beings." They also said that those of us who entered High School A were "chosen people" so that we should be proud of ourselves.

(female, composition, October, 1985)

Though this student did not necessarily have rivalry consciousness toward the other high schools in the given area, her teachers tended to have such a consciousness.

Teachers in this type of high school direct their students in daily instruction and guidance counseling in such a way that the prestige of the high school is elevated in the local society. One male ronin student said about the classroom climate:

High School A attempts to improve its college entrance rate as a school. For example, it was taken for granted that students who did not need a particular subject could sit at a desk facing opposite to their teachers and study the subjects necessary for the college entrance examination in the classroom. Of course when the entrance examination dates approached, the classes were reorganized for students to take any class (necessary for the entrance examination) sitting at desks according to their academic achievement.

(male, interview, November, 1985)

As this illustrates, students are encouraged to study for the college entrance examination by their teachers and even with the teachers sometimes violating the school's official rules.

Consequently, teachers conduct a strict guidance system to improve the college entrance rate of the high school. They try to persuade their students to enter a particular university instead of risking applying to the university that they might fail to enter. Since the number of high school graduates passing prestigious universities at their graduation will be a crucial criterion for the high school's prestige, teachers carefully persuade their good students to apply to safe, prestigious universities so that the number of "passes" into prestigious universities increases in total.

Teachers tend to point out specifically their school's rivals in the area. A group of male ronin students talked about their former teachers' attitudes.

High School A is the top entrance exam-oriented high school like High School N in Kure city. Teachers in our high school had great rivalry consciousness toward High School N. After a mock exam was over, the teachers talked openly about how much we were either behind or head of High School N in the particular mock exam, expressing their rivalry consciousness. A teacher who graduated from High School N said that students in High School M were "pigs" because they were inferior to those of High School N but High School M was different from a rural high school like High School H. Our teachers were not strict in counseling of a choice of a university to apply to. Even I could apply to Osaka University though it would be impossible for me to pass. But that also depended upon the students. When one of my friends told his teacher that he wanted to apply to Hiroshima University, he was told by his teacher to give it up because it would be absolutely impossible. In the case of High School N, the guidance counseling is much stricter than High School M. I hear that those who may pass Kyoto University were persuaded

to apply to Hiroshima University by their teachers. That's because High School N is famous for sending its about 80 graduates to Hiroshima University and it was reported in Sandai Magazine (or a special issue of a weekly magazine). The school seems not to have lost its reputation.

(Two males, interview, October, 1985)

Though students themselves did not necessarily show their rivalry consciousness toward the other similar local elite high schools in the area, their teachers tended to be explicit about this consciousness. It seems that the teachers tried to use this consciousness to encourage their students to study harder. But students interpreted it differently and despised the teachers' attitude very much. When I asked what they felt when their teachers referred to the rival high schools, one female ronin student said, "We didn't care about what our teachers said, 'stupid teachers'."

It is argued that the college entrance examination is a competition among high schools just as other organizations in Japan compete with one another, because Japanese society is group-oriented (Shimahara, 1979; Vogel, 1979; Yamamura, 1981; 1984). This argument is most applicable to the local elite high schools which have rivalries to compete with in the local area, but not necessarily true of the other types of high schools. The other types of high schools are categorized as elite high schools or marginal high schools and know their fixed position in the hierarchy so that they will not compete with one another. Second, even if each high school has a rivalry sense toward the other high schools, this consciousness is shared more by the teachers of the school, as their own status competition rather than by the students. Students

regard their competition in the college entrance examination as their individual striving for higher social status or a better self-concept.

Table 4.7 shows ronin students' responses regarding their rivalry consciousness when they were in high school. About 80 percent of the students responded that they did not have any rivalry consciousness toward other schools. But about half of these students would say that their teachers had such a consciousness toward other schools and encouraged them to compete with students in other high schools.

The table also indicates that among students responding that nearly half the students from Public-Urban (D) and Local-Elite (G) high schools perceived that their teachers had a strong sense of rivalry, which the students feel much less rivalry. This can be interpreted as indicating that teachers in middle rank high schools such as Public-Urban and especially Local-Elite high schools teachers encourage their students to study harder by creating rivalry consciousness toward other high schools. But teachers in National-Liberal high schools do not have to promote such a consciousness, but the students believe that they are bright. The students there study hard by themselves without being encouraged by their teachers or by the college entrance oriented curriculum. Amano (1986a) points out that the intensity of the college entrance examination competition exists in the middle rank high schools, not elite high schools based on their research on students from elite high schools who entered the most prestigious universities.

The Public-Local Elite High School is the most strictly college-oriented high school next to the Private-Super Elite High School. At a normative level this type of high school should not be an entrance

Table 4.7

## Rivalry Sense toward Other High Schools by High School

Answers	High Schools*							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	
Yes, I did	24.3	18.7	33.3	14.1	22.3	15.8	21.1	20.7
No, but our Teachers did	39.2	17.2	28.9	46.2	33.9	42.1	55.0	44.5
Neither I nor our Teachers did	36.5	64.1	37.8	39.7	43.8	42.1	23.9	34.8
Total cases	100.0% (74)	100.0% (64)	100.0% (90)	100.0% (277)	100.0% (251)	100.0% (19)	100.0% (551)	(n=1326)

\*Note: A and C = "Private Super-Elite"  
 B = "National Liberal-Elite"  
 D = "Public-Urban"  
 E = "Marginal-Average"  
 F = Girls' high schools  
 G = "Local-Elite"

exam oriented high school because at a public high school, students are supposed to be taught "cultural knowledge for personal development." However, unlike the "Public-Urban" high school, the school is explicitly organized for the entrance examination.

V. "Marginal-Average" High School. This type of high school is the average school representing the majority of high schools in Japan. The college entrance rate is less than 40 percent and only a few of the students become ronin. The school is not organized for the college entrance examination. This type of high school is not necessarily located in rural areas. Even in the center of big cities we can identify such high schools. The high school is placed at the lower tracks in the tracking system of high schools in the area. They are mainly private high schools which are different from the "Private-Super Elite" High School in that those who fail to pass the entrance examinations of public high schools tend to go to this type of high school. In rural areas, except for a few "Public-Local Elite" high schools, the other public high schools are regarded as this type of high school.

The school climate is quite relaxed without involving the college entrance examination system. One male ronin student who came from this type of public high school in a rural area in Hiroshima prefecture said about the classroom atmosphere:

Our high school was terrible. No one listened to what our teacher taught in class. We talked with friends in the class. Our teacher also said that if we didn't trouble others, we didn't have to listen to him.

(male, interview, February, 1986)

Neither teachers nor students are serious about the college entrance examination in general in this type of high school, so that instruction

is not organized for it and students tend to chat with their friends in class.

In the center of Hiroshima City there are several private high schools of this type. One male ronin student who graduated from such a high school describes what it was like:

Our high school is the one which has nothing to do with the college entrance examination. The school itself was fun and teachers were fun (or enjoyable) but in terms of the college entrance examination our school was completely useless. There were (only) three "bright" students in our high school. It would be useless for the rest of the students there to try to study hard. The classes were not taught seriously. The classes were so noisy that we couldn't study (in the classroom) at all. For mathematics I attended a special supplementary class personally. The English teacher didn't teach me anything when I went to ask questions because he was afraid of being asked questions. . . .

[What is the college entrance rate of your high school?]  
 Few students have entered any national university. Every student entered a university by way of a "recommended entrance examination." Some entered Waseda University by "recommendation" but by "sports-recommendation" . . . . Only three of us became ronin, and we attend Hiroshima Seminar.

(male, interview, June, 1986)

Students in this type of high school do not aspire to enter the most prestigious universities, but what they want to do is to enter a better university than their academic achievement at the time of their graduation from high school would allow them to enter.

Students from this type of high school tend to have not only low educational aspirations but also a feeling of inferiority about their high school. Therefore, many of these graduates do not apply to any prestigious university, let alone become ronin in order to apply to a prestigious university. Two male ronin students from this type of high school expressed their feelings about their high schools:

I don't mention about our high school (to others in the yobiko). Nobody knows about the high school. If I mentioned its name, I will be made fun of (for it). Only three of us became ronin, two of whom went to yobiko B in Fukuyama City. (male A)

Our high school is a rural high school (a country high school). If I talked about our high school in the dormitory, I will be laughed at. Do you know Chugoku Block Moshi (or a united mock exam system of Chugoku Area)? In the mock exam our high school is ranked so low that we can easily count its position from the bottom. (male B)

(two males, interview, November, 1985)

In summary, the school subculture of the Marginal-Average High School tends to discourage its students from aspiring to higher educational achievement. Teachers do not expect their students to enter any good university from the beginning so that they teach their students as such. Students, in turn, do not listen to teachers in the classroom. Only a very few students of this type of high school become ronin in order to apply to a good university. They aspire to do so partly because they are considered exceptionally bright students at the school and partly because their siblings went to universities.

Given these subcultural differences, there should be a correspondence between the tracking of high schools and the tracking within the yobiko. There is self-selection to attend and prepare in given tracks in a yobiko, with graduates from the "Private-Super Elite" and "National-Liberal Elite" High Schools with higher tested abilities, pride in their abilities, familiarity with demanding preparatory curriculum consonant with yobiko's demands, and competitive drive for passing the college entrance examination as reflecting the core identity of the "whole person."

### Self-Evaluation and Tracking

The institutionalized tracking of high schools contributes to shaping ronin students' self-evaluation in general. At the early stage of ronin life, they tend to view other ronin in terms of the high schools from which they graduated. Those from more prestigious high schools are viewed with more respect than those from lower prestigious schools.

The historical tradition and the social reputation of sending their graduates to prestigious universities reinforces such stereotypical views. This is also because the rank of each high school is visible to all high school students, teachers, and parents. The test scores in the unified entrance examinations to enter public high schools differentiate the achievement levels of students attending given schools. In selecting high school students, the counseling guidance home teachers tend to "slice" their students by combined test and grade scores to place them in "appropriate" schools. Students know the relative ranks of the schools to which they have been counseled to apply. Moreover, each school supports a particular model subculture of academic achievement due to the homogeneity of its students. The established ranking of high schools affects ronin students in evaluating others.

Two male ronin students talked about their high schools:

When I heard of Shudo High School or Hiroshima Gakuin, I thought that those students in these high schools are people "above the clouds." They are geniuses.  
(male A)

When I was in junior high school, our teacher often told us that there was a high school called Shudo High School. Students there always studied a lot and that we also had to study harder. (male B)

(males, interview, December, 1985)

When they entered the yobiko and met students from these elite high schools, they were likely to have a sense of inferiority toward them simply because of their stereotypical image of students of high schools established in high school days. Some did not want to mention the name of their high school and felt ashamed if they revealed it. Due to the visibility of hierarchical rankings of all the high schools in local areas, even after they became ronin students, they turned to the stereotypes in evaluating their classmates in the yobiko.

Ranking consciousness of particular prestigious high schools began at the end of elementary school, when pupils faced the reality of the entrance examination for the first time in their lives. There are a few "private-super elite" six year high schools to which the top pupils of each elementary school aspired. One male ronin student talked about the "Private-Super Elite" high school:

Talking of High School A, I feel hikeme or a strong sense of inferiority toward it. After all they are superior to us. . . . Such pupils who entered High School A were far brighter than the rest of us from their elementary school days. . . .

(male, interview, October, 1985)

There are special Shingaku Juku or juku for the entrance examination for these "Private-Super Elite" high schools. Two male students who went to such Shingaku Juku described their experience and views of others:

Those pupils who attended such Shingaku Juku made fools of their classmates in the elementary school. And they also made fools of their teachers. (male A)

Those pupils attending Juku M put more value upon the classes of the juku than upon those of the elementary school. All of top twenty pupils of our high school attended the Juku and they were far brighter than their other classmates. . . . In the case of the junior high school course in the Juku, students took so many

tests and they were ranked according to each test score. Teachers in our high school taught only the texts and in English class we only listened to English tapes and were given a literary translation of the text so that everyone in the class made light of instruction . . . I suspect that teachers thought that they didn't have to teach us the preparation for the college entrance examination because those bright students went to the Juku. (male B)

(two males, interview, October, 1985)

Male B's story about the Juku included an episode about a pupil who was absent from school in order to study for the periodic tests in the Juku. Those who attended Shingaku Juku internalize the value of academic achievement as the core of their identity and used it as the standard by which to evaluate others.

Thus, social stratification process through the "tracking system" of schools started as early as the end of elementary school. Those who attended Shingaku Juku perceived that they were elite students in comparison with the others in the elementary school, and later they entered the "Private-Super Elite" high schools. In the eyes of elite students, students in public high schools look stupid. In daily conversation, they would say openly, "They are stupid." Those who fail to enter the "Private-Super Elite" high schools enter the local prestigious public high school and then look down on the others in lower ranked high schools with a sense of superiority.

Some ronin students had a sense of inferiority due to their personal experiences. In the entrance examination to the senior high school, almost all junior high school students took several entrance examinations, ranging from "Private-Super Elite" high schools to public high schools and private high schools. Generally, among those who aspire to achieve educational success, "Private-Super Elite" high schools were their first

choice, with public high schools second. To avoid becoming a junior high ronin they were expected to take the entrance examination of private high schools which were ranked lower than the other high schools. One ronin student solidified his sense of inferiority to those in Shudo High School because he failed to enter it upon graduation from junior high school:

I came from High School B. When I took the entrance examination for high schools, I failed to pass the entrance examination of Shudo High School and passed that of High School B. Now when I see those students from Shudo High School, I still think that they are superior to me. . . . Students in our high school are all stupid. When I had been studying to take the entrance examination to Waseda University, others said, "You are only showing off that you are studying." The others in our high school went to Shudo University or Hiroshima Keizai University by leveling down their designated university (which are ranked lower in the hierarchy of universities).

(male, interview, September, 1985)

There is a sense of superiority on the part of those attending the "Public-Local Elite" high schools toward the other high schools in the local area:

Those students of High School H are really poor in academic achievement. I feel bad saying this. They sometimes failed to pass the screening test to Hiroshima Seminar. (What were such students going to do?). I guess that they would go to either Yobiko A or Yobiko B in Hiroshima city. Yes, Yes, I know some who failed to pass the test.

(two females, interview, September, 1985)

In each local area they have the shared common understanding of the relative position of each high school in the hierarchical structure. Almost all the high school students therefore tend to have a social evaluation of the school and thus a self-evaluation due to the relative rank position of the high school.

A Correspondence: The Relation of High School Tracking  
to Tracking of the Yobiko

The research questions of interest focus on the relationships between two systems of tracking (one involving the tracking patterns among high schools and the other within the yobiko as recipient of students from high schools). To what extent do the high school processes and rankings continue to affect yobiko processes and outcomes? Three aspects of the characteristics of high schools are used as variables influencing yobiko entrance and tracking: (1) the social prestige of the high school; (2) the rate of college entrance of the high school; and (3) the ronin rate of the high school. A central process within the high schools which may influence the adaptation of those who seek yobiko assistance for entry into high educational settings involves the subcultures of the five types of high schools described above.

Three analyses of the relationship between the ranks of classes in the yobiko and the characteristics of high schools from which ronin students graduated indicate a correspondence between the tracking systems of the high schools and the tracking system in the yobiko (see Tables 4.8, 4.9, and 4.10). First, the higher the social prestige of the high schools from which they graduated, the higher the ranks of the classes to which students are assigned in the yobiko. Second, the higher the college entrance rate of the high school, the higher the ranks in the yobiko classes. Third, the higher the ronin rate of the high school, the higher the ranks of the yobiko classes.

These findings suggest that those who enter prestigious high schools by the entrance examination to senior high schools are likely to maintain

Table 4.8

The Relationship between Tracking in the Yobiko  
and Prestige of High School

<u>Yobiko</u> Class	Prestige of High School <sup>a</sup>				
	A	B	C	D	E
Rank 1	44.7%	41.5%	16.7%	2.1%	0.8%
Rank 2	44.7	32.3	44.4	22.5	15.8
Rank 3	4.0	13.9	25.6	22.8	21.0
Rank 4	6.6	12.3	13.3	40.0	39.1
Rank 5	0.0	0.0	0.0	12.5	23.3
Total Cases	100.0% (76)	100.0% (65)	100.0% (90)	100.0% (285)	100.0% (253)

Gamma (G) = + .587

Chi-square = 327.604    df = 16    p = < .001

<sup>a</sup>High schools are ranked according to prestige: high school A is the highest and high school E is the lowest in prestige rank shared in the Hiroshima area.

or even improve their academic achievement for the college entrance examination more than those who enter less prestigious high schools. The students from less prestigious high schools will not expect to exceed their former classmates from junior high school who entered the more prestigious high schools, even with improved performance in the less prestigious high schools.

In sum, family background, tracking, and gender affect who becomes a ronin. Ronin students overrepresent the children of the families of higher social status. The higher social status families can afford their children's additional year of exam preparation. Graduates from college entrance oriented high schools with high college entrance rate tended

Table 4.9

The Relationship between Tracking in the Yobiko  
and College Entrance Rate of High School

<u>Yobiko</u> <u>class</u>	College Entrance Rate of High School				
	Almost 100%	More than 90%	70% - less than 90%	50% - less than 70%	Less than 50%
Rank 1	16.2%	3.1%	2.2%	3.3%	1.5%
Rank 2	37.5	25.7	19.7	18.0	26.5
Rank 3	19.1	21.8	25.6	26.7	16.2
Rank 4	20.8	38.9	31.8	34.0	32.4
Rank 5	6.4	10.5	20.7	18.0	23.4
Total cases	100.0% (462)	100.0% (440)	100.0% (233)	100.0% (150)	100.0% (68)
Gamma (G) = +.318					
Chi-square = 168.173      df = 16      p = < .001					

Table 4.10

The Relationship between Tracking in the Yobiko  
and Ronin Rate of High School

<u>Yobiko</u> <u>class</u>	<u>Ronin</u> Rate of High School						Little
	50%	40% - less than 50%	30%- less than 40%	20%- less than 30%	10%- less than 20%	5%- less than 10%	
Rank 1	25.4%	8.8%	4.1%	2.2%	1.5%	3.8%	0.0%
Rank 2	33.3	31.2	27.3	27.3	24.6	17.1	32.4
Rank 3	16.4	20.0	24.7	20.5	24.1	29.5	16.2
Rank 4	18.3	29.6	35.4	34.3	33.2	32.4	27.0
Rank 5	6.6	10.4	8.5	15.7	16.6	17.1	24.3
Total cases	100.0% (213)	100.0% (250)	100.0% (270)	100.0% (268)	100.0% (199)	100.0% (105)	100.0% (37)

to become ronin because the school cultures of their high schools encourage them to aspire to more prestigious universities by becoming a ronin. Due to the dominant sex role in Japan females are more discouraged from becoming ronin than males. Thus, male students who come from high social status families are likely to go to higher ranked high schools and then to become ronin than others.

Aspiration, Achievement, Family Background,  
and Tracking of High Schools

Did family background affect ronin students in the actual academic achievement of those students who became ronin in addition to its effect upon the ranks of high schools from which they graduated? Academic achievement may be measured by the scores the students received on the National First Common Examination which they took during their senior year in high school.

The average total score on the National First Common Examination of all applicants was 642 points in 1984, whereas the average total scores of ronin students at Hiroshima Seminar the same year was 695. The ronin students on the average scored higher on the National First Common Examination. According to data published by Obunsha (Shukan Asahi, 1985), if a student expects to pass the entrance examination of the department of law at Tokyo University, the student has to score at 883 or better. If the student applies to the department of law at Hiroshima University, the required score will be 747. However, if the student expects to pass the entrance examinations of the departments of law at Shimane University or at Kagawa University (both of which are located in medium-size cities), the respective required scores on the National

First Common Examination will be 652 and 666. As far as the achievement scores on the National First Common Examination were concerned, many ronin students could have entered national universities if they had applied to the lower ranked national universities. Thus, the higher achievement scores on the National First Common Examination gained by ronin students than all the applicants to national universities show that ronin students are aiming for the relatively higher ranked national universities or prestigious private universities, not because they are true failures.

Table 4.11 shows the mean and standard deviation scores on the National First Common Examination of ronin students by their family background. The higher the fathers' educational attainment, the higher the test scores. The test score differences between fathers with junior high school education and those with college or higher education is 26 points in a test with 1000 total points.

Ronin students with professional fathers obtained the highest scores in the test whereas those with blue collar fathers scored the lowest. The children of housewife mothers were likely to gain a higher score than the others, but the difference is quite small.

Did family background affect ronin students' aspirations? To answer this question, Table 4.12 is presented to show the relationship between academic aspiration in terms of the ranks of the university which they aspire to apply to and family background for the national university course. The findings suggest that better-educated parents encouraged more realistic aspirations in their children. Students whose parents had only a high school education were disproportionately more likely

Table 4.11

Mean and Standard Deviation Scores of the  
National First Common Examination  
by Family Background

	Mean	Standard Deviation	(Cases)
<b>Father's Education*</b>			
College or above	703	97	(401)
Senior high school	689	98	(404)
Junior high school	677	92	( 58)
<b>Father's Occupation **</b>			
Managerial	706	104	(183)
Professional	716	96	( 98)
Teachers	680	91	( 80)
White collar	696	97	(366)
Blue collar	668	95	(148)
Primary industry	680	91	( 9)
<b>Mother's Employment</b>			
Professional	687	96	( 68)
Worker	687	94	(194)
Housewife	698	98	(684)

\*indicates statistical significance at the .05 level by F-test

\*\*indicates statistical significance at the .01 level by F-test

to have aspired to rank 1 universities, which students whose parents had college education were likely to have aspired to lower-ranked universities. The same pattern can be seen by occupation, with children of professional parents and teachers disproportionately aspiring to rank 3 universities, and children of lower white collar workers aspiring disproportionately to top ranked universities. These figures do not represent the actual correlation between family background and college aspiration

Table 4.12  
Academic Aspiration by Family Background

National University			
	Level of University to Aspire		
	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3
Father's Education <sup>a</sup>			
College or Above	44.6	45.2	59.3
Senior high school	52.5	47.7	33.0
Junior high school	2.9	7.0	7.7
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0
Father's Occupation <sup>b</sup>			
Managerial	22.2	19.4	20.8
Professional	9.0	10.3	21.9
Teachers	7.7	8.1	12.5
White collar	49.3	39.9	34.4
Blue collar	11.8	20.7	10.4
Primary industry	0.0	1.6	0.0
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0
Mother's Employment <sup>c</sup>			
Professional	5.3	7.8	12.1
Worker	19.7	21.1	14.1
Housewife	75.0	71.1	73.8
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0

<sup>a</sup>chi-square = 18.390    df = 9    p = .031

<sup>b</sup>chi-square = 30.344    df = 15    p = .011

<sup>c</sup>chi-square = 6.035    df = 6    p = .419

in the general population, only within that segment of students who failed in their first attempt and then became ronin. A related implication that can be drawn from these findings is that better educated and more professionally oriented parents are willing to support a ronin year to ensure that their academically marginal children can enter even third ranked universities, which less-educated parents and those with lower occupational levels are only willing to support a ronin year for their most academically promising children.

As previously discussed, the correlation between the tracking system of high schools and tracking within the yobiko was high as measured by three indicators of the tracking of high schools: (1) the prestige rank of high schools, (2) the college entrance rate of high schools, and (3) the ronin rate of high schools. This is confirmed by this data set of students' files in Table 4.13. There is a strong relationship between ranks of high school and rank placement in the yobiko. Students from high school of the top two ranks are placed overwhelmingly into the top ranks in the yobiko. Rank 3 high school graduates also do well in the yobiko rankings but were placed predominantly into the second rank in the yobiko. Students from high schools of the top three ranks are almost never placed in the yobiko's rank. Consequently about half of the graduates of the lowest ranked high schools are found in the bottom rank of the yobiko.

First, which is the more important effect upon academic achievement, family background or the ranks of high schools from which ronin students graduated? To provide a direct comparison between the family background and tracking of high schools, a series of regressions were carried out.

Table 4.13  
Tracking in the Yobiko by High School

Ranks of High Schools	Ranks in the <u>Yobiko</u>					Total
	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5	
Rank 1	45.2	32.9	16.4	2.7	2.7	100.0%
Rank 2	48.5	35.6	13.6	1.7	1.7	100.0%
Rank 3	22.0	46.5	21.4	9.4	0.6	100.0%
Rank 4	2.4	24.3	29.9	28.1	15.3	100.0%
Rank 5	1.9	25.0	18.0	39.1	16.0	100.0%
Rank 6	5.9	7.8	19.6	19.6	47.1	100.0%

Gamma (G) = .563    chi-square = 336.830    df = 20    p = < .001

Only two groups of independent variables are considered and the unique variance associated with each is calculated. These regression analyses are presented in Table 4.14.

Table 4.14  
Academic Achievement for National University Course  
by SES<sup>a</sup> and High School Tracking<sup>b</sup>

	R <sup>2</sup>	Added R <sup>2</sup>
<u>Yobiko</u> Rank <sup>c</sup> = SES	.011	---
<u>Yobiko</u> Rank = SES + HS Track	.246	.235
<u>Yobiko</u> Rank = HS Track	.240	---
<u>Yobiko</u> Rank = HS Track + SES	.246	.006

<sup>a</sup>includes father's education, father's occupation, and mother's employment.

<sup>b</sup>Tracking means the tracking of high schools.

<sup>c</sup>Rank means ranks in the yobiko.

Four regressions in the national university course indicate that high school tracking plays a much greater role than the family background in explaining the variance in academic achievement among ronin students. Ranks of high schools add 23.5 percent to the variance explained in yobiko rank (which is based on a placement exam), while the family background variables add less than 1 percent. For the private university course, a difference in added  $R^2$ 's between the family background and high school tracking is smaller than that between them in the national university course.

What determines one's academic aspiration most among the family background, tracking, or academic achievement? In order to answer this question, the ranks of the university one aspires to apply to were regressed on the family background, high school tracking, and academic achievement (see Table 4.15). In the national university course, academic achievement plays the greatest role in predicting the variance in the ranks of the university of aspiration, followed by rank of high school. The family background plays the smallest role. The unique contribution of academic achievement ranged from 13.5 percent to 11.3 percent. It explains six to nine times more than the family background and twice more than tracking of high schools. This indicates that ronin students engage in a realistic assessment of their achievement in the college entrance examination and aspire to a first choice university according to the assessment. Their aspiration is mildly affected by the school culture in which they learned what level of universities they and their classmates should aspire to enter. The most important finding here is that the family background plays a negligible role in their aspiration when the effects of the other two variables are controlled.

Table 4.15

Summary Multiple Regression Analysis Examining Contribution  
of SES, Academic Achievement,\* and High School Tracking  
of Academic Aspiration\*\*

National University Course		
	R <sup>2</sup>	Added R <sup>2</sup>
Aspiration = Academic	.131	---
= Academic + HS Track	.193	.062
= Academic + HS Track + SES	.218	.015
Aspiration = Academic	.131	---
= Academic + SES	.149	.018
= Academic + SES + HS Track	.218	.069
Aspiration = SES	.014	---
= SES + Academic	.149	.135
= SES + Academic + HS Track	.218	.069
Aspiration = SES	.014	---
= SES + HS Track	.095	.081
= SES + HS Track + Academic	.218	.113
Aspiration = HS Track	.077	---
= HS Track + SES	.095	.018
= HS Track + SES + Academic	.218	.123
Aspiration = HS Track	.077	---
= HS Track + Academic	.193	.126
= HS Track + Academic + SES	.218	.015

\*Note: Academic is measured by test scores on the National First Common Examination.

\*\*Note: Academic aspiration is measured by the level of the university that students aspire to.

Who is likely to attain the highest academic achievement? This question is not concerned with the unique contribution of each variable to the explained variance in the dependent variable, but with the effects of each variable upon increasing the value of the dependent variable (academic achievement scores in this case).

A regression analysis of academic achievement scores was conducted to examine what relevant variables other than the variables discussed earlier contribute to increasing the academic achievement scores. In this case the achievement scores are the National Common Examination scores taken during the senior year in high school by students (now first year ronin) who applied to a national university. Table 4.16 shows a multiple regression analysis of academic achievement scores by family background, high school tracking, high school activity and sex. The variable of high school tracking is significant at the .01 level belonging to a cultural club affect students' academic achievement scores at the .05 level of statistical significance while controlling for the other variables. One school rank difference can be expected to increase scores by 43 points (there is a maximum 1,000 points possible in the National Common Examination). Those students who belonged to some sort of cultural club can expect to get 38 points more than those students who were engaged in some sort of sport club activities. This indicates that the rank of high school and the type of school activity are important enough to differentiate high school students' academic achievement in the entrance examination.

The next question is what contributes to "warming-up" ronin students' aspirations to pass the college entrance examination. Table 4.17 shows

Table 4.16

Multiple Regression Analysis of Prediction of  
Academic Performance on the National Common Examination  
Taken in High School Senior Year

	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	T-value
Father's Education			
College	-4.32	-0.021	0.48
Senior High School	a		
Junior High School	-10.72	-0.023	0.59
Father's Occupation			
Managerial	13.86	0.055	1.11
Professional	23.38	0.071	1.44
Teacher	-20.07	-0.046	1.02
White Collar	6.21	0.030	0.59
Blue Collar	b		
Primary	12.71	0.008	0.21
Mother's Employment			
Professional	19.36	0.049	1.24
Worker	-0.30	-0.001	0.03
Housewife	c		
High School Tracks	43.06	0.554	14.32**
School Club Activity			
Sport	-14.97	-0.074	1.75
Culture	23.34	0.083	1.99*
None	d		
Sex			
Female	-26.46	-0.071	1.87
Male	e		
Intercept	851.13		

N=802

F = 18.987    P>F 0.001    R<sup>2</sup> = .343    Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = .325

Note: The letters a, b, c, d, and e indicate respective comparative group (with a dummy variable) in each category.

\*indicates statistical significance at the level of .05.

\*\*indicates statistical significance at the level of .01.

a regression analysis of the level of university of first choice aspire to during the senior year of high school, by family background, academic achievement, high school tracking, high school activities, and sex.

The variable of academic achievement measured by the National First Common Examination scores in the high school senior year was significant at the .01 level and having a father with a professional occupation affected a student's university aspirations at the .05 level of statistical significance while controlling for the other variables.

Findings in these two multiple regressions of academic achievement and aspirations also suggest that students' sex is related to the level of aspiration and academic achievement although the differences between sexes are not statistically significant. In these two regressions, female students tend to have a lower academic achievement and aspirations than male students.

In summary, this chapter examines how students were differentiated prior to becoming ronin. The chapter focuses on the effect of family background, high school tracking and its school culture, and gender upon academic achievement and aspirations. Family background plays an important role in tracking students into different high schools. Gender is also an important factor in regard to the high schools to which students aspire or are allocated. The ranks of high schools and their school cultures affect students' aspirations and academic achievement while in high school. Family background, high school tracking, and gender affect students' likelihood of becoming ronin. The higher the family social status, the higher the likelihood of becoming ronin. The higher the ranks of high schools, the higher the likelihood of becoming ronin. More male students than female students are likely to become ronin.

Table 4.17

Multiple Regression Analysis of the Level  
of University Aspired to as a High School Senior

	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	T-value
Father's Education			
College	-0.031	-0.017	0.349
Senior High School	a		
Junior High School	0.083	0.021	0.475
Father's Occupation			
Managerial	-0.176	-0.080	1.461
Professional	-0.313	-0.109	2.024*
Teacher	0.071	0.019	0.379
White Collar	-0.047	-0.026	0.471
Blue Collar	b		
Primary	-0.251	-0.019	0.449
Mother's Employment			
Professional	-0.237	-0.070	1.599
Worker	-0.073	-0.033	0.761
Housewife	c		
High School Tracks	0.034	0.051	1.002
Academic Achievement	0.004	0.461	9.106**
School Club Activity			
Sport	0.078	0.044	0.932
Culture	-0.025	-0.011	0.244
None	d		
Sex			
Female	-0.080	-0.025	0.594
Male	e		
Intercept	4.89		

F = 10.307    P F 0.001     $R^2 = .244$     Adjusted  $R^2 = .221$

Note: The letters a, b, c, d, and e indicate respective comparative group (with a dummy variable) in each category.

\*Indicates statistical significance at the level of .05.

\*\*Indicates statistical significance at the level of .01.

The ranks of high schools and school activities predict students' academic achievement along with the smaller effect of family background and gender. While family status has no systematic effect on students' aspirations, school culture and status, and gender have an important impact upon students' aspirations. High school status also affects students' self-evaluation so that school status and culture have a pervasive effect on students' self-concept before they became ronin.

The organization of the yobiko reflects the social stratification. The correspondence between the ranks of high schools and the ranks of classes in the yobiko mirrors the reproduction of academic differentiation among students seen in high school tracking. The yobiko is more explicitly organized to promote differentiation of academic achievement and aspirations than high schools. Students are assigned to classes at Hiroshima Seminar according to their placement test scores. Table 4.18 summarizes 16 classes at Hiroshima Seminar with regard to the average standardized test scores of each class, the names of classes, class size and type of course. The yobiko divides its students into these 16 classes on the basis of a combination of type of department they aim to enter and their overall academic achievement. There are two top classes, Tokyo University and Kyoto University which include students in both natural sciences and social sciences-humanities. In lower ranked categories there are five classes in the natural sciences-national university category, ranked by placement exam performance. For humanities and social sciences students there are seven classes, the four for national universities and the three for private universities.

Table 4.18  
A Summary Table of Classes in the Yobiko

Ranking	Specific Class	Number of <u>ronin</u>	Standardized (Average Value of Test for Class (English))
Rank 1	1. Tokyo University . . . . . Natural & Humanities Social Sciences	(55)	(67.8)
	2. Kyoto University . . . . .	(79)	(66.6)
Rank 2	3. Special Class for National University . . . . . Humanities Social Sciences	(130)	(62.7)
	4. Special Class for Department of Medical Sciences (A) . . .	(120)	(62.6)
	5. Special Class for National University (A) Natural Sciences	(158)	(59.4)
	6. Waseda University . . . . . Humanities Social Sciences	(132)	(60.1)
Rank 3	7. Hiroshima University (A) . . . Humanities Social Sciences	(119)	(57.7)
	8. Special Class for National University (B) . . . . .	(131)	(57.1)
	9. Hiroshima University (A) . . .	(155)	(55.5)
Rank 4	10. Hiroshima University (B) . . . Humanities Social Sciences	(119)	(51.7)
	11. National University . . . . .	(116)	(48.8)
	12. Hiroshima University (B) . . . Natural Sciences	(158)	(49.9)
	13. National University (A) . . . Natural Sciences	(138)	(50.7)
	14. Special Class for Private University . . . . .	(138)	(51.7)
Rank 5	15. National University (B) . . . Natural Sciences	(129)	(45.1)
	16. Private University . . . . . Humanities Social Sciences	(122)	(44.6)
	Total . . . . .	(1,999)	(55.8)

The screening of students in admission to the yobiko is done based upon the students' academic performance on the English test. Not all students applying for admission to Hiroshima Seminar actually entered it. Some failed to enter Hiroshima Seminar and went to the other yobiko in Hiroshima.

English test scores are regarded as the best indicator for students' potential for progress during ronin year at Hiroshima Seminar. From its long experience of evaluating students' potential and observing English test scores' high correlation with the test scores in other subjects, the yobiko divides students into different classes. The English test in the entrance examinations is a test that requires students to learn rules and patterns with accuracy. This reflects the fundamental nature of academic ability to be explored in the entrance examination competition. By learning systematic facts and rules relevant to exam questions for the entrance examinations, students expect to improve on their academic achievement best.

This tracking system within Hiroshima Seminar primarily based upon academic performance in the English placement test will impact ronin students' aspirations, academic achievement and self-evaluation during their ronin year among relatively homogeneous groups in terms of family background and academic achievement. In comparison with the general population of the same age group, ronin students are aiming to relatively prestigious universities.

The following three chapters will describe how ronin students experience ronin life in the yobiko from the beginning to the end.

## CHAPTER IV--NOTES

1. In companies positions available for female works are limited mainly to secretarial or clerk positions, usually assisting positions for male workers in Japan. Skills and knowledge learned in special training schools are considered to be appropriate for the existing positions for female workers. This is set by the companies to use cheap and fresh labor of young female workers without providing more important or responsible positions. The term appropriate here is used in a quotation indicating that skills and knowledge are appropriate to the existing sex role in Japanese society.

2. Kimono is a traditional Japanese piece of clothing. People used to wear one daily in the Edo era of feudal Japan. But now women wear Kimono only on special occasions. Kimono is no longer an everyday costume, and it is very expensive. Adults' day, January 15, is one of the special occasions when young women wear Kimono and attend a ceremony to become "adults" in society. Almost all the young women wear Kimono on this special occasion. The prices of Kimono range from 2,000 dollars to 50,000 dollars.

3. Education mother is a popular image of Japanese mothers who encourage or sometimes force their children to study hard for the entrance examinations to send the children to prestigious high schools or colleges. This image of the Japanese mothers was most popular in the 1960s and the mothers were criticized in the mass media for their excessive involvement with their children in studying for the entrance examination. In a discussion of the close relationship between mothers and their sons, as amae, in Japanese culture, it is argued that mothers drive their sons to engage in the entrance examination competition. It seems that my subjects of ronin students did not have their education mothers unlike the image of the mothers in the mass media. This may be partly attributed to the fact that my subjects are in their late adolescence and become independent of their education mother at their age.

4. Rohlen (1983) provides his observation of five different school cultures in Kobe City. Five ideal types of high schools in this dissertation do not include "Sakura" or a technical night high school and "Yama" or a commercial high school described by Rohlen because ronin students came mainly from the college entrance examination-oriented academic high schools.

5. The term "Local" is defined as indicating small or medium size cities in this dissertation. Local does not necessarily mean rural. It is used to indicate the medium size cities between rural areas and urban or metropolitan large cities.

6. Generally, Japanese high schools are rigidly organized. Especially the college entrance examination oriented high schools have little freedom among students. But the national high schools (only 17 of them in Japan) served as models for other schools and encourage their students to be free and creative in any school activities and curriculum. In this context, the national schools have much more freedom for their students than other types of high schools.

7. Sogo Senbatsu literally translated as an integrated system of selection was implemented in order to equalize the level of public high schools in big cities. Due to the competitive entrance examination to senior high schools by a unified test in each prefecture, the hierarchical structure of public high schools was formed in a specific area. Historically the different academic levels of high schools had been enlarged. This reform is practiced on the basis of the democratic principle to reduce differences among high schools. For example, in Hiroshima City students take a unified entrance examination to public high schools. The students who achieved certain test scores in the examination obtain admission to one of six public high schools in Hiroshima City. But which high school a student will be assigned to is decided by these six public high schools by considering their home address and academic achievement in order to equalize the levels of six public high schools in Hiroshima City.

## CHAPTER V

### THE INITIAL PERSPECTIVE: FAILURE AND NEW START

#### Societal Views of Ronin

Different views of ronin in Japanese society will be discussed in this section by referring to the term's original meanings and contemporary views expressed by newspaper letters to the editor. The purpose of this section is to describe what the meaning of ronin is for people in Japanese society, and to identify the dimensions of being ronin as expressed in the newspaper, before discussing how ronin students in this study interpreted their status.

Originally, the term ronin meant those wanderers who left their home area and traveled to other provinces. The number of ronin increased in the Heian period of the eighth century and some became samurai. In the Tokugawa period (between 1603 and 1868) ronin meant samurai who had lost their masters. After the Meiji era, ronin referred to those students who failed in the entrance examinations and did not have student status and unemployed workers who were seeking new jobs, especially those who had finished schooling but could not obtain a job. The image of ronin was of a person who was free but unstable in social status and suffered from economic difficulty so that he was isolated from the rest of the world. But the term ronin was not used for unemployed workers in the lower social strata, only for those who were waiting for a good job after completing higher school education or even university at that time.

A ronin has the potential to achieve a higher social status but he has not realized it yet (Ikeda and Yabana, 1982:11-14).

The contemporary meaning of the term ronin usually refers to a high school graduate who has failed in the college entrance examination but wishes to try again the following year, and has resolved to prepare either independently or at a yobiko. A high school graduate who failed in the college entrance examination and simply decided to start working in a company or factory is not considered to be a ronin.

Ronin are described as a problem in the newspapers in general. The titles of articles regarding ronin in the newspapers include the following: "Ronin stabbed his mother after getting angry at his mother's words, 'Study hard!'" (February 22, 1981), "A female ronin burned herself to death," "Another suicide by ronin because of his anxiety over the entrance examination." When the newspapers reported an incident in which any ronin students studying for the college entrance examination was involved, they attributed the causes of the incident to anxiety or stress related to the "examination hell." Thus, the image of ronin in the mass media is stereotyped as a victim of the "examination hell" in the Japanese educational system. It always has a gloomy or negative connotation.

One of the stories that the mass media reported about ronin students is of the high correlation between ronin status and suicide. According to the statistics of the Ministry of Health and Welfare, the number of suicides of persons aged between 15 and 19 was 2,217 in 1960 while the number of ronin students was about 83,000. In 1970 the number of ronin students was about 130,000 while the number of suicides of the age group was 757. In 1975 when the number of ronin students was over 180,000,

the number of suicides of the age group was 857. Thus, there is no relationship between suicides of the age group and the intensity of the examination competition or the number of ronin students, despite the popular belief that the "examination hell" causes the supposedly high suicide rate among Japanese students (Ikeda and Yabana, 1982:24-26).

A letter from a female ronin to the editor of a major newspaper describes what being ronin means to her. Her letter prompted eleven additional letters from other readers depicting what being ronin means to them. Her letter to the editor of the newspaper reads as follows:

#### Is Ronin Life a Blank Space in Life?

I failed a college entrance examination this spring and started attending a yobiko. A yobiko teacher said to us, who attend classes only for the entrance examination, "Ronin is not youth. You should finish this kind of period only for a year because (being a) ronin suppresses desire and hope in youth."

In a T.V. program three people who experienced ronin life discussed it and said, "Ronin life is basically meaningless." A college professor also said, "A college student without ronin experience makes progress more easily than those with ronin experience. People in the society use the term Jukenjigoku or the "examination hell" and those yobiko and high school teachers who teach us for the entrance examination say that studying for the entrance examination is in vain and it is not real study.

People say that a ronin life is meaningless and vain and children today are pitiful. In this environment I lead a ronin life. I do so to devote myself to studying to enter a university and engage in the examination study as a means. I do not go to a university without any purpose. But I have a vague purpose that I do go to realize my dream based upon my ability and interest. I would like to expand and master the knowledge necessary for the realization of my dreams. I became ronin despite my parents' opposition to it and did not apply to the university of my second choice because I could not give up my present dream and did not want to compromise with what I can do easily. I

wanted to train myself to my limit. I thought that ronin life for me is a suffering period as a stepping-stone to reach my dream. I believe that I must experience self-satisfaction.

I believe that there must be contentment in my endurance for my dream and what I want to do. But teachers say that it is a futile suffering. Some professors said that those students with ronin experience will not progress well. It is not the youth's meaningful suffering for personality development. From the very beginning, I started not feeling like studying somehow and my dream becomes far away from me suddenly so that I am at a loss, suspecting that I made a wrong choice of becoming a ronin.

Some people even say that I become a ronin even though I am a girl. I feel as if ronin life were a blank space in my life. I will be happy to hear from you, seniors, about your opinions regarding ronin.  
(Asahi Newspapers, April 29, 1986)

Ronin life is a challenge for this female ronin student. She did not want to "compromise" by entering a lower level university which she could have entered very easily. She did not apply to such a university as a second choice. When she failed to achieve her goal, she chose to become a ronin against her parents' advice and the societal norms for females. It was her decision that made her ronin. She wanted to try herself to her limit so that she was prepared for "suffering" from this trial as a stepping stone for her "dream" and believed in the meaning of suffering in itself. She regarded ronin life as meaningful because it is a challenge for training herself and she chose to do it.

However, she began questioning the meaning or value of ronin life for her. She thinks that ronin life is meaningless because "studying for the college entrance examination is vain and it is not real study." She distinguishes between "false" study and "real" study. It is false because it is only a "means" to enter her first choice university. It has no meaning in itself. By contrast, "real" study is done to "realize"

her dream by expanding her knowledge and learning skills for it. In short, she doubts her ronin life because of its short-term instrumental nature.

In my interview with her, she said that she began regretting her ronin life because she was rebelling against her parents. She felt guilt toward her parents because she did not take their advice as a good daughter.

She questioned her ronin life due to her "deviant behavior" as a female in the Japanese society. The internalized dominant sex role value was in conflict with her wishes.

Her initial firm decision with which she persuaded her parents to agree to her plan was shaken and fading away due to the negative views of ronin life in the mass media, from a yobiko teacher, and a college professor.

Letters responding to the female ronin's letter to the editor are categorized into three types. The first type of letter simply regards ronin life as "meaningless or useless." Writers of this type of letter attributed reasons for their views to the instrumental nature of studying for the college entrance examination by saying, ". . . Don't you think that many ronin students are 'brushing up' their study for the college entrance examination only as arms in 'the entrance examination war'" (A college student, 18 years old). Another criticizes ronin life as useless because ". . . ronin students do not contribute to their society. Ronin life is only for consumption." (A graduate student, 24 years old). The third person negates the legitimacy of ronin life by saying "Ronin whom I frequently saw in a train were talking only about which Pachinko

Parlor is better or about Mahjong. I wonder what they do in their ronin life. I want you to give up the illusion that if you become ronin, everything would be possible . . . Ronin life is only an exceptional means . . . " (A high school teacher, 25 years old).

The second type of letter points out the positive aspects of ronin life. One of them emphasizes the impact of ronin life upon human maturity or personality development. He says, ". . . such people (as spend a year or more in ronin life) had attractive personality unlike students without ronin experience and a firm vision for their future. . . ." (A college student without ronin experience, 20) or saying, ". . . I want you to spend your ronin life for personality development and expand the scope of your world view, and acquire the ability to understand others' suffering." (A college student, 22 years old). Another regards ronin status as a challenge for self-actualization.

The third type of letter is "sympathy letters or sharing of experience letters." This type of letter is from those who experienced ronin life themselves. They pointed out four reasons why ronin life was severe for them. These four reasons include: (1) uncertainty about success in the college entrance examination for the next year, (2) results are everything, (3) negative views from others in the society, and (4) ronin life is a life without status. One of the letters says, "Ronin life was more severe than I thought. If you became a ronin, it was not guaranteed that you would be able to pass the entrance examination without fail."

The above discussion is by no means a comprehensive coverage representing societal views of ronin. However, at least eleven letters

responded to the female ronin student's letter in the newspapers. This fact itself indicates that the issue of ronin is a topic of interest in the Japanese society. Second, the three types of letters represent the three most important views which are commonly shared by ronin students themselves: believing in human personality development, engaging in a negative evaluation of the meaning of ronin life, and experiencing suffering from uncertainty, anxiety, and lack of social recognition.

### The Start

High school students become ronin after failing to pass the entrance examination of the university of their choice. They begin their ronin life with one resolve: "I failed to enter the university but I am determined to pass the entrance examination of a university ranked higher than that this year." On receiving the news of failure in their entrance examinations, or sometimes even passing the entrance examination of the university that their teachers advised them to enter, they discuss their future plan with parents, friends, and high school teachers and finally decide to spend an additional year of study in preparation for the college entrance examination of the next year. They make their final decision to become ronin on their own. They do not start the ronin life by choice, but at the same time it is their own decision to embark on this new life.

Ronin life is not a static but a dynamic process in which ronin students change their perspectives according to their position in the time sequence of ronin life. At the very beginning of their ronin life they tend to have not only a stigmatized image of being ronin in the eyes of the society but also a promising perspective about their future,

especially about their possibility to pass the entrance examination of the university of their choice if they study hard in a stimulating environment, the yobiko, where energetic teachers teach them better than their former high school teachers and their fellow ronin students appear to be studying much harder than their former classmates in high school.

Up to the end of the basic term (from April to July) of the yobiko year, they share the initial perspective of hope. The summer session, starting in the middle of July, ronin students tend to change their initial perspective into a middle perspective on the basis of a changed perception of their situation. During this second phase a hopeful and promising ronin life is fading and they are filled with anxiety. By this time they cannot believe in a myth of success through hard work when facing their slow improvement in the objective achievement score in the mock exam.

Then as time passes by, in the third phase of the process of ronin life, the majority of ronin students acquire a final perspective in which they wish to terminate their ronin life by entering any university while still hoping to enter the university of their choice by stepping up their study effort.

This chapter will cover the immediate period after their failure of the entrance examination and their initiation into ronin life. High school boys and girls have experienced the first significant failure in their lives.

The social status of being ronin is a stigma to the students who compete for the more prestigious universities. This status is similar to the stigma held by an unemployed worker during the Depression

illustrated by Goffman (1963:17). The unemployed workers could not help feeling "wholly inferior" to "an average citizen" and felt that ". . . everybody is pointing at him (me) with his finger. He (I) instinctively avoid meeting anyone. Former acquaintances and friends of better times are no longer so cordial" (Goffman, 1963:17). Likewise, ronin students graduated from their high schools, then suddenly they do not have any social status with which to identify. They are neither high school students nor college students. Ronin status comes as a shock as well as a stigma. Before graduating from their high schools, they had always had a firm social status of being students.

How do they respond to this stigmatized image of being ronin after they themselves become one? How do they recover from their shock of failure and give meaning to their ronin life? What kind of perspective do they share in describing their situation and status? How do they live their ronin life?

These are major questions that this chapter will attempt to answer by referring to the actor's viewpoint, expressed in ronin students' own accounts. Each actor in the society has a perspective on social reality in accordance with his or her position in the society. The descriptions and discussion of the yobiko and ronin students and their perspectives are derived from the ronin students' own accounts and my observations, plus some supplementary views about ronin students and the yobiko provided by those involved in the yobiko such as yobiko teachers and tutorial staff members.

Most ronin students thought that they had been prepared for their failure since they had evaluated their scores in a series of mock exams.

But they could not help feeling shocked to see their results. One female ronin student wrote about her feelings:

"There was a storm in Shinji Lake. We pray for your next challenge" (this statement should be interpreted as indicating that she failed to pass the entrance examination), a telegram to her said. I said to myself, "I was prepared for this . . .". But actually I could not hide my shock (I could not help being shocked at my failure in the examination). I could not forget that indescribable feeling that I had to become ronin. It was as if I had been hit by something like a hammer and my heart was nearly torn. My heart was filled with mixed feelings such as regrets of my bad health condition in taking the exam, my inefficient way of studying, unluckiness on my part, the humiliation of being a loser, and sorrow for my parents.. For the time being I could not do anything at all.

(female, composition, October, 1985)

This student took only one entrance examination of a national university in her area because her family's financial situation would not allow her to attend an expensive private university in another large city. At the same time she did not want to take the entrance examination of a private university near her hometown because of its poor reputation, although she was quite confident that she would have passed the examination if she had applied for it.

In facing the fact of their failure, the ronin students are determined to try again the next year. To some extent, they predicted their failure but hoped that it would not happen to them. But as time passes by, they are determined for a new challenge. One male student who took the entrance examination of the University of Tokyo, the most prestigious national university in Japan, said:

In front of the board which displayed the names of those who passed the entrance examination, I said to myself, "I couldn't make it as I thought . . ." I

felt neither regretful nor sad at this result. But I realized that it was an evident fact. . . . On the day I made all the arrangements to enter the dormitory of Hiroshima Seminar and took the entrance examination to the yobiko. . . . On the train to Hiroshima, I felt so sad without any reason. And I realized how different passing the exam is from failing to pass it. Then I was determined to pass the exam next year by convincing myself that I would not be defeated again and would pass it next year by all means.

(male, composition, August, 1985)

He was very depressed at his failure in the entrance examination only for a short while before starting his new life, ronin life.

Some were so shocked that they did not even feel like looking at their high school texts for a long time, much less making any arrangements to enter the yobiko. One of them said:

When I found that I had failed the examination, I was so shocked that I did not feel like looking at my high school texts for a month. I didn't look at any exam. And I entered the yobiko by way of my high school's recommendation.

(male, interview, July, 1985)

The majority of ronin students said that they had taken their failure in the examinations as something expected or taken for granted and thus it was not a shock for them. Those students who graduated from prestigious private high schools which yield a high percentage of ronin students were less likely to take their failure seriously. One of them said:

When I took the entrance examination to one of the private universities, I had given up thinking of passing the entrance examination of the national university. I was not good at English so that it was natural. It was OK for me to become a ronin student because almost all of my classmates became ronin students (in our high school). Of course it was better to enter the university without becoming ronin, but it was still OK for a year, but not more than that.

(male, interview, November, 1985)

The National Common Examination was designed to reduce the psychological pressure of high examination competition among applicants by enabling students to predict more or less whether or not they would pass the entrance examination of the national university to which they wished to apply. The total scores obtained in the National Common Examination are sent to each national university to which the applicant applied and are to be added to the scores gained in the second examination given by the university itself. The weight given the scores of the National Common Examination and those of the second examination depends upon each university.

Although students knew in advance that they were likely to fail the examination on the basis of their own estimated scores in the National Common Examination with consideration of its weight in the total scores, they decided to take a chance. They thought that if they had to apply to an appropriate university according to their estimated scores, they would rather fail to pass the entrance examination of the university of their choice. They felt that the appropriate university was not worth applying to. Therefore, they would not feel much shock at their failure simply because they had prepared to fail and become ronin.

For some students, taking the entrance examination was a gamble and they bet their chance on luck. While knowing the objective predictions of their chances, they hoped to go beyond a passing score on the entrance examination of a particular university by bringing about a miracle in the second examination, praying for good luck to come to them in taking it. One male ronin student said, "Among our high school graduates, there are some Ippatsugata or gamblers. These students had

not done a good job in a series of mock exams and had always been playing with others. This attitude towards the entrance examination may be an attempt to reduce the degree of their shock at failure. They might say, "I failed it because I was unlucky."

Although some students preferred to become ronin rather than to apply to universities which ranked lower in their perceived hierarchy of universities, they still experienced some ambivalent feelings. One male ronin student who took only one entrance examination to a prestigious university said:

I didn't feel shocked at my failure in the examination simply because I thought that I would probably fail to pass it. But I felt envious of those classmates who entered the lower ranking universities. Of course, I did not take the entrance examination to these universities.

(male, interview, October, 1985)

A specific comparative reference group (Singer, 1981 and Kemper, 1968) also tends to determine how much shock students feel. If a student failed to pass the entrance examination that his friends had passed, his shock was greatly elevated. One male ronin student of this type wrote about his feelings:

One of my classmates took the entrance examination of the same department of the university that I took. He was a student who had never been "defeated" by any mock exam in our high school. Several days after I received the news that it was only I who failed in the examination, I wondered why he passed it and felt terrible. Later on I checked the materials for guidance (in our high school) and found that I did better in the National Common Examination than he did. Whenever I looked at the guidance materials, I felt mortified and felt even more miserable.

(male, composition, September, 1985)

The same failure in the entrance examination was interpreted differently, depending upon with whom a student compared himself. In this ronin student's case, he could not predict his failure on the basis of the accumulated guidance materials and his achievement scores in a series of mock exams. He believed that he would definitely pass the entrance examination, even saying to his parents, "There will be no way for me to fail to pass the entrance examination." He was shocked at the result because of the surprising gap between his expectation and what really happened to him.

Moreover, his friends' success in the same examination intensified his shock. He thought that he was the best student among the three who took the same entrance examination from his group according to previous objective achievement scores in a series of mock exams. He did not dream that he would be the only student who would fail. In finding out about his friends' success, he felt "unreasonableness" or "bad luck" and he could not help resenting them. Because he was evidently defeated by those who supposedly had less ability than he had, he felt miserable about himself.

A student also felt shocked to find out that only he became a ronin student from among his friends graduating from the same high school.

One male ronin student in this case described how he felt about it:

I was a member of the rugby football team. Only I became ronin from among ten members of the club. Every member always said that he would definitely become a ronin. When we had a farewell party among the members of the club, I asked one of them who had said that he would surely become ronin, "Which yobiko are you going to?" He answered that he passed the entrance examination of the university of his first choice. I was really shocked to hear that. I was the only student who became a ronin among the members.

(male, interview, January, 1986)

In his case he felt sad because he found that he was the only ronin to be at the party. He understood that it was all right to become a ronin because there were many classmates who planned to become ronin in his high school. While his friends told him that they would become ronin, they actually made every effort to avoid becoming ronin.

The concept of the comparative reference groups may help to understand why these students felt "injustice" or "unfairness" when they found that only they became ronin. The comparison groups provide the actors with a frame of reference which serves to make evaluative judgments about the equity of one's fate (Kemper, 1968:32). This equity group is used as a frame of reference for judging whether or not one's situation or fate is fair or equitable. These students also had a feeling of relative deprivation (Singer, 1981). The essence of this relative deprivation is:

. . . that a person (group) wants X; does not have it; and feels entitled to it--that is, expects to get it--on the basis of comparison either with similar others or with self at an earlier time, or on the basis of awareness of the norms governing the situation . . . The outcome of such feelings of inequality or relative deprivation is a sense of injustice, . . . (Singer, 1981:88)

Not all ronin students experienced failure in the entrance examinations. In some high schools, especially in the "Local-Elite High School," the guidance system is so rigidly structured that students are encouraged or even forced to take the entrance examination of a particular university that they actually do not want to enter. Teachers in these high schools, thinking of their schools' reputation and their students' security, would say that if the student would not take the entrance examination of a university recommended by them, they would not write the necessary forms for application for the entrance examination.

Therefore, the student could not help taking the entrance examination of the recommended university and passing it. Later, however, he would decide not to attend the university. One ronin student said:

I didn't go to Kyushu Institute of Technology although I passed its entrance examination. Because of my high school teacher's guidance, it was only this college that I could apply to. The teacher did not allow me to take the entrance examination of the other universities. Since I thought that whatever I might say to the teacher would be useless, I followed his guidance obediently. I really wanted to go to the department of medicine so that I came to Hiroshima Seminar without informing the teacher. . . . Teachers in our high school wanted all of their students to pass the entrance examination of some university. All the students but one passed some university exams and almost all of them were happy to enter the universities that they did not intend to apply to as their first choice. About forty-five students entered national universities among students in our high school

(male, interview, May, 1985)

As this ronin student talked about his teacher with some resentment, he thought that he had to become ronin simply because the teacher did not allow him to apply to the medical science department of another university. In his case he became ronin without experiencing failure in the entrance examination. He was not the only example of this type. A friend of another ronin also belonged to this type of ronin without failure:

A friend of mine in our dormitory actually passed the entrance examination to Kagawa University. I think that he really wanted to go to Waseda University (in Tokyo). . . . He also passed the entrance examinations of several private universities but all of them were not his first choice. So he lives the ronin life. I think that it was too good to give up the national university.

(male, interview, January, 1986)

Another ronin student who actually enrolled in a national university said likewise:

I passed the entrance examination of the department of education at Okayama University, but I actually wanted to enter the department of medicine at the university. If I do not make it this year, I will return to the department of education.

(male, interview, February, 1986)

These ronin students did not experience any shock of failure. They had confidence to think that they would pass the entrance examination of the university or the department of their very first choice. Compared to the others, they were very motivated to study hard simply because becoming ronin was their free choice. They had become ronin to achieve specific academic and career goals.

The majority of ronin students experienced several psychological features in common in starting their ronin life: (1) They were shocked to experience their first "defeat" in life, although the degree of shock varied depending upon the immediate situation: whether their friends were likely to become ronin, and the comparative reference group by which they evaluated their ronin status; (2) They were highly motivated to enter a prestigious university or the university of their choice. They would rather become ronin than attend the university of their second choice. They were likely not to apply to an appropriate university as indicated by their accumulated academic achievement scores indicated. They intended the next year to apply to a university ranked higher than the university that they had failed to pass by studying much harder, and (4) They thought that passing the entrance examination was partly a matter of luck. In this sense, taking the entrance examination was something like a challenge or a gamble.

Experiencing the shock of failure, they would account for why they failed to pass the university of their choice to themselves as well as others so that they would be able to recover from the shock and start their ronin life with hope.

### Accounts of Failure

Individuals with "spoiled identity" need to repair their "moral image." In order to repair their moral image and reestablish their former self-esteem, they search for moral justifications that can transform them back into their former selves as competent and respectable persons (Jacobs, 1985:10). Ronin students who wanted to enter universities spoiled their identity by failing to do so. They engage in making moral justifications. They need to recover their identity as bright students capable of entering universities. How they make moral justifications are expressed in their "accounts" (Scott and Lyman, 1968) for failure in the college entrance examination.

Ronin students emphasized their potential to do better by accounting for the causes of their failure in the entrance examinations. Without this accounting they would not start their ronin life and would not give any meaning to it.

Those who took their failure as natural tended to attribute their failure to the insufficient effort in their high school days to pass the entrance examination of the university of their first choice. They were likely to imply that they applied to a university which their past efforts did not allow them to enter. They believe, however, if they try their best this year, they will pass it. Thus in their ronin life

they were determined to do their best by working harder than they did in their high school days.

Some ronin students accounted for their failure in the examination by their lack of effort and more interest in enjoyment in their high school days. One of them wrote in his composition:

I became a ronin because I enjoyed club activities and could not study in my high school days. Many ronin tend to say so. I am likely to say so as an excuse. Actually it was because I could not study for the entrance examination while enjoying club activities.

(male, composition, September, 1985)

Another group of ronin students talked about their high school days and also attributed their being ronin to too much enjoyment in their high school days:

I can't say, "I didn't pass the entrance examination simply because I didn't study enough." This is a stupid excuse. Others would say that it was my fault. But if you did not pass it simply because you didn't study well, you can easily recover from your shock of failure. If I had failed after studying hard, then I would be terribly shocked at that. (male A)

We really didn't study (nodding to male A). We thought that it would be better to become ronin rather than to enter a university which our scores in the National Common Examination should have enabled us to enter. . . . We prepared for "High School Cultural Festival" by staying and playing until about seven (in the evening). After the festival (in the middle of October) its excitement remained in us for over a month. We enjoyed it very much. Being aware of the entrance examination around the corner, we thought that we had much more time. But we had only 2 months to study.

(three males, interview, September, 1985)

As these two excerpts of field notes illustrate, ronin students were likely to explain their failure in the entrance examination by referring to their happy and enjoyable high school life with involvement in club and extracurricular activities. They thought that they had not taken

their examination seriously enough and did not devote themselves to studying for it. In accounting for their failure this way, they were likely to reduce the degree of their shock of failure while believing in their unexplored or untried potential or ability to succeed in the entrance examination the next year.

Second, ronin students were likely to account for the failure in terms of their challenging spirit or boldness. They would say that they could predict their failure by their self-estimated scores in the National Common Examination. Despite their recognition of the possibility of failure, they dared to take a chance by expecting some miracle in their second examination.

Third, they attributed their failure to some sort of accidental bad luck on the days when they took the examination. One ronin student said:

I failed to pass the entrance examination of the university because of my bad health condition when taking the exam. After I returned home, I had a severe fever and suffered from diarrhea.

(male, interview, September, 1985)

Another referred to his psychological condition, saying:

I am weak in a real examination (not in mock exams). I really wanted to pass KWANSEI GAKUIN University so that I became so intense in taking its entrance examination. That's why I failed. In contrast, when I took the entrance examination of KANSAI University, I relaxed my thinking that whether or not I would pass did not matter. Then I passed it.

(male, interview, May, 1985)

Both implied that if this sort of accidental bad luck had not happened to them, they would have passed the entrance examination by utilizing their real ability.

Scott and Lyman (1968) suggest that accounts may be classified by content as excuses and justification, each with its own subtypes. Excuses and justifications are socially approved vocabularies to neutralize what actors have done wrong. The successful accounts to themselves as well as to the others means the restoration of equilibrium and thus recovery of their trusted and respectable identity.

In sum, living in the society where equality and fairness are highly valued, ronin students tended to account for the causes of their failures by other factors than ones in themselves. By accounting for the failure this way, they reduced their anxiety about failing again. They tried to work as hard as possible in studying for the entrance examination to avoid failure. With these accounts in their minds, ronin students could be determined to pass the entrance examination of the university of their choice the next year.

Relieving their psychological suffering, they started their action to become ronin. The first thing that they had to do was to select a place where they would spend their ronin life. Their decision in selecting a place required them to talk with their parents, since ronin life requires their parents to pay substantial amounts of money (500,000 yen or \$4,000 for the yobiko's tuition in addition to the cost of living). The next section of this chapter will discuss how students started their ronin lives and selected a place to spend an additional year of preparation for the college entrance examination.

### Selection of the Yobiko

After failing in the entrance examination, ronin students would discuss the future with their parents. Some parents told their children to give up studying for the entrance examination and to go to work.

Two ronin students described their family's reaction to them:

My father intended to have me work to help him in fishing. When he was away from home, I came to take the entrance examination to Hiroshima Seminar in Hiroshima. (male)

My mother told me to give up becoming ronin. But my father and grandmother agreed that I could become ronin. So I asked for information for Hiroshima Seminar and came here, because Hiroshima Seminar is one of the three most famous yobiko throughout Japan. (male)

(two males, interview, May, 1985)

The parents of these two ronin students did not want their children to become ronin at first. Instead, they wanted them to work. But these ronin students were determined to become ronin. They could not give up going to a university of their first choice.

In the other cases parents were likely to complain about their children's failure in the entrance examination, but they allowed them to study for the entrance examination for only an additional year with encouragement. Yet it depended on the children's decision as to whether or not they became ronin. All the parents could do was to support their children psychologically and financially. Without this family support, they could not become ronin. There was only a small number of self-supporting ronin students who studied by earning money for all their expenses. In Hiroshima City the number of such working ronin students is much smaller than in other larger cities where many ronin students work at a part-time job such as in newspaper delivery agencies.<sup>1</sup>

Ronin students of Hiroshima Seminar chose it as their yobiko because it is ranked as the highest among the three major yobiko in Hiroshima. Living in an educationally stratified society, they tended to rank the yobiko in terms of academic level. A group of female ronin explained why they chose Hiroshima Seminar:

Hiroshima Seminar is close to the station (Hiroshima Station) so that I can commute there easily. I should not talk about academic level but it is because Hiroshima Seminar is highest in academic level among the yobiko in Hiroshima. (female A)

It is because Hiroshima Seminar is well known throughout Japan. The academic level of the mock exam provided by it is high. (female B)

Hiroshima Seminar has a national network. If you apply to Hiroshima University, you may go to either yobiko A or yobiko B. But if you apply to a nationally known university, Hiroshima Seminar is best. (female C)

When you apply to a nation-wide university, you should come to Hiroshima Seminar because it has nation-wide data on universities in Japan. And it seems that the quality of texts and mock exam is good here. (female D)

(four females, interview, November, 1985)

These female ronin students did not have specific information about Hiroshima Seminar as their explanation above illustrates. They selected the yobiko according to its reputation in the society.

Ronin students wanted to be seen as attending a yobiko that itself is difficult to enter. One ronin student said:

Yobiko A allows any student to enter without taking its entrance examination so that the academic level of the yobiko must be lowered. I don't like studying with students of a lower academic level.

(female, interview, November, 1985)

She came to Hiroshima Seminar because it screened out the students of a lower academic level. This implies not only that she could believe

that she would have a better chance to enter the university of her choice, but also that she would be given the social prestige attached to the yobiko itself in the society. The ronin students tended to have a clear sense of rankings of the three yobiko in Hiroshima City so that attending the "best" yobiko itself could provide them a sense of pride and security.

Ronin students viewed the fourth year supplementary program attached to their high schools with some contempt in spite of its low tuition. They did not trust their former high school teachers. One ronin student talked about the supplementary program attached to her high school:

Our high school has the supplementary program. It costs only 30,000 yen (or \$240) for a year. We do our fourth year of high school there. Of course we do not wear a uniform and we study in a different building. According to my seniors, those who attend this program will not enter any prestigious university. Teachers there consist of those of our grade. Now they teach mainly freshmen from high school so that it is useless to learn from them because they do not teach energetically (and clearly).

(female, interview, December, 1985)

This female ronin student thought that she should come to Hiroshima Seminar despite its expensive tuition and other costs because she is ambitious enough to try to enter a prestigious university. She thought that if she had attended the supplementary program in high school, she would not realize her goal. The academic level of Hiroshima Seminar perceived among ronin students and its societal prestige tended to win over the fourth year supplementary program in medium size cities. They and their parents prefer spending more money to "buy" a better education in the yobiko than to use the supplementary program.

In summary, we can see the way the institutional arrangements of the hierarchical structure of the yobiko affects ronin students in their

selection of the yobiko. Ronin students engage in their choice within the hierarchical judgment framed by a wider stratified society. Since Hiroshima Seminar was perceived as the best yobiko in Hiroshima City which has a nation-wide network of branches, the most ambitious students entered it.

Selecting their yobiko, Hiroshima Seminar, but still keenly remembering their failure, they embark upon their ronin life. As is often the case with people in a strange land, they were filled with mixed feelings in a new social situation.

#### Starting Ronin Life: Consciousness of Being Ronin

Ronin students started their lives with mixed feelings of stigma and hope after recovering from their shock of failure in the entrance examinations and being determined to become ronin. Some students tried to hide the fact that they became ronin. One of them said:

In our high school it is quite common among students that even female students become ronin. So I took becoming a ronin as natural. But I feel uncomfortable in walking in my hometown although it is OK to walk around in Hiroshima. For example, on Monday Hiroshima Seminar has an off-day and I walked out in Kure City. It felt a little hard to do so there. . . . After becoming a ronin, I commute to Hiroshima by taking an earlier train than in my high school days in order to avoid meeting my juniors from high school.

(female, interview, December, 1985)

As this case of a female student illustrates, although she said that she took it for granted that she became ronin to enter a prestigious university because it was so common among the students in her high school, she could not help feeling some stigma attached to the image of ronin. Ronin students try to hide their ronin status from those who personally

knew them such as their neighbors and their juniors at high school. But they are not anxious about their ronin status if people in general do not know about it.

Two ronin students described how they feel about being ronin:

When I returned to my hometown, Okayama, I would not go out because I feel ashamed of being ronin. (female A)

In my neighborhood it is said that I go to a university in Tokyo. When I passed the entrance examination of Dokkyo University in Tokyo (last February), some of my neighbors read about it in the local newspaper. One day one of my acquaintances in my neighborhood said to me, "Did you return home from Tokyo?" I answered vaguely. After that I am still thought to be a student of the university in Tokyo. (female B)

(two females, interview, December, 1985)

These two female ronin students tended to say that they did not care about being ronin among strangers in the society, but they would rather be regarded as a college student by their neighbors. When their ronin status becomes "visible" to other people, they cannot help feeling ashamed of it. This stems from the image of ronin they had in their high school days and share in common with people in general in the society. In other words, as the symbolic interactionist's perspective argues, they feel ashamed of being ronin simply because they believe that people in the society think ronin are something like losers or persons to be ashamed of. They themselves thought this in their high school days. Thus, they are conscious of how they are viewed by people in the society and act on their consciousness of being ronin.

One male ronin student described this type of consciousness in a composition as if he were telling a story:

He went to an ophthalmic hospital to buy contact lenses. There he had the following conversation with

a secretary at the reception desk. The lady: "Are you a college student?" He: "Hiro . . . Hiroshima University." The lady: "I see." This strange conversation continued. He who should be a ronin student of Hiroshima Seminar became a freshman of the department of Education at Hiroshima University who was a member of the tennis circle, playing tennis everyday, without being aware of what was going on in their conversation. Then why did he hide the fact that he is actually a ronin student? Usually he does not feel ashamed of being ronin. He believes that it is not bad for him to study another year to enter the university of his choice rather than go to a university that he does not want to enter. In other words, he does not regard the yobiko as bad. Rather he thinks of it favorably. But he did hide the fact that he is a ronin student of the yobiko. He does not know why. . . . Next spring when he becomes neither a high school student nor a ronin student, "I" will see the reason for the behavior in the ophthalmic hospital.

(male, composition, August, 1985)

He views his ronin status positively but actually he could not reveal it to the lady who he thought would tend to look down upon ronin students. Since he sensed her negative labeling of the ronin students, he could not help answering that he was a college student.

In having a conflicting idea of being ronin in his mind: positive and negative, he plays different roles depending upon the specific situation. When he is alone or with his fellow ronin students, he is convinced that ronin life is a positive and important one for him to achieve his goal. This ronin life is quite a challenge for him to improve himself as a person as well as to pass the entrance examination of the university that he really wants to enter. On the contrary, when he perceives that ronin is viewed negatively by people in the society, he is likely to accept the stigmatized image of being ronin so that he may not reveal his identity as a ronin to avoid being labeled as a gloomy person or loser.

In being conscious of how the world views them, ronin students try to deny it and justify their ronin status as bright or promising or exciting and so forth. One male ronin student wrote about it in his composition:

. . . some people in the society would say that ronin is something like "dirty." I was one of them last year. But I don't know what to say to them. To some extent, we become spoiled so that we become a little disorderly in life. But in our heart we are serious and "matured." Although we trouble our parents financially, our ronin life is full of wonderful things for me. For I will be able to judge my potential in studying hard.

(male, composition, August, 1985)

Another wrote likewise:

So far (until August) I enjoy my ronin life. I have had a very good time in it partly because I attend Hiroshima Seminar. But it is true that I have a feeling of "crisis" at the bottom of my heart. It is true that it is because I was rejected by the university which I wanted to enter, but besides that it is because I am likely to suspect that I am being viewed as "something abnormal" by people in the society.

(male, composition, August, 1985)

They attempt to give positive meaning to their ronin life by denying the world's negative view of ronin as something less human or as less valued members of the society.

Some ronin have two conflicting attitudes, those of freedom and anxiety. In facing the world's cold eyes on them in their perception, one of them tries to give meaning to his status of being ronin:

Generally speaking, ronin is a symbol of a gloomy image and the ronin status is a marginal position from the society's point of view. But on the other hand I think that a ronin is free from variety of (social) constraints to that degree. In other words, ronin has only to make the exam preparation which is the "ultimate" obligation. For this reason ronin life

is easy. But . . . on the other hand, he always has to have anxiety feeling that he might not pass the entrance examination of the university next year. He tends to be vexed at why he is going to a university and what he will do afterwards, which he did not think of in his high school days. In my case it was lucky for me to talk with classmates in Hiroshima Seminar about my troubles.

(male, composition, September, 1985)

For him the yobiko is a place where he can meet other ronin students who can share the same troubles and feelings. Because of his marginal position in the society, he is likely to question what he took for granted in his high school days. Going to a university was taken for granted and almost all the students in high schools with high college entrance rates for graduates compete for a more prestigious university without any solid and firm idea about their future. By being free from the dominant and established values in high schools, he is likely to think for himself.

Ronin students could change their image of the ronin status through meeting with fellow ronin students and listening to lectures given by the yobiko teachers. Ronin life is already not gloomy but cheerful. One ronin student living in the dormitory describes his dormitory life with fellow ronin there:

How about the dormitory life? In April and May friends in the dormitory looked serious and sober. But I was relieved to discover that they were a group of cheerful guys. We exchange jokes and some go in the others' rooms and read comics there. Is this situation that of ronin? Yes, it is. It is this situation which is ronin's. The expression, "Ronin are gloomy" is no longer true now.

(male, composition, August, 1985)

In the early ronin life he was preoccupied with his gloomy image of ronin life. As he started living in a new environment, everyone around him

looked very serious to him, as his image of ronin taught him in his high school days. But living there for a while, especially after the yobiko's sports day among ronin students and attending a party in each class for the sports day they got acquainted with one another as individuals and came to discover that other fellow ronin were as cheerful as any other young people in their late teens.

Some ronin students tended to justify their ronin status by positively changing the image of ronin they had held in high school. One of them emphasized self-improvement as a man through ronin life. He said:

If he is a man and does not become ronin, he is not a (true) man. For a man improves himself through ronin life. I believe that ronin life strengthens a man's mentality (mind). To be honest with you, I decided that I would never become ronin when I was in high school. In my eyes then ronin were gloomy people and they had to be frowned upon (looked at coldly) by people in the society. When I read the advertising pamphlet of Hiroshima Seminar, the former ronin said that the yobiko was an exciting place. I thought of this as stupid. But once I became ronin, I really think that ronin life is exciting and I strengthen myself mentally. . . . I feel like studying because of the exciting atmosphere of the yobiko.

(male, interview, May, 1985)

Whether or not ronin students could have a positive consciousness of being ronin varies between males and females, and between those coming from rural areas and those from urban areas. Female ronin students feel more stigma about being ronin than males. In addition, in rural areas females are not expected to be educationally ambitious enough to become ronin. If they become ronin there, they will be the subject of gossip among middle-aged women. In a sense, when females in rural areas become

ronin, they violate the normative sex role expected of females, which is to become good wives and workers. A consensus in the rural areas is that girls cannot be good wives if they have too much education.

Males from rural areas also have to face a severe negative sanction from people there. One of them said:

When I went out in my hometown, everyone would ask whether or not I have been studying hard because I am the only ronin there. In my hometown everyone knows me by my first name. I cannot go out.

(male, interview, November, 1985)

The male ronin student came from a small village to attend Hiroshima Seminar not only because there was no yobiko in the village, but also because people there are very critical of young men not working, and leading the ronin life without attending any formal school.

Among ronin students, therefore, those from rural areas and especially females, seemed to have more difficulties in changing their self-image because people in rural areas tend to hold negative attitudes toward them. But even those students came to change their image of being ronin after becoming involved in the yobiko life.

#### The Yobiko: An Exciting Place

The yobiko plays a very important role not only in giving technical skills and efficient instruction for the college entrance examination but also in justifying ronin status in the society and thus providing psychological support to ronin students. They perceive that teachers in the yobiko were quite different from their former high school teachers. Three female ronin students talked about their ronin life:

After becoming ronin our life has been much more enjoyable than that of our high school days. We can attend

classes freely and do whatever we want to do (all of them are saying this, smiling cheerfully). The classes in our high school were boring. In the case of the yobiko, the way teachers teach here is good, exciting, and enjoyable. And we can choose any class to attend by ourselves.

(three females, interview, September, 1985)

Another group of males talked likewise:

After becoming ronin, I began to understand physics better and I enjoy studying it. (male A)

. . . Of course teachers in the yobiko teach more clearly than those teachers in the high schools. Besides that their lectures are interesting (exciting). I understand English better now than I did in high school. In mathematics high school teachers wrote a lot on the blackboard but they didn't teach us well. (male B).

(three males, interview, May, 1985)

These ronin students evaluated their yobiko teachers as much better than their former high school teachers with regard to teaching skills. They were happy to understand their subjects for the college entrance examination better and even enjoyed studying itself. The yobiko teachers were likely to teach their students with energy though or rather because they have to teach about 150 ronin students in one classroom by using a microphone.

In accounting for the differences between their high school teachers and yobiko teachers, some ronin students referred to the characteristics of the high school teachers and criticized them:

Since high school teachers are "civil servants" (in the case of public high schools), they seemed to teach what they are supposed to. By contrast, teachers in the yobiko will be fired if they lose their popularity among students. Teachers are in a severe position so that they have to teach better than high school teachers. (male A)

When I attended classes in high school days, I was bored and could not be relaxed in the classroom. But attending classes in the yobiko has become enjoyable to the extent that I wondered if this is all right. Some teachers made jokes in the classrooms. (male B)

The classes in yobiko are enjoyable and besides, teachers teach us clearly. After all, teachers in the yobiko are experts for the college entrance examination. High school teachers did not try to teach us techniques for the entrance examination, but "cultured knowledge" because they had to teach according to their tatema or normative rules in high schools. Teachers have to provide their students with "education for personal development," not the technical knowledge for the entrance examination. Teachers in high school did not like what we learned in the yobiko or juku.

(four males, interview, May, 1985)

Ronin students have been socialized in the exam-oriented educational system such that their primary concern is to enter a university of their choice, hopefully a prestigious university. Therefore, they would evaluate anything in terms of the preparation for the college entrance examination. In addition, they failed to pass the entrance examinations of the universities immediately at their graduation from high school. In reflecting upon their high school days and classes in the high schools, they tended to attribute their failure partially to the high school education they experienced. Thus, high school teachers were evaluated as bad by their criterion, the usefulness for the college entrance examination.

In the yobiko, all the classes are organized to prepare ronin students for the college entrance examination and teachers there have been recruited primarily to teach technical knowledge and skills concerning the entrance examination. In addition to their desire to trust their yobiko teachers as examination experts, they were exposed to the

different kinds of classes in the yobiko. These refreshing and exciting classes made them praise their teachers in the yobiko while criticizing their former high school teachers. The majority of ronin students at this beginning period of ronin life could believe that they would surely improve their academic achievement and eventually pass the entrance examination of the university of their first choice by following their teachers' instruction in the yobiko.

Ronin students also have been given psychological support by the yobiko teachers. They feel excited and enjoy attending classes because they can find something interesting in the teachers' jokes and casual talks there. One male ronin student described his classroom scene in a composition:

Ronin life is all wonderful. For example I live in the dormitory where I can enjoy "human relations" with others there and share empathy that we have been studying together. In the classes in the yobiko there are a variety of ronin students. I cannot help feeling happy to see that a variety of people, including "good-or-not-so-good-looking girls, boys in dirty or bright clothing altogether listen to the lectures and take (the same) mock exam. Teachers are also good. Mr. A is a teacher who teaches us spiritedly, Mr. B full of authority, and Mr. C is a teacher who teaches energetically in perspiration even in a jacket and induces warm feelings in students. Our exciting non-verbal communication with these teachers is by far more exciting to us than going to a concert. My ronin life proceeds (steadily) on the basis of such human relations, studying and hope for next year. It is no doubt that our "graduates" of Hiroshima Seminar would say, "Our ronin year was a precious experience," or "Thank you for an enriched one year."

(male, composition, August, 1985)

This student enjoys exciting communication with his yobiko teachers and fellow students in the classes. In a sense this communication seems a creation of the interaction between his position in the society and

the yobiko teachers' attitude toward teaching. When he was determined to become ronin, he "declared" to himself that he would pass the entrance examination of the university of his first choice. With this strong zest he came to attend classes in the yobiko. Unlike his former high school teachers, teachers there teach him straight knowledge about the college entrance examination. In addition, they teach him with "spirit, energy, and authority."

As one female ronin student said, "Our former high school teachers taught in a yobiko secretly after teaching at the high school so that they had to save their energy to teach there." As discussed later, because the yobiko and high school teachers are in different situations, the yobiko teachers can be energetic in teaching or at least look so in ronin students' eyes. Indeed, it may be true that teachers in the yobiko teach ronin students more clearly or better with more spirit or energy, because otherwise they would be fired by the yobiko. But the praise may be a reflection of ronin students' zest to study harder this year and the tense atmosphere of the classrooms which consist of ronin students willing to study for a specific goal for the near future.

Viewing their former high school teachers from their exam-oriented perspective, ronin students fail to recognize the differences between the yobiko teachers and their former high school teachers.

First, high school teachers are busy with secretarial work in addition to teaching. Besides this, they cannot teach their students straight knowledge for the college entrance examination since they must educate their students in terms of personality development by engaging in other activities. Because of the Japan Teachers' Union's dominant

ideology, teachers try to educate their students generally more than teaching specifically for the college entrance examination.

Second, classes in the yobiko are not routine at the beginning of ronin life whereas classes in high schools are routine. In high schools students know their teachers personally and vice versa so that classes in high schools will not be as tense as those in the yobiko where a teacher teaches a class of 150 students through a microphone. In addition, high school students have to attend fixed classes whereas ronin students can choose their favorite classes or teachers. As a result, the atmosphere of the classroom in the yobiko tends to be much more exciting to ronin students than those of the high school.

Third, the yobiko is organized to prepare students for the college entrance examination. In their high schools they did not want to study what was irrelevant to their entrance examination schedules. In such classes they studied different subjects by ignoring what their teachers were teaching. What is taught in the yobiko matches what ronin students want to learn for the purpose of entering the university of their choice.

Fourth, what they have been studying in the yobiko tend to be repetitions of what they learned in their high schools. In their high school days, they learned unfamiliar material little by little for the first time. It will be much easier for students to learn the same subject matter for the second time in yobiko than for the first time in the high schools. This is why they can understand materials better now than before, besides the fact that yobiko teachers in general teach them clearly and energetically.

Ronin students tend to neglect these four aspects of why they are impressed with the way the yobiko teachers teach. They can praise them a great deal since they look at the yobiko teachers from a rational point of view. The most important thing is to raise the chance of passing the entrance examination of the university of their first choice. With the above unfair criticism toward their former high school teachers, ronin students are eager to look at their teachers as their savior or rescue from ronin status.

However, not all of the ronin students were impressed with yobiko teachers. There are some variations in attitudes toward the yobiko's classes, depending upon which high school the students graduated from.

Ronin students who graduated from prestigious high schools were less likely to praise classes in the yobiko than were students from the other types of high schools. These schools have become prestigious because quite a few of their graduates enter former Imperial Universities such as Tokyo University and Kyoto University. They recruit teachers who are good at preparing their students for the college entrance examination. Such prestigious high schools provide their students special programs designed to prepare them for the college entrance examination by way of a six-year curriculum, combining junior high school level with that of the senior high school. Students complete all their high school curriculum by the end of the second year of high school and spend all of their senior year preparing for the entrance examination by using extra textbooks. It is possible for these schools to do this because they recruit the best pupils at the beginning of junior high school by imposing difficult examinations upon applicants. Those from such

prestigious high schools would not necessarily be impressed with the way the yobiko teachers taught, but they would feel that they were just repeating the second year of special training for the college entrance examination. Thus, yobiko is simply an extension of high school where they would concentrate more on studying for the entrance examination than before.

With generally positive feelings about the yobiko, the students have one thing in common in their hopes and plans: I will pass the entrance examination of the university of my first choice next year.

#### Hope in Ronin Life

Ronin students hoped that the next year they would apply to a university ranked higher than the one whose entrance examination they took this year. At this beginning period of ronin life they do not want to apply to the university that they failed to enter, much less the ones ranked lower. They are likely to think that because they are going to spend an additional year of preparation for the college entrance examination, they should enter a more prestigious university than the one they failed to enter. Generally they are thinking of taking the entrance examination of different universities. Two ronin students said:

Applying to the same university that I failed to enter this year is stupid. I will apply to a university one or two ranks higher than the university I failed to enter. (male A)

I would not apply to the same university simply because I couldn't make it this year. (male B)

(two males, interview, May, 1985)

For these two male ronin students, applying to the same university would not be worth doing, since they believed that they could do much better

the next year. Passing the same university that they failed to enter that year would not be good enough for them to accept. Instead, they would like to enter the university ranked higher according to the yobiko's data on rankings of universities.

Being conscious of his friends who passed the entrance examination of the same university that he failed to pass, one ronin student was determined to apply to a more prestigious university. He wrote:

Once I became ronin, I was determined to do one thing, that is, "I will pay back those friends who entered the same university I failed to enter by entering a much more prestigious university." I believe that not only I but also others surely think such a thing. For considering the present situation, the more prestigious university a student graduates from, the better job he will be able to obtain. In my case I will not work after my college graduation but go to a graduate school. If the graduate school, which will be my final school, is prestigious, I believe, my friends will think, "He made quite an effort in his ronin life." This is not vanity toward them, but I want them to think that I surely had potential or ability although I did not make much use of it when I became ronin.

(male, composition, October, 1985)

With a rivalry consciousness regarding his comparative reference group, he expected to prove to his friends that he has real ability. His hope was to recover his high self-esteem, which was damaged because of his failure in the college entrance examination.

At this early period of their ronin life, students can still believe in their potential to jump up in their achievement scores. Until early in May they have not taken any mock exams yet, so they cannot yet evaluate their academic achievement. They hope to improve it far beyond their high school performance by studying harder.

Receiving the results of their first mock exam early in June, they began worrying about the way they had been studying up to the day of the exam. The result of the mock exam includes several pieces of information such as success potential for specific universities, itemized scores on each subject, and some comments indicating weak points of each subject. The ronin students are concerned with the standardized value of their mock exam which indicates their relative position to others in terms of scores on each subject. They are also sensitive to success potential for the universities whose entrance examinations they plan to take. Some are depressed with their success potential and rush to their teachers or tutors to ask for their advice about how to study for the entrance examination effectively and efficiently. Others are a little shocked to see their results but do not become so depressed. In general, at this beginning period of ronin life they think that they have not studied long enough to see any improvement in their mock exam yet so that they can still believe that if they study harder, they will pass the entrance examination of the university of their first choice, despite the judgement of potential.

In sum, during the initial phase ronin students have hopes of entering a university of their choice. Their optimism includes hoping for rapid improvement in achievement scores during their ronin life by studying hard, as well as applying to a university ranked higher than the one they failed to enter that year. They do not have any means of knowing whether or not they can realize their hopes at this period of ronin life without gathering objective data on which to make a rational decision in taking the entrance examination the next year. How do ronin

students lead their ronin life during this hopeful period? This is the question that will be described in the following section.

Daily Activities at the Beginning:

Study Hard with Regular Attendance

Ronin students attend all the assigned classes with enthusiasm at the beginning of their ronin life. For the first month their memory of failure is still vivid, which urges them to attend every class assigned to them by the yobiko. They trust Hiroshima Seminar as the most famous yobiko ranked as the highest in Hiroshima. They rely upon it for their success in studying for the college entrance examination. Every yobiko teacher looks fresh and different from their former high school teachers. They follow the yobiko's instruction as to how to study for the entrance examination because to them yobiko seems a professional school for this purpose. They prepare for each class the previous night and review what they have learned on the day when they go home, although how seriously they do so depends upon each individual student. They believe in the value of studying their yobiko textbooks thoroughly.

Immediately after each class, several students rush to their teacher to ask questions about unclear points taught in each lesson. During lunch time many students come into the teachers' large office and actively ask questions, while some visit their favorite teachers for advice or chatting. Ronin students go to some teachers, not to others. Particular teachers, so-called "star teachers," receive more students. About an hour lunch break passes by quickly for teachers and students, asking and answering questions. Some teachers stay and have lunch at

the office for the specific purpose of answering questions for their students.

During this early period of the first month, ronin students have not made friends with others in class and feel lonely there. Their loneliness and enthusiasm to study enables them to concentrate on their studies. Others in the classroom look bright, so that each ronin student thinks of studying hard to catch up with the others in the class.

Their circle of friends is confined to those who graduated from the same high school and came from the same city or area. They tend to be together with one another always in these unfamiliar surroundings. The other students in the classroom look hard to talk with. They eat together and talk among themselves.

This is particularly true of those students in the dormitory. Dormitory students come from places far away from Hiroshima City. They are glad to meet someone with a similar background. Since they eat three meals at the same place and live in the same building, they gradually begin talking to those who happen to be their next door neighbors. But still at this beginning period of ronin life they are not willing to talk to others in the dormitory because they thought that they came to study for the college entrance examination, not to make friends with the others. In addition to their enthusiasm to study hard, they tend to view the others as rivals. This sense of rivalry is strong among dormitory students in that they were selected on the basis of stiff competition to enter the dormitory and come to Hiroshima Seminar. The ratio of acceptance in the dormitory is only one-fifth of those who apply.

However, gradually ronin students find new friends in the yobiko. They are likely to talk to those who happen to sit next to them during a short intermission or during lunch time. After a while students have a tendency to sit in almost the same seats though there are no formal rules. Once they start sitting in certain seats, they tend to use them as their own reserved seats so that they sit next to the same students. As a participant observer, playing a teacher's role, I observed almost the same students roughly in the same seats with their friends in the classroom.

It is only after the yobiko's sports day that students start making friends with students other than those who came from the same high school or city. Through engaging in athletic activities with others in the same classroom, they have the first opportunity to talk with others about things other than their study topics outside the classroom. The sports day is designed for those of the same classroom to cooperate with one another to compete with those of the other classes. After this athletic competition the ronin students of each class go out for a drinking party to celebrate their activities or effort or victory with the same class. At this party they became closer to one another and new friendship circles are likely to be formed. This is partly because each one discovers that others are also the same young people as they are and can share the same experience of becoming ronin. In their conversation, they do not talk about their bitter experience of becoming ronin but they talk only to entertain themselves, avoiding talk about serious things. The class's atmosphere changed a great deal after the week when the sports day was held. Before that time, the teacher saw quiet students

sitting in a large classroom before starting his teaching of each lesson. But after the week he heard a lot of cheerful and active talking among students. This change in the class's atmosphere indicated that they had made friends with new people through their experience in the sports day and during the following one week academic clinic holidays late in May.

In the dormitory the students also started talking to and visiting one another. These talks and visits reveal that others in the dormitory do not study hard all the time. Some may find that others read comics and go to Pachinko parlors or the game center to relax. Many of them are likely to be relieved to find that not only they but also others have difficulty in concentrating on studying all day. Then talking with others became one of the best forms of relaxation among those in the dormitory. Since they came from different areas, they have a lot to talk about such as their former high school days and hometowns. Some came from high schools with a high college entrance rate and others from those with a low college entrance rate. They enjoy talking with others not only because they find what they were not familiar with but also because they have fellows to spend time with, being free or escaping from their studies. They could feel comfortable knowing that others who are supposed to study hard all the time are talking with them. If a ronin student spends his time wastefully by himself, he definitely feels depressed. By sharing the same anxiety for the college entrance examination for the next year, they talk about a variety of things.

Gradually changes happen in terms of their class attendance behavior. A small number of students start arranging their classes according to

their own schedule, not attending all the classes assigned to them by the yobiko. This behavior, which is called moguri or sneaking into the classes other than the ones assigned to them by the yobiko, increases drastically in the advanced term of the yobiko year. In the teachers' office one group of ronin students talked about their class attendance:

Which class are you going to attend in the next session?  
 One male ronin asked. A female student replied, "I will attend V5 class. Oh, I shouldn't say this," holding her mouth covered.

(Observation, May, 1986)

By late May, they started evaluating and judging their teachers in terms of usefulness or preference. Some stop attending some classes by going to attend the same kind of classes taught by their favorite teacher. But this group of ronin students are still a minority. The majority of students attend the classes assigned by the yobiko so that the average attendance rate of each classroom is over 90 percent. The attendance rate is similar across classrooms whereas in the advanced term starting in September the rate will be disproportionate among different classrooms depending upon who is the teacher.

Outside the yobiko's classroom, many ronin students go to study halls or go back to the dormitory or lodging house, or home after school and spend almost all their time in studying for the classes for the next day. However, some of them started going to pachinko parlors or the game centers to have breaks. Others go in a group to coffee shops frequently and gossip. One ronin student who came from a rural area where there were no pachinko parlors became engrossed about going there regularly. One of his friends said to me, "When you want to see him, go to pachinko parlors and definitely find him there." A group of

students can be seen chatting in coffee shops near the yobiko when they are supposed to be attending their classes. Other ronin students will be reading comics at the bookstore and playing the games at the game center for a long time. Those students, hanging around at the coffee shops, the game centers, bookstores, and pachinko parlors near the yobiko are not the majority of ronin students in Hiroshima Seminar at this early stage of ronin life even though they will increase in number later. The majority of them go to the yobiko and attend their assigned classes, in which they might have a chat with friends during breaks. After school they go to either the study halls or their homes and study for the next day.

There is a distinctive difference between the urban ronin and the rural ronin in their attitudes toward their ronin life in general. Those who graduated from high schools in Hiroshima City may constitute urban ronin whereas those who came from other cities are regarded as rural ronin. The urban ronin lead a relaxed ronin life. The ronin life to them is only the extension of their study for the college entrance examination in high school. They know what they are going to master during the ronin life since they have been exposed to the materials and the information on the entrance examination. In living in Hiroshima City, they know where they are and go shopping for their relaxation. They are accustomed to going to coffee shops in Hiroshima City. They live with their parents so that they do not worry about other things than studying, unlike those who came from the other cities. They appear to be playing around without studying at all. They study at home very much, while presenting themselves as lazy and cheerful ronin students.

By contrast, rural ronin tend to be serious about living ronin life. They criticize the urban ronin, saying they should study more seriously without paying attention to their fashion in dress. They feel sorry for having their parents pay for expensive tuitions and the cost of living in Hiroshima. They are determined to study very hard to pass the college entrance examination by enduring any inconvenience related to their lives in Hiroshima, much less be interested in fashion and the opposite sex during this particular year. Although they have sufficient interest in the opposite sex as young people, they try to give up even talking to the opposite sex in order to concentrate their attention upon their studies. They organize their lives around studying for the college entrance examination with little relaxation time in talking with their friends. They define their ronin life as a period of endurance and trial so that they are supposed to study all of the time.

The initial perspective ronin students share can be summarized in the following way. In facing the reality of their failure of the college entrance examination, ronin students could not help being shocked, although the degree of shock depended upon the situation of each individual. They then were determined to become ronin, although they had to obtain permission from their parents since ronin life requires a lot of money. After becoming ronin they declared to themselves that they would pass the entrance examination of the university of their first choice the next year by all means. With this determination they came to Hiroshima Seminar, which is the most famous and ranked the highest among yobiko in Hiroshima City. There the majority of them were impressed with the way the teachers taught and were stimulated with the

enthusiastic class atmosphere. They attended the assigned classes regularly as in their high school days, but this time they did so with much more seriousness and enthusiasm. Outside the yobiko they were likely to feel some stigma before those whom they knew personally. In their hearts they thought that ronin life was exciting and hopeful to them, whereas they perceived that people in general in the society would think otherwise. Entering into the new circumstance of the yobiko, they at first tended to stick together with those who came from the same high school and cities. But they started making friends with new people after the sports day late May. Thus, hope for success prevailed over anxiety of another failure and in their daily life they were excited about attending classes and studying to fulfill their hopes for the next year.

## CHAPTER V--NOTE

1. In Metropolitan areas such as Tokyo and Osaka many ronin students work part-time jobs in newspaper delivery agencies. In Japan newspapers are delivered to individual households by newspaper deliverers early in the morning and in the evening. This daily delivery is part of the service included in the subscription fee of newspapers. Major newspaper companies recruit ronin students and college students for this job with scholarship or loan systems. Ronin students and college students from rural areas who cannot afford their tuition and living expenses work this part-time job. When a ronin student works at a newspaper agency, he is given meals and board and can borrow money to pay tuition for a yobiko. His duty is to deliver newspapers to about 200 households in the morning for two hours and do the same job plus some related job in the evening for two or three hours. This system of recruiting ronin students as newspaper deliverers helps the children of limited means from rural areas to work part-time and study for the college entrance examination in a yobiko in a Metropolitan area independently of their parents. This system is also good for the newspaper agents because this part-time job is no longer popular among young men in the Metropolitan areas.

CHAPTER VI  
THE MIDDLE PERSPECTIVE:  
STRUGGLING RONIN AND THE STRATIFICATION PROCESS

Time has passed by and the excitement has been fading away. Ronin students have been in Hiroshima Seminar for long enough to normalize their lives. Anxiety about the college entrance examination for the next year is building. They question, "Will I really be able to enter the university of my first choice?" They have been ronin long enough to begin doubting how rapidly they will progress in academic achievement from now on.

All the excitement related to ronin life at the beginning has faded away and ronin students realize that all they have to do is to study for the entrance examination as hard as possible. Reflecting upon their lives up to the middle of July, they regret that they have not studied as they had expected to. Their achievement scores have not risen as they expected. The yobiko's texts, which they trusted before, seem less and less sufficient. Some of them search for other exercise books and reference books to study for themselves, in addition to attending classes in the yobiko. To do all of this has made them feel that it is impossible to study satisfactorily. The gap between the ideal study plan and their actual behavior created anxiety in their minds, which, in turn, prevents them from studying steadily.

This chapter will focus upon how ronin students at this middle period of ronin life maneuver and cope with the difficulties they

experience. What is the changing perspective upon which ronin students act during this middle period? What are their most significant concerns during this period in comparison with the previous period? Then what is the effect of tracking within the yobiko upon ronin students' view of life, aspiration, and self-concept? This chapter examines the continuing dynamics of ronin life.

#### Changing Perspectives in the Advanced Term

When the basic term ends in mid-July, anxiety begins prevailing over hope in the ronin students' minds. They have just received the scores from the first nation-wide mock exam, which they took in the middle of June. The result of this mock exam was the only objective means to evaluate their academic achievement. Many of them realize that they have not studied hard enough to improve their test scores. One male ronin student wrote about the day he received the mock exam results:

On June 16 I took a national unified mock exam. It was terrible because of my bad performance in mathematics. When I received the results on July 13, I felt depressed all day long. The basic term finally ended on July 13. But I had to take a terrifying test to be placed into classes for the advanced term on July 16 and 17. We will not know this result until September. Even if I should fall down to the class ranked lower by the placement test, I would like to attend classes without any depression although I believe that it wouldn't happen. . . .

(male, composition, August, 1985)

When he entered the yobiko in April, he was placed by its screening test in the highest class, the class designed for Tokyo University. After receiving a bad result on the first national unified mock exam, he was afraid that he might not be able to stay in this top class. All of this worry creates the anxiety in his mind, "Will I be able to enter Tokyo

University next year?" If he does not do well in a series of mock exams, he cannot be optimistic about his entrance examination the next year.

The placement test which all of the ronin students take at the end of the basic term is a significant concern for them because on the basis of its results all the classes in the yobiko are reorganized. Some fall to lower-ranked classes and some go up to the upper classes. This replacement is very important to everyone in the yobiko since one's home class indicates the level of his academic achievement clearly. If someone goes down to a lower class, he feels ashamed in front of the others. One male student who moved to a lower class said:

I fell down to lower class two ranks lower in September by the placement test. It was terrible. I was very depressed. I was placed in that class only by this test.

(male, interview, September, 1985)

Another male student was not only depressed but also started criticizing Hiroshima Seminar. When I interviewed him in May, he talked about only the good aspects of the yobiko. But now three months have passed by and his test scores not only did not go up, they actually went down. He said:

I don't come to Hiroshima Seminar any more because I cannot believe in it. Perhaps it is partly because I don't trust the yobiko, but it does not fit me. I cannot master what Hiroshima Seminar provides us. So I have started studying for myself since the summer session. . . . I don't mean that the teachers here are bad. . . . But my test scores have lowered since I became a ronin.

(male, interview, September, 1985)

Although cheerful before, he became anxious about his entrance examination. He began to employ his own strategy to prepare for the entrance examination by not coming to the yobiko.

Summer is regarded as a period when ronin students can speed up in studying and get ahead of their rivals. The atmosphere of the dormitory during the summer session was described by a group of ronin students there:

Now everyone in the dormitory studies desperately. No one watches television any more. When I returned to my hometown and watched television at home, it was not fun. We feel that we are already behind times in songs and programs on television (all of them agreed).

(five males, interview, August, 1985)

This talk may have been exaggerated because they were talking to a teacher who was also a researcher (I was introduced to them as a teacher).

Not all ronin students could make the most of this important time of summer for study. Some of them expected too much from the summer sessions. Some returned to their hometowns and met their friends and then returned to Hiroshima Seminar with regrets. One of them reflected on his summer vacation in his hometown.

During the summer I played too much. I did not study for two weeks at all. I returned to my hometown and visited many friends who are ronin and college students.

(male, interview, October, 1985)

Those who thought that they did not study hard during the summer time became determined to study hard again in the advanced term, which started on the tenth of September.

Almost everyone interviewed later than September indicated a drastic change in the atmosphere of the classroom in the advanced term. One of the students I interviewed again in September changed his description of the classroom and his attitude toward the entrance examination and ronin life. He was quite positive and hopeful in May and definitely believed that he would improve his test scores. He said:

In September, everyone in class seems desperate. Especially after the placement (classes) was done, such a feeling spread over the classroom. In our class I am one of those who can stay in the "Special Class for National Universities" but about forty students (out of 150 students in the class) fell to lower classes. I am happy to be in the same class. But I am sure that those who fell to lower classes felt ashamed and awkward toward others. The atmosphere of the class changed very much. Unlike during the basic term, I have been studying much more seriously.

(male, interview, September, 1985)

By emphasizing the changed atmosphere of the class, he said that his ronin life had become realistic instead of hopeful now in September. I asked why he felt this way. He explained that ". . . since the entrance examination would be only one chance, if he should fail, that would be all." He could not help having this anxiety.

Another ronin student also pointed out his changed attitude and feeling toward the entrance examination and ronin life. He stressed that there was a distinctive difference between the basic term and the advanced term. He wrote:

When I started ronin life, I thought that this was exactly what I had expected of the classes of the yobiko because all the classes were so refreshing to me. Until summer vacation, I did not feel driven into a corner. But now in the advanced term I feel as if I were sitting on a mat with needles.

(male, composition, October, 1985)

The advanced term was fundamentally different from the basic term in its effect on the ronin students' psychology. They cannot continue their cheerful and exciting ronin life any longer. Their anxiety toward the entrance examination of the next year fills up their minds, which drives many of them to study harder instead of enjoying their hopeful ronin life. One male student describes his observation of changes from the basic term to the advanced term. He wrote:

. . . and my ronin life began. But it was not the world that I thought of as a ronin life. When I was in high school, I thought that a ronin life was a gloomy and gray life. I didn't think of having a party (among ronin students) at all. . . . Our tutor said that the ronin students of V3 class were unusually cheerful. It is true that I studied much harder in my ronin life than in my high school days, but I played more in ronin life. I did not go to play table tennis and bowling in my high school days. But the story so far is true of the basic term of the ronin life. In the advanced term the atmosphere (of the V3 class) is completely different now. It has become ten or twenty times as gloomy as that of the basic term. It is better to say that everyone in the class studies much more seriously rather than to say that it is gloomy. This time many of the class said that they would not go to a party after the ball game. In these days I have not played around much. This may be a real ronin life.

(male, composition, September, 1985)

The atmosphere of the dormitory also changed in the advanced term.

Two students in the dormitory said:

The atmosphere of the dormitory is different these days. Until the summer session, friends frequently dropped by but these days no one comes to use us.

(two males, interview, November, 1985)

The excitement in meeting others from other places and the enjoyment of chatting with each other has faded away in the dormitory. They have started confining themselves to their small rooms and concentrating upon studying for the entrance examination under the psychological pressure of anxiety about failure.

The general atmosphere of the classroom is expressed by students' class attendance pattern. I asked one of the key informants to keep a diary for a week concerning what he felt, how he lived, and what kinds of conversation he had on each day. In his diary of October 5 he wrote about his changed attitude toward class:

Two minutes to nine o'clock I arrived at the yobiko. When I entered the classroom, Mr. A was already there and I took a seat in the center without saying anything to others. It is true that everyone looked different in the advanced term. Up to recently I was in the habit of sitting next to friends A and B but these days I tried not to sit there although there were vacant seats there. For when I sit next to them, I tended to talk with them and I feel bad to waste their precious time for them as well as for myself. That is why I have become a "lone wolf" in class whereas I relaxed with them enough during breaks.

(male, diary, October, 1985)

In the basic term ronin students sometimes talked in the classroom while their teacher was teaching. They enjoyed their talks and the jokes made by the teacher. But now students in the upper track classes stopped chatting with each other, even in the back rows in the classroom, and concentrated on listening to what their teachers had to say.

Not everyone showed such dedication, however. Those in lower tracks attended classes simply because their anxiety intensified if they did not attend them, not necessarily because they were trying to master whatever the teacher taught. They tended to be satisfied with sheer attendance, because they thought they were doing what they were supposed to do. A group of female ronin students said, "We regularly attend classes even though we don't understand. We do so without any preparation for the classes the previous night. But we feel anxious if we don't attend the classes."

Some ronin students even stopped attending classes because of anxiety. One of them said:

I tried to get up early enough to attend classes by going to bed early. But at night I cannot sleep and stay up until about five a.m. . . . When I go to classes (because of lack of sleep), I feel sleepy, so I don't attend. That is why I get up in the

afternoon. Some students in my dormitory do not attend any class except for the tutorial session.

(male, interview, December, 1985)

This student became psychologically unstable and broke his normal daily cycle. Such students do not know what to study for the entrance examination now because their test scores in the mock exams have not risen. They lose confidence in their study methods, and try to do something different. They are likely to study by themselves and stop attending classes in the yobiko.

The closeness of the day of the entrance examination prevented some students from concentrating on studying. Those who are planning to take the entrance examination of a national university have to study seven different subjects for the National Common Examination. The subjects are so varied that the students tend to be indecisive in setting the priorities on which subjects to study daily. Two ronin students expressed their problems about how to study and described their situation. One of them lost confidence in studying and was wondering what the other studied. He did not know what or how to study now. Both of them bought exercise texts to study by themselves. One of them said:

These days I cannot study at all. When I am studying mathematics, I start worrying about English and when I study English, I start being concerned about social studies. And when I was playing, I started worrying about studying. Whatever I do, I tend to disperse my concentration upon different things.

Anxious about failure in the next college entrance examination, they are afraid that they will have to repeat their ronin life again.

These qualitative descriptions of a small number of ronin students are supported by questionnaire data from all students in the yobiko.

Table 6.1 shows ronin students' perspectives on being ronin in the first week of December. The positive views of being ronin include, "Enjoyable life free from high school," "Enjoyable life making a variety of friends," and "Meaningful life studying harder than in high school." Among these items ronin students tend to think that ronin life is more meaningful because they have studied harder in ronin life than in their high school days. About 40 percent of the total ronin students in the yobiko agreed with this item whereas only 23.3 percent disagreed.

Table 6.1  
Distribution of Ronin Students' Views of Life

	Strongly Disagree		Strongly Agree		Total	
	+	+	+	+		
	-----+	-----+	-----+	-----+		
Enjoyable to be free from high school	25.1	17.5	30.5	15.9	11.0	100.0% (n=1494)
Enjoyable to make friends in <u>ronin</u> life	14.9	16.4	35.0	21.0	12.7	100.0% (n=1490)
Meaningful to study harder in <u>ronin</u> life than in <u>high school</u>	10.1	13.2	37.1	25.3	14.3	100.0% (n=1494)
Anxious about the entrance examination of the next year	5.0	9.1	26.9	29.5	29.5	100.0% (n=1494)
Hard life by studying everyday	4.5	9.2	33.9	29.2	23.0	100.0% (n=1495)
Severe life without any social status	15.7	12.8	24.0	19.7	27.8	100.0% (n=1495)

As discussed earlier in the section on "the beginning ronin life," ronin students were happy to be free from their rigid high school life, but now they reinterpret this freedom and they come to think that the freedom was not necessarily good considering their ambivalent social status. In the same table only 26.9 percent of them agreed that ronin life was enjoyable because they had freedom whereas 42.6 percent of them disagreed.

Whether or not ronin students made friends with others depended upon the individual's way of life which is reflected in split responses to the statement that ronin life is enjoyable because of having made a variety of friends.

Despite the enjoyable aspects of ronin life on one hand, ronin students tend to have negative perspectives on being ronin especially early in December of the advanced term. Among the negative perspectives, anxiety regarding the entrance examination and difficulty in studying everyday are shared by the majority of the ronin students. About 60 percent of them agreed that ronin life is full of anxiety in terms of the entrance examination of the next year.

Studying for the examinations in itself becomes more difficult for the ronin students. Fifty-two percent of them agreed that studying for the examination everyday was difficult for them whereas only 13.7 percent did not agree.

A substantial percentage of ronin students tend to think that ronin life is bitter because it does not have any social status in the society. Forty-seven percent of them agreed to this view with 28.5 percent of them disagreeing. Of course, logically, once they enter any university,

they will gain a firm social status of college student in the society. Thus, this question item is interwoven with the other negative aspects of ronin life, but is of less direct concern to ronin students in December.

The changing perspectives of being ronin will have an influence upon the way in which they lead their daily lives. With hope of entering the university of their first choice in their thoughts, ronin students tried to study as hard as possible in the basic term. But now in the advanced term their hope is vanishing little by little because of the prevailing anxiety. How do they live their daily lives in such a stressful and anxious situation?

Ronin students need some sort of recreation and leisure in order to take breaks from their studies. Because the ultimate hope for ronin students is to enter the university of their first choice, they try to spend their time for that purpose as much as possible, but it is practically impossible for them to study all of the time. The type of recreation and leisure time taken is influenced by the individual student's situation.

Ronin students in the dormitory have limited places to go for recreation. They live near the yobiko and are not allowed to have bicycles and motor bikes. The places where they can go are pachinko parlors, game centers, and bookstores. When they are bored with studying, they go to one of these places and spend time there. Ronin students can be seen concentrating on playing games in any game center and at any coffee shop. Many others are seen in the bookstores near the yobiko and around Hiroshima Station. They usually do not purchase a

book but browse through books concerning the college entrance examination. Other ronin students indulge in reading comics and weekly magazines.

These ways of spending time are only a means to escape momentarily from studying. Most ronin students spending their time in this way are not excited about the actual activity. Ronin students have easy access to this type of recreation by themselves at any time. They do not have to make any previous arrangement. Whenever they feel like doing any one of these activities, they can. They can also confine it to themselves without bothering other people. Dormitory students went bowling on Sundays if they had money. However, ronin students do not play any time-consuming or high energy sports which might tire them later on. Here again playing sports is all right as long as it does not disturb their studies.

The easiest way to take breaks is to talk with friends at a coffee shop or on the floor of the yobiko. If some of their friends do not feel like attending a class, they go to one of the nearest coffee shops around the yobiko to talk. The most popular topics concerned "Who is the most beautiful female in the class?" "Who likes whom?" or "Someone was jilted by someone." In short, these were generally male students discussing female students. A key informant describes the kind of conversation they tend to engage in:

. . . on my way going up to the eighth floor (of the yobiko), I came across friend A. . . . he told me that he had come to the yobiko to study at the study hall. But I guessed that a group of his friends got together and would enjoy chatting as is always the case with them. And then they would try to find pretty girls to have lunch with . . . This is their behavior pattern.

Today I finished all of my classes at three o'clock. Friend B with whom I took the same class on "how to write an essay" and I hung around at Hiroshima Station, talking to each other. His recent topic is "I like Miss C of the Tokyo University class" . . . we ended up talking until five o'clock . . .

(two days of diary, October, 1985)

Still they try not to waste their time. If they do, they are likely to regret what they have done. One male ronin student who frequently escaped from attending classes and enjoyed talking at the coffee shops said:

I attended only seven classes this week. I played sailing in Kure City. . . . Usually I don't feel bad about playing around, but this week I feel bad because I studied only today. Even if I was smiling, I could not enjoy myself at my friend's birthday party.

(male, interview, September, 1985)

Another male ronin student describes his feeling after a drinking party with his friends. He said:

It was fun to have drinks and to talk at the party. We didn't talk about the examination. This topic is "taboo." Although I enjoyed the party at the moment, I didn't feel good after that because I tend to think that I have to study all the time. Recently I feel as if I have been carrying a heavy load on my shoulders by thinking that I don't have much time like the seniors at high schools. I can't make merry too much like in my high school days. When I play to a certain extent, I think that I should stop here. Whatever I may do, I tend to be concerned about the next year entrance examination.

(male, interview, August, 1985)

Ronin life is always shaped by anxiety over the entrance examination. Whenever they take more than short breaks, they cannot help feeling guilty or uncomfortable about their behavior. Thus, the majority of ronin students try to regulate their social behavior, but only so long as the breaks do not become an obstacle to their study.

Other groups also emerge in the advanced term. They deviate from the majority of ronin students and indulge in an enjoyable ronin life. They do not forget to study hard but they also escape from it and do whatever they want. For these groups, leisure and breaks became a part of their lives.

Some became intensely interested in playing pachinko, and they could not quit going to pachinko parlors. Since this is public gambling allowed only for adults over eighteen years of age, those who came from the rural areas enjoyed going there because they were free from their family and neighbors. As high school students in their hometowns they had not been allowed to play. In their high school days they would return home and study after school, following the usual routine for high school students.

Now living in the dormitory or an apartment in Hiroshima they had a lot of free time. Nobody pushed them to study or watched whether or not they were studying. Thus they went to the new and exciting pachinko parlors and game centers in Hiroshima. Since the pachinko parlor involves gambling, if they lost their money for living expenses sent by their parents, they had to win the money back. Sometimes they won and sometimes they lost. By thinking of a winning day, they would go there when they had time and eventually lost interest in attending routinized classes. They stopped thinking about the entrance examination and concentrated on playing around. Two of these ronin students said:

I frequently go to pachinko parlors. I went there yesterday, too. I will go after this study meeting. I have earned money from there. (male A)

I won fifteen thousand yen (or 80 dollars) by pachinko parlors yesterday and today. But my friend lost a lot and was depressed with that. (male B)

(two males, interview, December, 1985)

A description of how one group played around may add some variation to the general picture of ronin students. This group of twenty ronin students got together at the party after the sports day in May. The following description was given by one of the group members.

His tiny four and a half mat (9'x9') one-room apartment is a place where they get together frequently to chat and drink all night long. He could never turn away any visitor so whoever gets together there starts a party. This group usually hangs around on the bank of the river near the yobiko. After attending classes or even without attending them, they would get together there and start talking. Sometimes after that they would go to one of their apartments. Many of them did not attend classes very regularly.

For this group, standing in line for registration for the winter session became a party. The female members of the group had a good excuse for spending the night standing in the line because they would say to their parents. "I will go and start waiting for winter registration from the previous night, otherwise I will not be able to register for good classes." Even a patrol car came to the yobiko to check on what was going on that night. A T.V. reporter might report about this long line of students standing and waiting for the registration for the winter session as a serious or enthusiastic attempt to attend good classes. But what these ronin students actually were doing was having a party. This group deviated from the majority of ronin students.

How much of a day ronin students spend studying indicates how serious they are about preparing for the entrance examination. Over 50 percent (58.6 percent) of ronin students reported that they spent more than

seven hours a day studying for the entrance examination. Only 11.5 percent reported that they studied less than five hours a day. Although their ronin life should be designed for the entrance examination, it is quite a long time period for young students aged nineteen or twenty years to spend more than five hours studying monotonous and repetitive memorization tasks for the entrance examination. In the first week of December, 9.4 percent of ronin students responded that they studied more than ten hours a day. This long time involvement in the preparation for the entrance examination suggests that they wish to realize their hopes by studying hard.

Thus there is some variation among ronin students in the advanced term. Despite this, they share an underlying feeling that they ought to study all the time to avoid ronin life and to enter their first choice university. The intensity of this common concern shapes their daily activities in the advanced term.

The next section of this chapter will discuss changes in class attendance pattern in the advanced term. The changes reflect their psychology and priorities in the advanced term.

#### Class Attendance and Perspectives on Yobiko Teachers

The most crucial difference between the yobiko and the high school is that students evaluate their teachers in the yobiko whereas only teachers evaluate their students in the high school. In a typical high school, attendance is always checked by their homeroom teachers and its record is in the student's file. All the recorded information in high school will affect the student's future substantially so that the students have to observe the schools' rules and regulations. Students are assigned

to a certain class. The class is the basic unit in which they receive instructions from teachers on each subject. In high school there is almost no choice in selecting courses, much less selecting teachers. In short, the relationship between teachers and students in high schools is a type of power relationship in which the teachers are superordinate and the students subordinate.

By contrast, ronin students can select their classes and teachers despite the normative idea of the yobiko that they should attend the classes assigned to them. There are different classes for the same subject in which different texts are used by different teachers. Sometimes the same text is taught by different teachers in a different classroom on a different schedule.

The yobiko also evaluates teachers on the basis of ronin students' responses to the teacher's evaluation form. It conducts evaluation twice each term. According to the results, the yobiko sometimes fires those who are evaluated as poor teachers. Ronin students as well as the yobiko teachers know that their evaluation might lead to the firing of some of their teachers.

One of the important aspects of the teachers' evaluation is the size of the regular class attendance. The staff members of the yobiko enter the classroom while the yobiko teachers are teaching and count the number of students attending the class twice per term. The percentage of attendance is calculated and reported to the teachers' evaluation committee which consists of senior staff members in the yobiko. This size of regular student attendance and students' evaluation of their teachers are two crucial criteria to evaluate yobiko teachers, although

some staff members also observe students' reaction to lectures and the teacher's behavior through audio video equipment in each class.

In the basic term, ronin students more or less lead a continued high school life. The majority of them attend the assigned classes regularly. The yobiko reported at the end of the basic term that the attendance rate of Hiroshima Seminar was over 80 percent for the term across classrooms.

Regardless of the yobiko's evaluation of teachers, during the advanced term the majority of ronin students start going into classes different from the ones assigned to them. The findings of the self-administered questionnaire showed that 82.7 percent of the ronin students had switched classes in this way. This percentage is rather conservative. The questionnaire was administered by staff members of the yobiko. Revealing to one of the ronin students that it was my own questionnaire, not that of the yobiko, the student replied:

I thought that the questionnaire was Hiroshima Seminar's. I felt strange at that time because there were several questions which had nothing to do with the yobiko. Since many friends of mine thought it was the yobiko's, they did not respond to it honestly. They thought that answering "yes" (which indicates that they got into the classes other than the ones assigned to them) was bad.

This female student observed that over 90 percent of her friends had attended the other classes.

It is a drastic change in the advanced term that more ronin students tended to go into other classes. In the basic term every teacher seemed more interesting or better than their high school teachers. But in the advanced term they had enough interaction among themselves to exchange

their evaluation of the yobiko teachers. One male ronin student describes his motive to get into the other classes and stop attending assigned classes:

I attended only the assigned class on biology. I didn't have a concept of moguri or getting into the other classes. I criticized those from high schools in Hiroshima who had been getting into the other classes by violating the yobiko's rules. After I got used to the yobiko, I came to think that it was all right because we could attend the classes to suit our level. Then I started getting into the other classes to suit myself. Take biology class for an example, since I am good at it, I can see in advance what to learn in the class if it is an easy class and I prepare for it (by myself). If it becomes so, it will be useless to attend the class. So I got into another class on biology.

(male, interview, November, 1985)

Many ronin students felt guilty about attending classes other than the ones assigned to them in the basic term because they had been so accustomed to observing school rules and regulations since their elementary school days, especially since almost all ronin students had been among the most industrious and good students in their high schools.

But even in the basic term those who came from high schools in Hiroshima City and had had previous experience in attending Hiroshima Seminar as high school students began breaking this internalized behavior pattern and establishing a norm of free choice of teachers. Such an atmosphere was prevalent during the basic term and summer sessions. This atmosphere would merge with anxiety for the college entrance examination on the part of ronin students, so that they became more likely to be selective in attending good classes, which they perceived as more useful for exam preparation.

If they judged that their teacher did not teach the materials well, they would lose interest in attending the classes. They expected their

teachers to be clear about what they were teaching and not to bore them by giving encouragement and telling jokes. They would say that they did not attend the class of a particular teacher because their feelings did not fit that of the teacher.

In November even those in the higher ranked classes had stopped attending many of their assigned classes and had gone into other classes. A group of male ronin students talked about changes in class attendance in the advanced term:

I tend to study in the study hall most of the day.  
I quit the class on subjects which I can do by myself.  
(male A)

I also cut too difficult classes. When I was in the basic term, I attended every class assigned to us since I could not judge it. Now I cut many classes because I know who our teachers are and what classes are available. (male B)

I don't attend classes because of feelings. The teacher is not my type. If a teacher is my type, then I will attend his class. I attended English Composition class today. (male C)

(three males, interview, November, 1985)

These students were always concerned about the efficiency of studying for the college entrance examination.

Another group of male ronin students talked about their class attendance:

If I found a teacher to suit my taste, then I would attend the class. Once I changed one class, I had to change the others. Now I have changed five classes. I attend 7A class, the lowest class for national universities in which only 30 students attend in a 100 person-classroom, because I attend V5 and classes for the University of Tokyo and Kyoto University.  
(male A)

I always attend V3 class. But I don't attend many of my classes. (What classes have you quit attending?) For example, mathematics, since the teacher writes down answers on the blackboard monotonously by himself, it is no fun to me. (male B)

I am thinking of quitting the class on Frequent Questions for English. The questions in the text are too easy to solve. I think that it is not worth spending ninety minutes attending the class by spending ninety minutes. I had better do it by myself. Don't you think so? (male C)

The teacher of World History writes a lot on the blackboard, but we don't understand, do we? It is better to quit attending that class. (male B)

(three males, interview, September, 1985)

These students tend to emphasize the usefulness of the class and the teachers' methods. They judged the content of the classes in terms of efficiency and effectiveness. By attending given classes several times, they would determine that it was more efficient for them to study by themselves than to attend the classes. More and more students begin to study in the study hall in the yobiko instead of attending useless classes.

Female ronin students showed the same tendency, although the females were more likely to attend classes than males. A group of female ronin students talked about their class attendance:

I stopped attending English Class B because the class was monotonous although I attended it until recently. At that time the other students in the class felt so and the number of students decreased in attending the class. I heard that then the teacher conducted a self-administered questionnaire about their complaints about his class. Some responses mentioned that they wanted to be called on to answer in the classroom. Then the teacher started calling upon students in the classroom so that again the number of attendance decreased. . . . In his teaching, his translation of English is good but we cannot use it when we review what we learned in the class. (female A)

I am satisfied to grasp the outline of translation by being taught to identify what "it" and "they" mean in an English sentence. (female B)

My reason for not attending classes is that our teacher is so slow in teaching that I feel that the teacher has not prepared for the class though I have a tendency to be impatient (with slow teaching). (female C)

Whether the teacher is teaching energetically or not does matter to me. Or whether or not the teacher has prepared for the class is important to me. (female B)

(four females, interview, December, 1985)

Whether or not this group of female students attended a given teacher's class depended upon his industry or sincerity in preparing for the class. In other words, when they trusted a certain teacher's preparation, they would attend his class regardless of the usefulness of the class itself.

Some ronin students were not patient enough to attend a given class even a few times. They judged the teacher quickly. One female student talked to me about her plan to attend class in the winter session:

I am going to attend Combination of English Composition and Translation class. I expect this class to focus on how to answer questions in an essay-style but if the teacher of the class is bad, I will do it myself. I quit attending English Composition in the summer session because the teacher was terrible.

(female, interview, December, 1985)

For this female student, time is more important than money.

Students had to pay extra money to attend classes in both the summer session and the winter session. Once the money was paid, it would not be refunded. But in her class, she decided to quit attending the class if the teacher was bad in the first class. Some ronin students walked out immediately if they found out that the assigned teacher was one of the teachers that they defined as bad.

Female ronin students tended to attend unassigned classes more than males. Eighty-nine percent of the female students responded that they attended classes other than the ones assigned by the yobiko in comparison to 81.7 percent of the males (both rates can be underestimated because they thought that this questionnaire was for the yobiko to investigate class attendance so that some of them normatively responded "no" to this question).

Both female and male students responded with the same rank order of reasons for not attending the assigned classes and attending the ones of their choice. Both evaluated their assigned teachers in terms of feelings of whether or not they like them, or whether or not they are bad in a vague sense. Although the difference is slight, male ronin students more than female students tend to select their classes according to their own schedules.

#### Self-Evaluation and Tracking within the Yobiko

In addition to the institutionalized tracking system of high schools, the tracking system within the yobiko influenced the self-evaluation of ronin students. Those in the private university course tend to convey a sense of inferiority to those in the national university course. They had given up studying some of the seven subjects required for the National Common Examination at some time in the process of schooling before becoming ronin. They did so because they did poorly in some of the subjects, usually mathematics. If they were poor in mathematics, they could not expect to enter a prestigious national university. They might think that instead of entering a local national university, they would rather enter a prestigious private university in a metropolitan

area. Yet they still tended to feel a sense of inferiority simply because they could not master all the subjects, as those in the national university course did. One ronin student in the private university course said:

After all, those students who are applying to private universities are no good or have something lacking because we did not study all the subjects like those students applying to a national university. Those in the national university are above us.

(male, interview, November, 1985)

When I asked a student applying to private universities if I could find anyone to agree to being interviewed for my research, he answered:

There is no one that becomes interested in such a thing unlike those in the national university course. I think that it is impossible for me to ask any classmate in our class. If you ask those in the course for private universities for interviews, I think that they will say, "I have nothing to do with it" . . . . They are not interested in this kind of things because the standardized value of mock exams are low, I guess.

(male, interview, November, 1985)

The way he described his classmates in the course for private universities implied that he himself looked down upon them. Simply because their academic achievement scores were low, they seemed a little lower as persons than those in the course for the national universities. Ronin students quite openly look down upon their classmates because of low academic achievement.

The yobiko and ronin life intensify the value of academic achievement in comparison with that in high schools. Academic achievement becomes the only criterion to evaluate others as well as themselves. A group of male ronin students talked about the impact of academic achievement in the ronin life. One of them said:

I sometimes look at others as persons in terms of differences in academic achievement. At first, the difference is only that of academic achievement, but if the situation continued to be the same, that person is superior to me, I think. . . . The one who is superior can do very well in academics and sports. One of my friends who entered Tokyo University on graduation from high school could do anything well. . . .

(male, interview, August, 1985)

Another student who had kept silent began talking just when the other two students said that both of them were poor in English, specifically pointing out the standardized value of the mock exams. This quiet student began talking by referring to his standardized value in English:

I am good only at English. My standardized value in English is 72. Since I was a junior high school student, I attended juku for English and became confident only in English. The mock exam was easy, wasn't it? I am especially confident about English translation. But my score in Japanese is only about 50 and I think that I have to study Japanese harder.

(male, interview, August, 1985)

He had kept silent, not saying a single word, even though he had agreed to be interviewed by me for about one hour. But when the topic came to that of test scores in English, he began talking about it with smiles and enthusiasm. His behavior implied that the test score was his only means of presenting himself better to the others, as if there were no other criteria to evaluate people in the yobiko at all.

In particular, those in a high-ranked class for national universities view female ronin students in the private university course with distaste. The key informant referred to those female students in the private university course in his diary:

The fourth period of today was Japanese History for Private Universities. There were many who are in the private university course. Many of male ronin students

in the course wear bright clothing and hairstyles. The females acted like an adult and talked to anyone without any sense of hesitation. A student in the room next to mine in the rooming house told me the following story. He is in the lower class for private university course. One Sunday he visited a teacher of Chinese Classics with his friends. Those who came earlier were talking with the teacher, and smoking. Looking closely at them, he realized that they were the female classmates in the course. I hear that many of female ronin students in the private university course smoked. . . . The other day when I was going down the elevator from the ninth floor, three females who seemed to be in the private university course got on the elevator and happened to stand in front of me and I felt terrible about the stink of smoking from them. You may say, "It is only smoking." But I personally feel sorry about the increase of such immoral females.

(male, diary, October, 1985)

This ronin student in the national university course of high rank viewed females in the private university course according to his stereotype of students in the private university course. Even though he did not know whether or not those smelling of smoke were female ronin students in the private university course, he was sure of it. His prejudice against those in the private university course made him have a false image of these female ronin students. I talked with female ronin students and observed them, but there were no distinctive differences in their behavior or clothing to the extent that he could classify them as distinctively immoral women. They seemed the same as those in the national university course.

Not only this ronin student but also his friends shared the same image of females in the private university course as somehow immoral people. They talked about their female classmates in the national university course and those in the private university course:

In our class, twenty-two out of 140 students are females. They are not stupid. They study hard. Our female classmates are more bright than males in the class. Females in the private university course are different. They, after all, are stupid. You can notice if you see them. They are strange (wierd). The only college they would possibly pass would be junior colleges in Hiroshima City. Whenever I saw them, they were walking with their boy friends, arm in arm.

(three males, interview, October, 1985)

Evaluating those females in the private university course in terms of their academic achievement, these male ronin students imposed moral judgment upon them as persons. Their perception of females in the private university course was distorted by their stereotypes of students of low academic achievement, which suggests how much the academic achievement or academic identity affected their perception.

The way tracking affects ronin students is expressed in their consciousness of the ranks of the classes to which they belong and thus the reorganization of classes in the summer time is an important concern to all of them. The yobiko only intends to reorganize the classes so that teachers can teach effectively and efficiently in a class of homogeneous academic achievement. But the ronin students interpret this event differently. Whether they are placed in a class of lower rank or higher rank is a matter of life and death to them. If they fall to the class of lower rank, it means that they are behind their other classmates. Consequently, they perceive that others would know that their level of academic achievement is down. The rank of the class is a symbolic indication of what they are as persons in the yobiko, where achievement scores form the core value by which to evaluate others. The high visibility of test scores is established by an explicit

announcement of each test score on the board of the yobiko, accompanied by names. Every ronin student talks about his test score with his friends if they are good, which make them look better.

At the end of the basic term, students take a test for replacement. During the summer session they do not know whether they will go up, remain, or go down from the class to which they belong. They agonize over the thought about dropping. A female ronin student expressed such a feeling:

I worried about the result of the test during the summer session. I had been depressed for about two weeks . . . but I can say that the test was one step for studying more. After that I started taking any examination very seriously though these days my tension about studying has been lowered.

(female, interview, December, 1985)

Although the result of the placement test really has nothing to do with their prospects for the college entrance examination, they worry about it because they are conscious of how their classmates will view them if they have been demoted to a lower class. One male student said:

Fortunately, I remained in the same class as a result of the re-placement test in the summer. When I received the result of the test, my hands were trembling (he said this with a gesture and with a serious face). I am very happy to remain in this class.

(male, interview, September, 1985)

Those students who could remain or go up to a higher class would be happy. But those who dropped from their former class were very troubled by it. Some of them then began opposing the yobiko and finally stopped coming. One student said:

I dropped way down by the placement test. When I realized it, I couldn't study for the time being. It is true that I was prepared for dropping because I didn't study very much in the basic term. I was shocked

to know that I dropped further than I was prepared for. I lost the will to study any more. . . . One of my friends in the Tokyo University Class was also shocked at dropping to a class of lower rank.

(male, interview, September, 1985)

Ronin students tended to talk about rumors regarding dropping or going up as an evaluation of others. One group of male ronin students talked about a three-person group of male students from a "Private-Super Elite" high school in Hiroshima City:

There is a three-person group consisting of students from High School Y. They made a lot of questions and studied very hard in the basic term. Two of them dropped in the re-placement test and one remained in the Tokyo University Class. But this remaining student stopped coming to Hiroshima Seminar by saying that the class was boring. He quit Hiroshima Seminar and has been studying at home.

(three males, interview, October, 1985)

The name of the class itself has meaning for ronin students. By dropping out of the highly ranked class, they lose face in the eyes of their former classmates. They cannot bear this situation. In a sense they are stigmatized by their former classmates by being labeled as a student unable to keep up with the others. With this highly visible hierarchical ranking of the classes in the yobiko, they have to accept their stigmatized academic identity in the eyes of the others.

The class, thus, is a status symbol in the yobiko. The classes are assigned by the yobiko and ronin students are supposed to attend the assigned classes for each subject. The texts are designated to suit the level of students comprising the class. But almost all the students went into the classes other than the ones assigned to them. An analysis of the responses to this question in the questionnaire indicated that the majority of them did so in order to attend their favorite teacher's

class. But in interviewing ronin students, they mentioned vanity as a reason for attending classes other than the assigned ones. They said:

M attends class 5C of English though he belongs to 9C because of vanity. (male A)

It may be because of vanity but I think that the texts used in 5C class are better than that of 9C. . . . I have several other classes to attend despite the class assignment by the yobiko. (male B)

(two males, interview, September, 1985)

Since the class is a status symbol in the yobiko, some ronin students asked to remain in the same class in spite of their placement downward on the basis of the test. College student A, who works as a student aide in the dormitory and ronin student B talked with me about rank consciousness:

College student A: I don't think that we had rank consciousness. I am what I am, so that if you can pass the entrance examination of the designated university, which class I was at the yobiko did not matter at all.

Ronin student B: I suspect that all of us are conscious of rank if it is not a kind of vanity. I worried about the result of the re-placement test when I was visiting my parents in the summer and didn't know how to tell my parents about it (if I dropped). . . .

College student A: I guess that many of you were very shocked at the reorganization of classes. But I think that you won't drop unless your test scores are very bad.

Ronin student B: Someone happened to do poorly in that placement test by chance and was moved to a lower class, so that he went and shouted at his tutor to complain about the test. The class assignment was not changed, but he attends mathematics in the same class.

College student A: I remember that there was such a student last year. He also went and shouted at his tutor. But he was flatly rejected by his tutor.

Ronin student B: The yobiko is a severe place, isn't it? It is true that any class is the same but some students think of the class as status.

College student A: You don't have to have a sense of inferiority simply because you are in the class of a lower rank. The point is a matter of real ability, after all.

Ronin student B: But still students don't like dropping down a class, do they? . . . .

(two males, interview, October, 1985)

This conversation between a college student and a ronin student indicates that the class was very important to the ronin student. By contrast, the college student did not care about it and emphasized real ability, since the important thing is to pass the entrance examination. Here I have to doubt the college student's reconstruction of his past. I suspect that if he were a ronin student now, he would be conscious of the rank of his class and would worry about the reorganization of the classes. He is already a college student, talking in a retrospective perspective, justifying and distorting or giving meaning to his past reality. As a student aide in the dormitory he played a senior role to the ronin student. It seems that they are in quite different worlds, a college student living in heaven with stable mentality and a ronin student living in hell with a lot of anxiety for the future. The hell will turn into heaven once the ronin student is able to finish his ronin life. The past can then be reconstructed to justify and legitimate what he is as a college student.

Consciousness of rank is also pervasive in daily interaction. The rank is more or less visible to everyone in the yobiko. Being aware of the relative position in academic achievement tends to shape how they interact with each other. In interviewing two ronin students, one in Tokyo University Class and the other in the Hiroshima University Class, one talked about his consciousness of ranking:

When I talk to others, I change my way of speech according to the level of standardized value. If the standardized values are far lower than mine, I do not talk to them as if I am showing off my knowledge and talk about something light. When I talk to the student of a high standardized value, I talk about something serious if I don't have a sense of inferiority.

(male, interview, August, 1985)

Academic achievement can be a criterion of happiness in the ronin students' minds during this particular period. When two ronin students talked with me about happiness in life, one of them said that happiness was only a subjective feeling so that a man could not always be happy. Happiness was a balance of one's desire and reality. Listening to this view of happiness, the other student in the Tokyo University Class emphasized the existence of an absolute criterion of happiness. He said:

Happiness has an absolute criterion. For example, if someone who always gets a score of 30 on a test gets a 60 score, then he will be happy. If someone who always gets a score of 80 gets a 60 score, then he will be unhappy. But the one who always gets a score of 30 tends to look up to those who get a score of 80 with longing and envy. . . .

(male, interview, August, 1985)

This might be only a chance example, but it seemed to have more meaning than that. The speaker had internalized the value of academic achievement and sincerely believed that one's happiness depends upon one's test scores.

He also thought of one's happiness as relative to other people even though he started by saying that there is an absolute criterion for happiness. This way of thinking reflects his internalization of the entrance examination value. He enjoyed studying from his elementary school days simply because he could feel a sense of superiority to his other classmates, in addition to enjoying learning itself. In this

sense, his study was always motivated to show or prove that he is superior to his classmates as a person expressed in academic achievement. In the same way he looks at happiness, which is an emotional or psychological feeling, from his judgment of academic achievement especially in comparison with others. He thinks that he is happiest if he achieved the highest score to date in his ronin life.

In summary, the illustrations by ronin students indicated that the tracking system in the yobiko contributed to shaping a self-evaluation in which individuals are stratified by academic achievement. Those in the lower tracks are likely to have a sense of inferiority toward those in the higher tracks. The latter, in turn, tend to have a sense of superiority toward the former. This is due partly to the highly visible hierarchical structure of ranking of high schools and that of classes in the yobiko. Because ronin life is basically a special status in which everyone attempts to improve upon their academic achievement in order to pass into the university of their first choice, the system of tracking within the yobiko leaves its imprint in both objective and self-evaluation terms.

#### Aspiration and Views of Application to a University

An analysis of the reasons why ronin students chose to apply to a particular department of a university as their first choice helps us understand their priorities and reveals the basic dimensions of the decision-making process. Table 6.2 displays the responses to twelve possible reasons why students might choose to apply to a particular department of a university. About 70 percent of the ronin students in this yobiko said that they would apply to a particular department of

Table 6.2  
Factors Considered in Choosing a University to Apply to

	Strongly Disagree +		Strongly Agree +			Total
	+-----+-----+-----+-----+					
University and department have what I want to do	3.5	5.5	20.2	26.6	44.2	100.0%
Desire for the university	3.8	5.3	19.0	33.3	38.6	100.0% (n=1595)
Required subjects in the entrance examination	15.5	9.3	25.1	26.2	23.9	100.0% (n=1597)
To get a better job	11.8	11.0	33.2	29.7	14.3	100.0% (=1592)
Appropriate one for my academic ability	11.2	14.3	30.8	32.3	11.4	100.0% (n=1593)
Reputation of the university	15.8	12.3	31.0	28.2	12.6	100.0% (n=1593)
The city in which the university is located	23.9	12.3	21.3	23.1	19.4	100.0% (n=1593)
To terminate <u>ronin</u> life	28.3	20.5	28.5	14.8	7.9	100.0% (n=1592)
The graduates of the university are socially active	25.6	17.1	31.2	16.5	9.6	100.0% (n=1593)
Commuting from home	78.6	4.8	5.6	6.1	4.9	100.0% (n=1600)
Parents' advice	66.7	14.0	12.3	4.9	2.1	100.0% (n=1604)
Friends also go	80.6	10.9	5.4	1.8	1.4	100.0% (n=1595)

a university because they had a desire for it. The name of the university somehow attracts them. At the same time 70 percent of the students reported that they would apply to the department of the university because they would be able to do what they wanted to do there. These two reasons reflect the students' diffuse desire for a particular department of a university.

On the other hand, ronin students were least influenced by others in their application plan. Less than 7 percent of the students said that they would apply to a particular university according to their parents' advice. Only 3.2 percent of the students reported that they would apply to a particular university because their friends would also apply to the same university.

Reasons why students would apply to a particular department of a university varied by the level of the university that they would aspire to. Table 6.3 shows percentages of agreement with each reason by the level of the university students aspire to. Students across three different aspiration level groups reported that their interest and desire for a particular department of a university are major reasons although the higher the level of the university that they aspired to, the stronger this tendency. A lower aspiration level group were more likely than a higher aspiration level group to report that the required subjects in the entrance examination and desire to avoid repeating ronin would be important reasons.

A peculiar pattern appears regarding the reason, "I can commute from home." Students in the middle aspiration level group reported it as one of their reasons at the highest percentage. This may be attributed

Table 6.3  
 Factors Considered in Choosing a University  
 by Level of University to Aspire

(% Agreement)

	Level of University to Aspire		
	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3
	N=268	N=693	N=309
(1) University and department have what I want to do	83.6	59.8	64.7
(2) Desire for that university	81.8	70.8	64.6
(3) To get a better job	54.8	44.6	37.0
(4) Reputation of the University	51.7	40.3	34.4
(5) The city in which the university is located	47.8	42.2	43.1
(6) Appropriate one for my academic ability	42.9	42.5	46.0
(7) The graduates of the university are socially active	37.9	24.1	20.7
(8) Required subjects in the entrance examination	38.6	50.4	58.5
(9) To terminate <u>ronin</u> life	20.9	22.4	26.9
(10) Parents' advice	6.6	8.4	5.8
(11) Friends also go	6.6	2.6	1.3
(12) Commuting from home	3.7	17.1	5.2

to the substantial number of students who would apply to Hiroshima University. Hiroshima Seminar in Hiroshima recruits many students who would like particularly to attend Hiroshima University. The students were likely to live in Hiroshima or cities near Hiroshima City.

The twelve reasons can be grouped into four categories by the correlations among them. A desire for a particular university, to get a better job, the social recognition of the graduates from the university, the reputation of the university, and the university's location are highly correlated. This group of reasons is called a status reason. Second, consideration of the required subjects in the entrance examination and academic achievement, and to avoid repeating ronin are also highly correlated. This group is called rational calculation reason. The third category which consists of the influence of their friends and parents, and possibility to commute from home is called other's influence. Fourth, the response, "the university and the department have what I want to do" is unrelated to most of the other reasons, except for a correlation with the diffuse "Desire for the university." It is therefore treated as a distinct reason, called interest.

Table 6.4 shows the relationship between four categories of reasons and the level of the university that students aspired to. Students aspiring to higher ranked universities were more likely to report interest and status reasons. By contrast, students aspiring to lower ranked universities were more likely to report rational calculation reasons.

The difference between the number of university ronin students applied to the previous year and how many they plan to apply to this time indicate how ronin life has changed their attitude toward the

Table 6.4  
 Level of University to Aspire  
 (Mean Agreement Scores) \*

Category of Reasons	Level of University to Aspire		
	Rank 1 N=263	Rank 2 N=683	Rank 3 N=307
Interest	4.24	4.03	3.93
Status	3.41	3.19	3.08
Rational	2.77	3.03	3.19
Others	1.41	1.59	1.37

\*Scores are calculated by the assigned numbers from "Strongly agree = 5" to "Strongly disagree = 1."

college entrance examination. When they were in high school they aspired to enter a prestigious university, so they did not apply to any university that they thought was not worth entering. The number of the universities they applied to and plan to take their entrance examinations are shown in Table 6.5. About 40 percent of the students took only one entrance examination of a university on graduation from high school in responses in the questionnaire. A similar result was obtained through analysis of students' files of the previous year. About 30 percent of the students took only one university entrance examination.

Ronin students, however, plan to apply to more universities than they did the previous year. About three-fourths of the students plan to apply to four or more universities. Considering the application fee of 25,000 yen per one examination (equivalent to about \$200 at the rate

Table 6.5  
 Number of Exams Ronin Expect to Take,  
 by Number Reportedly Taken the Previous Year

Number to be taken	Number Reported for This Year				School Records of Exams Taken Previous Year
	1	2	3 or more	Total	
only 1	3.1	0.9	0.5	4.5	31.3
2 or 3	13.1	5.1	2.6	20.7	41.5
4 or 5	14.2	10.9	10.0	35.1	20.9
6 or more	9.0	9.4	11.5	39.8	4.7
none	39.4	26.1	34.5	100.0	1.6
Total (%)					100.0

(N=1165)

of 125 yen = \$1.00), transportation and hotel fees, parents have to pay quite a lot of money to let their children take the entrance examinations. But the parents do not spare money in attempting to send their children to the best possible universities. Ronin students also wish to avoid repeating ronin.

#### The Effect of Tracking in the Yobiko on Ronin Students

Yobiko students are placed into one of five ranks according to their academic test scores. Table 6.6 reports the mean scores to questions regarding (a) ronin life, (b) reasons for going to a university, (c) reasons for applying to a more prestigious university, and (d) factors considered in choosing a university to apply to, by yobiko rank.

Ranks in the tracking system differentiate how favorably students view ronin life, as shown in deck a. Those in tracks of higher ranks are more likely to think ronin life is enjoyable than those in lower

tracks. Although there is no significant difference between ronin students in different tracks in their negative views of ronin life, those in the top rank are slightly less anxious about the entrance exams and find ronin life slightly less onerous.

Correlation analysis reveals little difference in reasons for going to a university (deck b) and applying for a more prestigious university (deck c). However, those students in track 2 show a peculiar pattern of reasons for applying to a more prestigious university, which is not captured in the rank correlation analysis. They were more likely to respond that they would apply to a more prestigious university both to prove real ability to others and to show superiority over others. However, they were least likely to consider the choice to obtain a better job because of credentialism in Japan. A possible explanation of this pattern is that the students in track 2 are more conscious of competition with others than those in the other tracks. It seems that they want to identify with the higher performance elite and reject the notion that they are part of the general race for credentials.

The factors considered in selecting a first choice university vary by yobiko tracks. As was discussed earlier in this chapter, ronin students generally consider their own interest and preference most and the influence of others least as factors in the decision-making process.

However, those in higher ranked tracks are more likely to consider status factors than those in lower ranked tracks. Those in higher tracks indicated "to get a better job," "reputation of the university," and "social recognition of graduates from the university" as important factors more than those in lower tracks. By contrast, those in lower tracks

Table 6.6

Tracking and Ronin Students' Perspectives on Life and Plans<sup>a</sup>a. Perspective on Ronin Life

	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5
Meaningful to study harder in <u>ronin</u> life than in high school	3.28	3.29	3.25	3.14	3.23
	*				
Enjoyable to make friends in <u>ronin</u> life	3.47	3.14	2.99	3.00	2.78
	**				
Enjoyable to be free from high school	2.91	2.79	2.80	2.70	2.42
Anxious about the entrance examination of the next year	3.46	3.68	3.68	3.72	3.84
Hard life by studying every day	3.44	3.56	3.57	3.55	3.66
Severe life without any social status	3.25	3.36	3.32	3.23	3.32

## b. Reasons for Going to a University

	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5
To obtain a better job	3.31	3.52	3.62	3.58	3.48
	*				
To get a certificate or degree	2.89	3.31	3.47	3.54	3.20
	*				
To enjoy youth before working	3.43	3.39	3.44	3.67	3.64
To improve myself before working	3.48	3.42	3.42	3.54	3.50
Friends also go	1.83	1.92	2.02	2.01	1.99
Parents' advice	1.59	1.64	1.80	1.71	1.85

Table 6.6 (continued) Tracking and Ronin Students' Perspectives on Life and Plans<sup>a</sup>

c. Reasons for Applying to a More Prestigious University					
	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5
To obtain a better job because credentialism in Japan	3.43	3.15	3.54	3.59	3.61
To prove my "real ability" to others	3.39	3.60	3.19	3.17	3.13
To show my "superiority" over others	2.60 **	3.35	2.73	2.64	2.78
To enter a more prestigious university than the one friends entered upon graduation from high school	2.55	2.85	3.02	3.00	3.21
d. Factors Considered in Choosing a University					
	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5
University and department have what I want to do	4.39 **	4.08	4.05	3.96	3.85
Desire for the university	4.40 **	4.12	3.90	3.80	3.90
Required subjects in the entrance examination	2.62 **	3.26	3.24	3.50	3.52
To get a better job	3.40	3.37	3.29	3.15	3.26
Appropriate one for my academic ability	3.07 **	3.19	3.30	3.13	3.26
Reputation of the university	3.41 **	3.25	2.95	2.95	3.12
The city in which the university is located	3.57 **	3.15	2.65	2.92	3.42
To terminate <u>ronin</u> life	2.16 **	2.54	2.45	2.63	2.71
The graduates of the university are socially active	3.13 **	2.88	2.51	2.49	2.57
Commuting from home	1.10	1.43	1.76	1.68	1.34
Parents' advice	1.58	1.68	1.66	1.66	1.49
Friends also go	1.51	1.31	1.26	1.30	1.35
Cases	(96)	(347)	(284)	(373)	(144)

<sup>a</sup>Scores are calculated by the assigned numbers from "Strongly agree = 5" to "Strongly disagree = 1."

\*Statistical significance at the level of .05

\*\*Statistical significance at the level of .01

emphasized factors related to the college entrance examination itself such as "required subjects in the entrance examination of the university," and "to terminate ronin life." Students in natural sciences and social sciences-humanities did not show any difference in the priority of factors considered in their decision-making process.

The yobiko begins in April and finishes its basic term in the middle of July. At that time ronin students take a placement test that is used to re-organize classes for the advanced term in August. Student composition in each track over time is quite stable. Table 6.7 shows the relationship between Initial Rank and Second Rank. The correlation between the two class ranks is very high, and only about 20 percent of students either rose or fell in rank.

Table 6.7  
Relationship between Initial Class<sup>a</sup> and Second Class<sup>b</sup>

Second Class	Initial Class				
	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5
Rank 1	93.8%	4.4%	0.7%	0.5%	0.0%
Rank 2	4.1	80.9	10.3	6.3	1.3
Rank 3	2.1	10.9	84.0	7.8	1.9
Rank 4	0.0	3.8	3.9	83.9	15.8
Rank 5	0.0	0.0	1.0	1.6	81.0
Total Cases	100.0% (97)	100.0% (367)	100.0% (282)	100.0% (386)	100.0% (158)

Gamma (G) = +.932

Chi-square = 3382.584    df = 16    p = < .001

<sup>a</sup> indicates the class assignment at the time of entry to Hiroshima Seminar.

<sup>b</sup> indicates the class assignment after the placement test in the summer.

A detailed investigation reveals some variation regarding changes in each class, however. In addition to the five general ranks by ability, the yobiko further divides its students into sixteen classes on the basis of a combination of type or department they aim to enter and their overall ability. Among the sixteen classes in the yobiko, the composition of classes in the upper level did not change much, but the class composition in the lower level changed significantly. In class the middle class four of the national university natural science category, only a third of the students remained in the same class in September. About one-third had moved up one or two classes and another third had moved down one or two classes. In classes 5-9 about two-thirds remained in the same class for the second term, with the majority of the others moving up one or two classes. Nearly 20 percent of those in the two bottom classes moved up two classes. Students in the humanities-social sciences category showed much less movement overall, yet even there the lowest national university class had relatively high percent of students who moved up two classes after the first term.

This indicates accomplishments made by lower level students in competing with the higher level students, although the overall composition of tracks between the two periods are rather stable. Unlike Rosenbaum's tournament thesis, ronin students are still in a race, competing with each other and win what they have not realized before. This minority of achieving ronin students are those who did not study in their high schools but made the most of instruction in the yobiko.

Not all ronin students aspire to apply to Tokyo University. They estimate the best university they could possibly succeed in entering,

and that becomes their first choice. They may have started their ronin life with an overambitious plan to enter a very prestigious university which their cumulative test scores on mock exams in high school did not predict possible for them to enter.

By December, overambitious application plans have been "cooled-out" by their ronin experience. Table 6.8 indicates the categories of universities to which they decided to apply. In Japan, national universities as a whole are ranked higher than and are more difficult to enter than private universities. The table shows that three-fourths of the ronin students in the yobiko decided to apply to a national university as their first choice. Ronin students aspired to enter higher ranked universities than did high school graduates taking the entrance exam for the first time. Among graduate seniors throughout Japan only 14.4 percent seek to enter a national university (Asahishinbun, 1986).

The national universities are grouped into three categories based upon both their social prestige and their ranking in the yobiko data: former Imperial universities, other old national universities, and newer national universities. The majority of students decided to apply to second ranked national universities whereas only 28 percent of them decided to apply to the top universities. The tendency is also true of those who decided to apply to private universities.

Tracking influences the level of aspiration of ronin students. Table 6.9 shows the relationship between the ranks of classes to which ronin students are assigned and their level of aspiration or ambition in their application for the college entrance examinations both for national and private universities. The higher the ranks of classes in the yobiko, the higher the level of aspiration for both.

Table 6.8

Distribution of Ronin Students by Type and Rank  
of First Choice University  
in December of Ronin Year

Rank*	National	Private
Top	28.2%	48.0%
Second	56.7%	42.0%
Low	15.1%	10.0%
	100.0% (1102)	100.0% (398)
University Type	73.5%	26.5%

\*Note: In the national university category, the six former Imperial universities and Tokyo Institute of Technology and Hitotsubashi University form the top rank. The second ranked institutions are the other national universities (Hiroshima University, Kobe University, etc.) which date from the early period. In the private university category, seven universities (Waseda University, Keio University, Jouchi University, Doshisha University, Kansei Gakuin University, Ritsumeikan University, and Kansai University) fall into the top category. At each rank level, the national universities rank higher than the private universities.

Table 6.9  
Level of Aspiration by Tracking in the Yobiko

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a. National University

Level of University	Ranks in <u>Yobiko</u>				
	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5
Rank 1	94.9%	50.8%	14.9%	1.8%	10.4%
Rank 2	5.1	44.9	72.9	73.4	35.4
Rank 3	0.0	4.3	12.2	24.8	54.2
Total Cases	100.0% (98)	100.0% (256)	100.0% (262)	100.0% (286)	100.0% (48)

Gamma (G) = + .773    Chi-square = 476.565    df = 8    p = < .001

b. Private University

Level of University	Ranks in <u>Yobiko</u>		
	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3
Rank 1	78.6%	33.8%	27.3%
Rank 2	21.4	61.8	51.1
Rank 3	0.0	4.4	21.6
Total Cases	100.0% (53)	100.0% (68)	100.0% (88)

Gamma (G) = + .654    Chi-square = 67.467    df = 4    p = < .001

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The Process of "Cooling-Out":

Changing Views toward the Selecting University

One of the most important concerns for ronin students in the advanced term is their decision about which universities they will apply to. By this time they are no longer optimistic about passing the entrance examination of their first choice university. They have taken several mock exams by which they can estimate their potential for entering specific universities according to the data in the yobiko. They now think of alternative universities in case they fail to pass the entrance examination of the university of their first choice. Two ronin students were talking about their concern with this decision-making process:

After all, I have to pass the entrance examination of a university. I have no intention to repeat the ronin life again. I am going to take the entrance examination of six universities as alternative choices. At first I thought that I would take the entrance examination of Nagoya University, but I decided to take that of Tsukuba University. Whatever I may say, it depends upon the result of the National Common Examination. I don't want to fail again. My parent told me to take the entrance examination of a name university. Specifically he told me to take the entrance examination of one of the former "Imperial Universities," but it is impossible for me.

(male, interview, November, 1985)

This student had actually passed a private university's exam when he graduated from high school, but he did not go there. Instead, he decided to apply to a more prestigious university. By this time, in the middle of November, he realized that he had not improved his test scores enough to apply only to the university of his first choice. Now he had to face the fact that it would be impossible for him to pass it according to the data he had consulted. Here we see how the results of a series of mock exams he had taken so far influenced his decision-making process.

Although educators and people in general say that these young men tend to lose their ambition and take it easy in applying to a university, it is actually the result of their rational decision-making process. The yobiko provides ronin students with data which everyone there believes is worth trusting because the data have been collected in vast numbers by a computerized system throughout Japan. It is a nation-wide data base on which many thousands of students rely in selecting which university exams to take. Having experienced an ambivalent and marginal social status in the society, they do not want to repeat their ronin life again.

Avoidance of repeating ronin life becomes more important than passing the entrance examination of the university of their first choice, not to mention passing that of a university ranked higher than the one they failed to pass previously. In daily conversation they expressed their concern about the possibility of failure again. The key informant described in his diary what kind of conversation they tend to engage in during the advanced term.

After studying with friend C in the study hall, we went to eat lunch with those friends we met in the room. Recently our main topic at lunch time was about the entrance examination. What department of Waseda University will you apply to? But what all present agreed to was that we wanted to pass the entrance examination of any university or college, whatever university it may be even if it is a private university. To be honest, I am among them. Although I have a university I really want to enter, if I apply to only the university and fail to pass it, I cannot challenge to apply to it again.

(male, diary, October, 1985)

These students in the top-ranked course tended to talk about prestigious private universities as their alternative choices, since they really intended to enter the even more prestigious universities. Despite their

wish to pass a more prestigious university exam, they all wished to pass the entrance examination of some university in order to avoid repeating ronin life again.

One's success potential rating as measured in the mock exams is a key criterion for selecting an appropriate university to apply to. The rating is a letter assigned on the basis of the individual's score compared to that of all other students who plan to apply to that university. As one student said:

I would like to study after entering some university. I don't want to lead the second year of ronin life. I feel that it is impossible for me to pass Hitotsubashi University because my success potential rating for the university is "D" (the possibility of passing the university is judged as less than 25%). It is because I am poor in mathematics. I haven't studied Japanese history enough yet so that my standardized value for the subject is only about 57 (the average score of all of those who took the mock exam is calculated as 50).

(male, interview, November, 1985)

This adjustment of his first choice university to a more appropriate one can be understood as the process of "cooling-out," as Goffman's concept is described by Clark.

Clark argues that there are four steps in the process of "cooling-out" overambitious students in junior colleges in the United States. First, junior colleges administer pre-entrance tests by which they will be able to place the students in proper courses. The second step is a counseling interview in which the counselors encourage the students to choose the proper courses and classes. The next step is a major step in reorienting the students by utilizing impersonal means such as showing them previous grades and test scores and trying to make the students engage in self-assessment of their proper courses. The final step will

be arranged in such a way that the students can also believe that it is best for them to choose their proper course as advised by teachers and counselors (Clark, 1960:572-574).

The concept of "cooling-out" applied to overambitious junior college students can explain some important aspects of the ronin student's selection process. Before entering the yobiko, they take a screening test to be placed in proper classes that are definitely ranked on the basis of the standardized values of the test. From the moment they became ronin students in the yobiko they know their relative position in the ranking. The rank of each class is visible to others as well as to themselves. Because of this placement into ranked classes, each ronin student is less likely to be overambitious in the first place even though many of them try to apply to a university ranked higher than the one they failed to pass the previous year.

The first counseling meeting is the three-person conference among the ronin student, his parent, and his tutors in July. This counseling session is designed both to encourage ronin students to study harder, and to level down the university of application by showing the student the results of the previous mock exams. But this first counseling in July is not powerful or persuasive enough for the student to change the university of his application since he has only taken one mock exam by that time. The students tend to think that what they had studied until that time did not manifest itself in the test results. They hoped to make rapid progress by making full efforts from that time on and so they did not necessarily change their application plan.

By November, however, ronin students have taken several mock exams to assess their success potential in the real entrance examination of the next year. The sequential test results are impersonal means, numbers which are calculated from thousands of test results. The expressed numbers seem objective or scientific to them as an assessment of possibility of entering a specific university. The individual's test result is accompanied by a statement, saying, "You will not pass the entrance examination of this university unless you study this and that. Your success potential for this university is E." The test scores expressed in standardized values are so institutionalized and accepted by ronin students that they are highly unlikely to question their validity. They conduct their self-assessment based on the results, and many of them will change their selection of universities accordingly.

There is, however, a distinctive difference between overambitious junior college students discussed by Clark and ronin students in Japan. The former will go through each step of the process of "cooling-out" considering real grades and test scores. By contrast, the mock exams ronin students have taken are not real entrance exams, but only fake, which they believe to be a probabilistic estimation of the real entrance examination for the next year. Consequently, some of them continue to believe optimistically or bravely that they will do much better in the real entrance examination than in the mock exams.

Another difference is that the American junior college students can go through each step of the process slowly, whereas for the ronin the final result in the entrance examination is everything. American college students can reach a socially accepted position or status in the long run, if they "cool-out" their ambition. For ronin students,

the "cooling-out" of their ambitious application plan takes place before taking the real entrance examination of the university. No one knows what will happen to them. Some with good success potential may fail and some may pass. Because of this uncertainty over the result of the real entrance examination, they tend to have several alternatives, including the safest university to apply to. In addition, because of their desire to avoid repeating the ronin life, they will make the safest choice. In their view, if they do not pass the entrance examination of any university, all the ronin life would be a waste and useless in its own right. This anxiety over failing again lays a foundation for their careful consideration of all possible results in the real entrance examinations.

Ronin students are not necessarily "cooled-out" from their over-ambitious plans by the counselors in the yobiko because they do not have real grades and test scores that affect them. Instead, they have more freedom in selecting an appropriate university to apply to than junior college students do in selecting proper courses. There is no formal restriction or requirement that ronin students have to observe. They tend to act more upon their own will and judgment than to be affected by their tutors in their decision-making process of selecting a university to apply to. In this sense, ronin students are less likely to be "cooled-out" by others than the American junior college students.

The most crucial factor in ronin students' decision making is the result of the National Common Examination since its test scores affect the real entrance examination of the national university. Considering this real result, they will make their realistic final decision regarding

which university to apply to. For the majority of ronin students this result is so powerful that they will give up any overly ambitious plan easily. But for a minority the National Common Examination result is considered but may not be crucial. They still hope that some miracle will happen to them in taking the second examination of a given university. Or they think that they will do better in the second examination, which is quite different from the National Common Examination in nature. The second examination includes short essay questions and applicants are expected to express themselves. By contrast, the national common examination is an objective multiple choice type examination. Some applicants are good at the second examination and others good at the National Common Examination and vice versa. On the basis of their own rational thinking, they will try for a better chance in the real entrance examination. One of those who was not "cooled-out" despite the objective results of mock exams said:

Still my success potential for the department of dentistry of Okayama University is "C" (which indicates that the chance to succeed is 50%). I feel anxious at the rating. I want it to be "B" or "A". If the rating is "B" in Hiroshima Seminar's data, I hear, you can probably pass it. But it is up to the results of the National Common Examination. If it is good, then I will apply to the department of dentistry and if it isn't, then I will apply to its department of mathematics.

(male, interview, November, 1985)

As this student's remarks indicate, what is at stake is not simply an academic major, but a basic career choice. Another major (mathematics) at the same national university is preferable to the same career choice (dentistry) at a lower-ranked university.

Which subjects are required in the second examination is an important factor in selecting the university. In addition to the rank of a university, ronin students consider what subjects are required in the second examination of each university. Since the National Common Examination requires applicants to take seven subjects out of five fields of study, they want to reduce the number of subjects to prepare for in the second examination of the university. Besides, each ronin student has both strengths and weaknesses depending upon the subjects. As a strategy to succeed in the entrance examination, they will apply to the university which requires their favorite subjects. One ronin student told me that he would apply to Yokohama National University instead of the department of natural sciences of Kanazawa University, after considering the kinds of subjects required in its second examination. The others said:

There are many ronin students who change their choice of university because of the subjects required in its second examination. For example, Hiroshima University requires its applicants to take examinations in English and mathematics in its second examination so that they will apply to Okayama University instead (which does not require both subjects to be taken).

(male, interview, August, 1985)

. . . I will apply to Ochanomizu University because it does not require mathematics in its second examination.

(female, interview, November, 1985)

The test score weight between the National Common Examination and the second examination of a given university is another important factor in selecting the university. If some are good at multiple choice tests of a diversity of subjects evenly in all the seven subjects, they prefer to apply to the university which counts the scores of the National Common

Examination more heavily than those of the university's own second examination. This is also a rational behavior on the part of ronin students.

Thus, ronin students start taking into serious consideration what subjects are required in the second examination and the weightings of scores between the National Common Examination and the second examination. In this way they try to make the most of their academic ability in the college entrance examination. This rational behavior on the part of ronin students is expressed more in the advanced term than in the basic term.

The tutor, the student, and one of the ronin student's parents have a final conference in late December. What role do the tutors play in the ronin students' decision-making process late in December? Utilizing test data, the tutors tend to strongly encourage the ronin students to take the safest way. They emphasize the importance of entering a university partly to improve the outcome of the yobiko education and partly to save the ronin students from their impossibly ambitious application plans.

After the three-person conference in December, one male student said:

I decided to apply to the department of dentistry of Okayama University. Of course it will depend upon the results of the National Common Examination. I will take the entrance examinations of alternative universities. But I will only take the examinations and will not go to the universities even if I would be able to pass them. (If you don't go to any of them, don't you think that you cannot regard them as safe alternatives?) But I will not go to any of the alternative universities. It will be all right to become the second year ronin. I would like to practice dentistry in my hometown.

(male, interview, December, 1985)

This student was so stubborn that he did not change his ambitious application plan after the conference. In the long run he became a second year ronin at the end of March, 1986, and went back to his hometown and studied for the entrance examination by himself at home for the second year.

Some ronin students ignored what their tutors advised and decided by themselves with their parents. Just after the three-person conference a study group of female ronin students talked about it:

My tutor told me which national or private universities I should apply to. Because of my parent's presence and avoiding any further discussion, I agreed to his advice. But actually I will not apply to the universities as the tutor told me to. After taking the National Common Examination and finding out its results, I decide on it by myself. He said that the department of commerce at Hiroshima Shudo University was good for me to apply to. But I don't want to enter the department because I don't like the department of commerce. (female A)

Only the tutor thinks that I will apply to the Faculty of Education at Hiroshima University (with laughter). Actually I won't apply to it. I will decide where to apply to by myself. (female B)

(females, interview, December, 1985)

For this group of female students, the tutor's advice and the three-person conference designed to "cool-out" an ambitious application plan on the part of the ronin students were only formalities and did not affect them. These ronin students made their own rational decisions on the basis of the realistic and effective result of the National Common Examination.

For those who were ranked lower, the three-person conference seemed an intimidating occasion. Because of their poor record the tutor tended to encourage them to apply to the entrance examinations of the

universities ranked lower than they themselves could think of entering easily. Two of them reflected on their conferences with their tutors and said:

When one of my friends told his tutor that he would apply to Ritsumeikan University, the tutor said to him, "Even if you apply to it, you definitely will fail it so you don't have to apply to it," while showing the cumulative test scores of the mock exam. (male A)

When I told my tutor that I would apply to Kwansai Gakuin University, he told me to give up applying to it because it is useless. I was dissatisfied with that. But my mother agreed to his advice. (male B)

(two males, interview, December, 1985)

Students took the record of mock exams into consideration for themselves and decided which university to apply to. Thus, ronin students may engage in an autonomous decision-making process without the influence of others.

The above discussion has focused on those who are planning to take a national university and several other university exams. Those who are going to apply to private universities only must decide their application plans on the basis of the sequential results of mock exams. They will simply increase the number of private universities to apply to instead of changing the university of their first choice. They can apply to more than one private university and take the entrance examinations on different days, whereas in 1986 it was possible to apply to only one national university.

#### Gender and Ronin Life

Female ronin students represented the most educationally aspiring segment among their female classmates in high school. These aspiring female ronin tended to have a more positive perspective on their ronin life than do their male counterparts. Table 6.10 shows the mean scores

on questionnaire items in evaluating ronin life. Female ronin students consistently scored higher than males in the satisfactory views of ronin life. Female ronin students are more likely to think that ronin life is more fun and free than their high school days. It is meaningful because they can study more as ronin than in their high schools and especially making friends has made their ronin life happier. They enjoy meeting friends with different backgrounds. One group of female ronin said:

The most enjoyable time is to talk with friends in the yobiko's hall. Since we came from different high schools, it is quite fun to chat with them. We don't talk with them seriously but lightly.

(four females, interview, July, 1986; summary)

Table 6.10

Ronin Students' Perspective on Life, by Sex<sup>a</sup>  
(Mean Agreement Scores)

	Males	Females
Enjoyable to be free from high school	2.63	3.16
Enjoyable to make friends as <u>ronin</u>	2.87	3.88
Meaningful to study harder as <u>ronin</u> than in high school	3.16	3.48
Anxious about the entrance examination of the next year	3.69	3.68
Hard life by studying every day	3.59	3.43
Severe life without any social status	3.36	3.01

<sup>a</sup>Scores are calculated by the assigned numbers from "Strongly agree = 5" to "Strongly disagree = 1."

In questionnaire items reflecting dissatisfaction with ronin life, female ronin students consistently scored lower than their male counterparts. They are less likely than males to feel anxiety about the next entrance examination and to experience difficulty in studying.

Job-related reasons for going to a university were important for both sexes. But female ronin emphasize certification, whereas the male ronin stress obtaining a better job. As a result, females are more certain of the academic field they want to major in and specifically apply to the department which issues a certain certificate, such as the department of education or pharmacy. By contrast, male ronin students in general put emphasis on the prestige of the specific university which they will apply to, since if they are admitted to a prestigious university, they expect to have better employment opportunities, regardless of their major (see Table 6.11).

Female ronin students have a different tendency from female college students enrolled in universities in general. Table 6.12 shows a comparison between the academic major aspired to by female ronin and the academic majors of female students in universities and the distribution of academic majors by male ronin students. Like female college students in general, female ronin students are likely to major in humanities, education, and home economics. The dominant sex role value in Japan also encourages them to choose sex-typed academic majors.

However, female ronin students are more oriented toward professional occupations than female college students in general. A greater percentage of female ronin students aspire to major in engineering and natural sciences in comparison with female college students. This indicates that female ronin students study for an additional year for the college

Table 6.11

Ronin Students' Perspective on Plan, by Sex<sup>a</sup>

Reasons for Going to a University	Male	Female
To obtain a better job	3.54	3.41
To get a certificate or degree	3.27	4.01
To enjoy youth before working	3.52	3.39
To improve myself before working	3.42	3.62
Friends also go	2.00	1.82
Parents' advice	1.73	1.70

<sup>a</sup>Scores are calculated by the assigned numbers from "Strongly agree = 5" to "Strongly disagree = 1."

Table 6.12

Academic Major for Ronin Students and College Students  
by Sex

Academic Major	<u>Ronin Students</u>		College Students <sup>a</sup>	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Social Sciences	39.1	9.6	46.1	15.1
Humanities	12.1	37.6	7.6	35.4
Education and home economics	5.0	29.2	5.0	24.6
Medical science and dentistry	8.8	10.8	4.7	3.1
Engineering and natural sciences	32.2	10.8	29.0	4.9
Others	2.8	1.6	7.6	9.9
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

<sup>a</sup>Source: Monbusho Tokei Yoran, 1986.

entrance examination in order to realize their specific educational goals as compared to their classmates who entered colleges and universities after graduation from high school.

The factors considered in the decision-making process of selecting the university to apply to indicate some differences between females and males (see Table 6.13). Female ronin students put the highest priority upon what they want to do in the university while male ronin students emphasize their desire for a specific university. In other words, those female ronin students are more sure of what they want in the university than male ronin students. In both social status factors and feeling factors, male ronin students scored higher than female ronin students except for desire for a particular university. This is interpreted as indicating that male students are more concerned with the social evaluation of the university rather than their own wishes. Male ronin students consider the social prestige of the university, the city of its location, the better opportunity for employment, and the social activities of graduates more than female students do.

Those female ronin students who finally started attending the yobiko are less likely to suffer from ronin life than male ronin students although they receive more negative social attention than male ronin students.

The yobiko as an educational institution contributes to reproducing the gender differentiation seen in the Japanese society which is shared by the parents and importantly internalized by the female high school students. The female ronin students, in this sense, are a deviant minority group who wish to pursue their educational success, do what they

want to do by obtaining a certificate, and thus become professional career women in the society.

Table 6.13  
Factors Considered in Choosing a University to Apply to  
by Sex<sup>a</sup>

	Male	Female
University and department have what I want to do	3.95	4.46
Desire for the university	3.96	4.04
Required subjects in the entrance examination	3.34	3.33
To get a better job	32.4	3.20
Appropriate one for my academic ability	3.22	2.96
Reputation of the university	3.16	2.67
The city in which the university is located	3.07	2.69
To terminate <u>ronin</u> life	2.56	2.40
The graduates of the university are socially active	2.70	2.45
Commuting from home	1.49	1.88
Parents' advice	1.59	1.88
Friends also go	1.36	1.10

<sup>a</sup>Scores are calculated by the assigned numbers from "Strongly agree = 5" to "Strongly disagree = 1."

## CHAPTER VII

### THE FINAL PERSPECTIVE: THE END OF RONIN LIFE

The National Common Examination and the entrance examinations to private universities are approaching. Now ronin students are in the final period of ronin life. They have only a short time to prepare for the entrance examinations. During this period they have to make their actual decision as to which university to apply to as their first choice by estimating their total scores in the National Common Examination. Those who will apply only to private universities will have to decide which universities to apply to, considering the examination dates of each university and application fees to be paid.

This chapter deals with (1) what is their psychological state during this period; (2) how they will really decide on a particular university to apply to as their first choice university; (3) how they react to passing or failing the examination of their alternative choice universities; and (4) what were the results of the entrance examinations of individual ronin students.

#### Psychological State and Daily Activities

##### Prior to Examinations

In the middle of December, ronin students began to be concerned with the remaining days before taking their first entrance examination, especially the National Common Examination. They became so nervous that they could not study for the entrance examination steadily. They knew that they did not have enough time to make up for what they thought they

had not studied. It seemed that in their preoccupation with studying even more they forgot they had already learned. A group of female ronin students who studied with me throughout the entrance examinations said:

We are concerned about the remaining days before the National Common Examination. It is only fifty days. Isn't it forty-nine? I haven't studied mathematics, social studies subjects, or English enough. . . . I can't study at all when I am thinking of the days. I made it a rule not to think of it.  
 (When did you start studying seriously?)  
 It is only recently that I started studying seriously.  
 It is only these two weeks (laughter). These days I have started studying very seriously.

(six females, interview, December, 1985)

As the above field notes of the group of female students illustrate, they were so nervous about the approach of the examination days that they could not concentrate on studying. Whenever they stopped studying and took breaks, they seemed to be at a loss as to what to do when they tried to study harder everyday.

Since they were ronin students, they could not give up studying and play around, as some had done at this time the previous year. Two male ronin students reflected upon how they had acted when they were seniors in high school:

By this time I had already given up. Whenever I didn't feel like studying, I would go to see my juniors and asked them to let me join in playing rugby. In this respect I had a place to go and enjoy myself last year. But this year I don't have a place to amaeru or to spoil myself any more so that I have nothing to do but to study. (male A)

I had already given up, too. Because, I decided to become ronin at this time last year. (male B)

(two males, interview, January, 1986)

The previous year, they thought they would have an additional year to study by becoming ronin. But this year they want to terminate their ronin life.

Two male ronin students talked to me when they took breaks from their study meeting:

I have already abandoned the National Common Examination (smiling). A has realized satori or given up and stopped worrying about it and has been indulging in playing games. . . . I will take the entrance examinations of more private universities because I think that I won't pass the entrance examination of a national university.

(male, interview, January, 1986)

The other student studying with me looked depressed though he was usually cheerful. When I asked why he looked so serious he answered that he did not have many days to study and could not study because of aseri, or an irritable feeling about the approach of the examination days.

Ronin students had ambivalent attitudes toward the approach of the National Common Examination. They wished to have more time to study on one hand, and on the other hand they wished that it was already over, and waited for it passively without doing anything. One girl said, "I would like to have 'time travel' for twenty-seven days," meaning that she wished that the twenty-seven days would pass instantly as if they were in a science fiction story. Then another said to her, "In twenty-seven days, I will be crying."

The desperate, psychological state of ronin students determined their attitude toward the classes offered in January in the Pre-Exam session. In the Pre-Exam session classes were designed to provide ronin students with practical training in taking examinations. Each class consisted of two parts: practice in taking the examinations in a similar

form to the real entrance examination, and the teacher's explanation about the correct answers. Those who were ready to practice taking the examination would attend the classes. But usually the class attendance in January after the winter session decreases in size drastically. Even classes taught by "star" teachers decreased from a total enrollment of 100 or 150 to 20 students.

Some ronin students continued to attend the classes which their favorite teachers taught. They seemed to worship their teachers as something to rely upon for success in the entrance examination. A female ronin student talked about her favorite teacher:

I will attend Mr. J's class up to its final one. If I listen to his class, I feel as if I would surely pass the entrance examination. In the final class I will ask him to shake hands with me and pat me on the head for my effort this year.

(female, interview, January, 1986)

This group did not attend his class to add more useful knowledge for the entrance examination, but to receive "salvation" from him.

The majority of ronin students, however, no longer attended the classes in the yobiko. They came to the school to attend their tutorial session, to obtain current information about the universities they might apply to, and study in the study hall. They brought their own texts and exercise books in the study hall and studied by themselves. They could study more there than at home because of the presence of other students. One of them said:

I can study well in the study hall because others also do so there. But when it is sometimes noisy, I cannot concentrate on studying at all. But I come to study there because I can't study at home at all.

(female, interview, December, 1985)

At home they are alone, so they do not feel like studying. They need someone to watch them study. Or they have to feel rivalry toward others in order to study.

Another place they usually go to study at this time is a library. Some students go to a local library near their home. Others go to the library attached to Hiroshima University. One female ronin student said:

I will go and study at the library of Hiroshima University. When I go there, I see that the library is full of the ronin students of Hiroshima Seminar. Especially at night there are only ronin students. I study there until 9:00 p.m. and go home. . . .

(female, interview, January, 1986)

They meet friends in the library and talk briefly, sharing their common anxiety about the approaching entrance examination. Without seeing others study, they cannot study any more, but they do not bother to call their friends about their studies. What they are interested in now is to study as much as possible by confining themselves to limited interaction with those studying in the same place.

This is the period when families celebrate New Year's Day in Japan. Virtually all shops and buildings are closed for the holiday season, but the yobiko is one of the exceptions. The winter session runs from in the middle of December to the tenth of January. Classes in the third term of the winter session begin on the second day of the new year. The yobiko opens its study halls for ronin students even on the second day of January, although other institutions tend to have three or four days of holiday. That is one reason why the yobiko is the most comfortable place for them to study. At home relatives and friends get together to celebrate the holiday season, watching special programs on television. Ronin students are encouraged to study by their parents because they

have only a short time before taking the entrance examination, but they feel isolated when they see others enjoying themselves. Therefore, they go to the yobiko, to see their friends study even during holidays. People might feel sorry for such hard-working ronin students when they see them go to the yobiko as a T.V. reporter announced while covering the scene of ronin students studying on New Year's day. But actually ronin students feel most comfortable in the yobiko, where they are free from parents' psychological pressure to encourage them to study all the time.

Ronin students took the National Common Examination on the 23rd and 24th of January. Once they had taken the examination, they could not concentrate upon studying any more. The group of female ronin students was talking about their lives after the National Common Examination:

Before I finished the National Common Examination, I hoped that I would like to do this and that. But afterwards, I just felt relaxed. (female A)

Yeah, I haven't studied at all since the National Common Examination. (female B)

I can't study at home but keep that I want to go out. I feel lazy and I cannot do anything. (female C)

(three females, interview, February, 1986)

They tried to study by asking me to tutor them in English, but at this meeting when they took a short break, it seemed that they didn't feel like studying any more but wanted only to chat among themselves.

Also during this period of time, ronin students started taking trips in order to take the entrance examinations of private universities as their alternative choices. They were anxious to know the results of these entrance examinations. At the same time, traveling and taking

several examinations made them exhausted physically so that they virtually stopped studying seriously any longer.

During this time ronin students appeared to work hard to pass the entrance examination of the university of their first choice, but actually they could not study as hard as they appeared to. By this time their preparation for the college entrance examination had practically stopped. Ronin students waited anxiously for the day when they would pass the entrance examination of the university of their first choice and be relieved of their anxiety. This is also the time when they really had to decide on a particular department of a university to be their first choice. The final decision-making process is the topic of the next section of this chapter.

#### The Final Decision of Which University to Apply To

In early February, a group of female ronin students talked about what was most important to them now:

I have been studying up to now and if I should fail to pass the entrance examination of a university (the university of my first choice), I would only be made a fool of (by others). The results are everything. If I could not enter the university, all would be over.

(Haven't you worked hard this year to your satisfaction?)

But if the results would be bad, everything would be useless. I don't have the spirit (or energy) to repeat ronin life. . . . I will attend a celebration party for passing the entrance examination of the university. Of course if I could not pass it, I wouldn't go there.

(two females, interview, February, 1986)

In the basic term, their hope was to pass the entrance examination of a university ranked higher than the one that they failed to enter. But in February, when they had finished the National Common Examination,

what they wanted to do was to pass the entrance examination of the university of their current first choice. They did not value the process of preparation in itself. It is only later in their retrospection that the process or effort will be reconsidered and valued.

Although they thought it was best to pass the entrance examination of the university of their first choice, their minimal hope was to enter any university to avoid repeating the ronin life. Observing the atmosphere of the dormitory these days, one male student said:

I am sure that everyone thinks of entering any university as good enough. Everyone in the dormitory thinks so.

(male, interview, January, 1986)

They now were prepared to enter even a university that they had looked down upon when they were in high school. The year of ronin life seemed bitter enough for them to want to avoid it again. One female student said:

Although I failed to pass the entrance examination of Hiroshima Shudo University, I didn't intend to enter it even if I had passed it. So I didn't look at its campus at that time last year. But this time when I looked at its campus, it was good. If I pass it, I will go there.

(female, interview, February, 1986)

By February 15 ronin students had to decide on which national university to apply to. They gathered all available information to make a rational decision. First, they considered their estimated total scores on the National Common Examination. They compared their estimated score to the yobiko's data concerning the ranking of the universities and considered which university was an appropriate one to apply to realistically. Since both the total score of the second examination of each

university and that of the National Common Examination are the determinant factors in the entrance examination, the result of the National Common Examination is a crucial factor to consider. Those who did poorly in the National Common Examination would change their first choice. I called the key informant to ask how he had been doing. He said over the phone:

My result on the National Common Examination was bad because I did badly in mathematics. So instead of applying to the department of psychology of Hiroshima University, I am going to apply to the department of law at Hiroshima University. And I will obtain a job in educational policy.

(male, interview, February, 1986)

In the Japanese educational system the undergraduate department of law is different from the law school at an American university. The department of law covers majors such as political science and economics. Only a few graduates of the department of law actually intend to become lawyers in Japan. In the yobiko's data the entrance examination ranking of the department of psychology was ranked higher than that of law at Hiroshima University. That is why this ronin student decided to change from psychology to law at the same university.

In November he had told me that he would apply to Hitotsubashi University, which is ranked higher than Hiroshima University. His ambition to enter Hitotsubashi University had been "cooled-out" by the results of the mock exams and more importantly by the estimated scores on the National Common Examination. He had not given up his hopes out of timidity or cowardice as the older generation often complain. Rather, he has rationally calculated his potential of success in the college entrance examination by gathering all of the available data and studying

it carefully. Then he decided on a particular university where he would be able to make the most of his academic ability during the exam, pass the test and thus terminate his ronin status. As part of his talk over the phone, the student referred to his friends' application plans. One of them did badly in the National Common Examination, so he had given up entering a national university and was trying to take as many entrance examinations of private universities as possible. Others who did well in the National Common Examination decided to take the safer route of applying to an easier department of the university of their first choice.

After the National Common Examination, I had a study meeting with three female students and talked about their plans for application.

I have given up Hiroshima University because I did poorly in the National Common Examination. So I will apply to Hiroshima Women's college (a prefectural college in Hiroshima City) instead. I will apply to the department of Japanese literature. (female A)

I will apply to the department of law at Hiroshima though my estimated result on the National Common Examination is only on the boundary line of passing it according to the yobiko's data. I guess that I probably won't make it. I hope that I will pass the entrance examination of Onomichi Junior College if I fail to pass that of Hiroshima University. I will go there. (female B)

I have decided to apply to Yamaguchi University because it is almost impossible to enter Hiroshima University. As is always the case with mathematics, I did poorly in it, too.

(three females, interview, February, 1986)

Two of these three female students gave up the university of their first choice because of their low estimated scores on the National Common Examination. By contrast, the other dared to apply to the university of her first choice because she did reasonably well in the National Common Examination.

Others thought about additional factors in their final decision to apply to a particular department of a university. They tended to consider the weights of two examinations: the National Common Examination and the second examination. They also considered what subjects were required in the second examination. One of them said:

I will apply to either Ehime University or Nagoya City University because both require only essays and Japanese and Japanese Literature in their second examinations. My score on the National Common Examination is on the boundary of passing for Ehime University. It is within success potential for Nagoya City University. And Nagoya City University takes the academic record in the high school into serious consideration. It is advantageous for me to apply to Nagoya City University because my academic record in high school is good.

(male, interview, February, 1986)

This student tried to find a university compatible with his strengths.

Ronin students now consulted with their tutors about their application plans although they had ignored their advice when they had the three-person conference in December. After the National Common Examination, they would report to their tutors for scientific advice in selecting universities. Unlike the previous consultation, what they were told by their tutors did matter to them this time. One of those who used to ignore his tutor's advice consulted him and came back discouraged.

He said:

When I consulted with my tutor, I was not given any good response to my plan of applying to Ehime University. My standardized value on the mock exam is a little under the success potential line in the yobiko's data. So I didn't decide on it at today's meeting with the tutor. I lost my confidence after being told that.

(male, interview, February, 1986)

In the long run, he decided to apply to Kochi University because it requires only an essay in its second examination whereas Ehime University requires both an essay and an exam in English. He was not good at English, so Kochi University was the safer choice in his rational thinking.

A minority would not change the university of their first choice regardless of the record of mock exams and the result of the National Common Examination. They were career-oriented ronin students who wanted to become medical doctors, dentists or school teachers. They applied to a particular university because it offered training in a specific field, not because of its rank. The level of the department of medical science is virtually the same across universities, and all of them are difficult to enter. Unlike the majority of ronin students who tended to adjust their choice according to their academic ability, this group applied to the university of their first choice. One female ronin student applied to a particular national university because it is located in her native city and thus the department of elementary education program can provide its graduates with the best chance to become a teacher in that area.

In summary, ronin students tended to decide on a particular university on the basis of rational considerations except for a small number of career-oriented students who wished to enter a particular program. They considered the second examination, and the weights between the second examination and the National Common Examination. But these factors are not as crucial as the realistic results on the National Common Examination. After estimating the results on this examination, the

majority of students settled on an appropriate first choice university which they could reasonably expect to enter in order to avoid the second year of ronin life.

At the same time, they began taking the entrance examinations of private universities. How they reacted to the results is the topic of the next section.

#### "Pass" or "Fail": The Result of the Entrance Examinations

In February ronin students took the entrance examinations of private universities as their alternative or safe choices and learned the results several days later. Whether or not they passed the private universities affected their psychological state tremendously. One of those ronin with whom I studied failed to pass the entrance examination of the private university he had regarded as his safe choice. He looked depressed when I met him at a coffee shop. I informed him of his friend's pass at the same university. He said:

I know that he passed it although he told me that he was weak in the real entrance examination (with envious facial expression). When I looked at the newspaper, I found the names of the graduates of my high school. It was shocking to me. In addition, out of those three who are still in the dormitory, I found two of them have gotten letters saying they passed the entrance examination of that university and again I became so depressed. So I couldn't do anything last Sunday.

(male, interview, February, 1986)

Before taking the examination of the national university of his first choice, this student found that he had failed to pass the entrance examination of a university which he did not dream of failing to pass. But he was still faced with the entrance examination of the national university of his first choice. Therefore, he came to see his study

tutor in order to study for the second entrance examination which required only an essay. He would not give up this time, unlike when he did in high school.

Many ronin students passed the exams of private universities which were their alternative or safe choices. Their responses to this lower level success reflected three types of attitude, which were often mixed and diffused.

First, some ronin students took the entrance examination of the private universities only as practice before taking the real entrance examination of the national university of their first choice. They had no intention to enter the private universities even if they passed them. One student took the entrance examination of the department of engineering at Tokyo Rika University. He wanted to enter the department of medical science at Yamaguchi University, so he did not pay any advance admission fee to Tokyo Rika University even though he passed its examination. Three students passed the entrance examination of the private universities of their second choice, but since they thought the universities were not worth entering after a year of ronin life, they became second year ronin students instead. One of these two is a female ronin student who passed only the same university that she had passed after graduation from high school. The others thought that they could not afford the tuition of the university.

Second, once they passed the entrance examination of any university, the majority of students paid the admission fee to the university as security in case they could not pass the entrance examination of the national university of their first choice. For them, passing at least

one university was a relief. A group of female students talked about their experiences in taking the entrance examinations:

I feel secure in having a place to go because I passed the entrance examination of Yasuda Junior College. (female A)

You are lucky to have a college to enter. I am very concerned about the results of the entrance examination of private universities because I haven't taken any university ranked low. The lowest university is Fukuoka University. (female B)

I feel as if the second year ronin was decided for me since the lowest university is Hiroshima Shudo University. I took the examination for the junior college course of Doshisha University three days ago. I couldn't do well in it at all. I failed to pass the entrance examination of Kansai University, too. Yesterday I took the entrance examination of Seinan University. . . . I didn't tell anyone that I would apply to Hiroshima Shudo University because I would feel too awkward and shamed to live anymore if I should fail to pass it. If I pass it, they will find it out in the newspaper. (female C)

(three females, interview, February, 1986)

Twelve days later at the meeting with the same group, they were talking about their results:

My father was terrible. He told me, "I feel so ashamed to know that you failed to pass the entrance examination of any university, even Hiroshima Shudo University." My sister said to me, "I will study hard in order not to become ronin like you. (female C)

My father said to me, "You will go only to Hiroshima Shudo University after one year ronin. (female D).

I didn't pay the admission fee to Yasuda Junior college by saying to my parents, "I will pass the entrance examination of Onomichi Junior College (a prefectural junior college)," because I didn't intend to enter it. If I fail to pass the entrance examination of Onomichi Junior College, I will go to Iwakuni Junior College. (female A)

Miss A, you had better not go to Iwakuni Junior College. If you fail to pass it, you will be given a certificate. I hear that the college is a terrible place. (female B)  
(four females, interview, February, 1986)

Two students in this group paid the admission fee for one of the private universities that they had passed. One did not pass any exam. The fourth student did not pay the advance admission fee to the junior college exam she passed, although she had said before that she was quite relieved to have passed it. In her case, by passing the junior college she had gained confidence that she would pass a more prestigious university for sure. As the quotation illustrates, fathers' reactions to their daughters' failure or minor accomplishments were negative. They thought that their daughters should enter a more prestigious national university after they had studied for a year and had paid an expensive tuition to Hiroshima Seminar.

Third, some ronin students were very happy to know that they would be free from their ronin life forever because they had passed the entrance examination of a university. Very early one morning I received a long distance call from Tokyo, from a ronin student I had taught and interviewed.

I am sorry to call you this early in the morning. I have just received a call from my mother in Hiroshima, saying I passed the entrance examination of Hiroshima Shudo University. I wanted to inform someone of this so that I am calling you. I am sorry to call you this early in the morning, but I am so happy with it and want to tell you as soon as possible (talking in a loud voice as well as crying).

(male, interview, February 16, 1986)

He was very gratified to have passed the entrance examination of the university of his second choice which he had failed to enter the previous

year. After the National Common Examination he told me that he had done very poorly, so that it would be impossible for him to enter any national university although he still tries. At that time he said that if he could pass the entrance examination of Hiroshima Shudo University, he would be very happy. After learning that he passed it, he canceled his plans to take another entrance examination in Tokyo and came back to Hiroshima immediately. When he met me in Hiroshima, he explained about his feeling in calling from Tokyo.

Hiroshima Shudo University is not the university of my first choice. But when I thought that I would be able to terminate my ronin life thanks to this, tears came into my eyes.

(male, interview, March, 1986)

His mother was happy that her son had passed the entrance examination to Hiroshima Shudo University, because she wanted to have him close to her. But she expected more of her son after this good news. He talked about his mother's changed attitude toward him:

My mother told me before that she would be happy if I would be able to pass only the entrance examination of Hiroshima Shudo University. But after my passing it, she became more ambitious for me and said to me, "Hiroshima Shudo University is the one that you should have passed at your graduation from high school." She always said that I should study hard to prepare for a national university.

(male, interview, March, 1986)

His mother wanted him to pass a national university to increase her own reputation although she wanted him to be near her.

Those ronin students who were fortunate enough to have passed more than one exam selected one university to enter on the basis of its social prestige and ranking in the yobiko's data. One male student passed four private universities and failed three including one national university.

He selected one private university in the Kanto Area (near Tokyo) because the university has the highest prestige among the private universities he passed.

Another male ronin student who passed even the entrance examination of the city university that was his final first choice went to private Doshisha University because of its social prestige, despite the expensive tuition, but in the long run this student convinced his father that Doshisha University is famous enough for him to get a good job after graduation.

Ronin students who passed the entrance examination of the national university of their final first choice were very gratified. One male ronin student who passed the department of medical science at Yamaguchi University called me to express his elation in a joyful voice.

Another ronin student, who failed to pass his safe choice but passed the national university of his first choice was excited and happy. He called me at ten o'clock in the morning.

My father got up early this morning, at about three or four o'clock and went to the newspaper shop to get today's newspaper. He woke me up at five this morning so that I had only three hours' sleep today. I was so happy to know that I had passed the entrance examination of Kochi University . . . I didn't pay the admission fee to Hiroshima Keizai University because I had no intention of going there. . . .

(male, interview, March, 1986)

In Japan the local newspaper announces the names of those who passed almost any university and live within a specific prefecture. People sometimes find the result of the entrance examination earlier in the local newspaper than by receiving a letter from the university itself. This ronin student's father was so anxious about his son's results on

the entrance examination that he could not sleep at night and went to the newspaper shop far away from his home in order to find out the result as soon as possible. The father also talked with me in order to express his appreciation for the tutoring of his son. Thus, the parents as well as ronin students themselves enjoyed the happiness of their children's success in the entrance examination.

A ronin student who struggled a longer time than the others was thrilled with the joy of passing the entrance examination. He did poorly in the National Common Examination and adjusted his national university choice downward, but he failed to pass that one, too. Although he passed Ritsumeikan University, which is one of the well-known private universities in Kyoto, his father did not agree that he could enter it. According to the ronin student's explanation, it was because his father would not be able to afford the expensive tuition of the university and monthly costs of living in Kyoto. The father also did not agree because he considered Ritsumeikan University not to be good enough for his son to enter. This student's elder brother entered Tokyo University after two years as a ronin, and his elder sister goes to the department of medical science at Ehime University. His father, a school principal, would not permit his son to enter an unfamiliar private university.

This ronin student had to spend an additional two months of ronin life after he failed to pass the entrance examination of Hiroshima University in order to apply to a newly founded department at Tokushima University. He reflected upon these two months and what had happened to him and his parents when he received a letter of success in the entrance examination.

I studied hard desperately from the day when the date of the entrance examination of the department of integrated arts and sciences at Tokushima University was announced in the newspaper until the day I took the entrance examination. I studied from morning till night. My mother and father were so shocked at my failure in the entrance examination that they had been gloomy (during those days). . . . I felt that these two months were the longest time in my life. It was really hard. When a mailman came to deliver a telegram of my success in the entrance examination, we hugged one another with joy in front of the mailman for about five minutes. The mailman had been waiting during that time because he needed to have my seal for the telegram. . . . My mother and father were delighted with tears in their eyes.

(male, interview, August, 1986)

Although this father was prepared to support him for a second ronin year, this ronin student was much happier to enter the newly established department at Tokushima University in the middle of May than Hiroshima University at the regular entrance examination the following year. Tokushima University has less prestige than the Hiroshima University in general, but he studied desperately in order to shorten his ronin life. By the time he had failed to pass Hiroshima University, he had lost his confidence in studying for an additional year.

In summary, the degree of happiness of passing a university varies depending upon the individual ronin student's situation and expectations. Generally when they passed any university, they felt at least relieved partly because it raised their exam confidence and partly because they knew that they would not have to continue ronin life. But they were happiest when they passed the university of their first choice.

### Female Ronin Students and the Final Decision

There is a distinctive difference between males and females in terms of their final decision of entering a university. Female ronin students tended to apply to a university because they wanted to enter that particular school. They also adjusted their aspirations according to the cumulative record of mock exams and the result of the National Common Examination. Like male ronin students, they engaged in rational behavior in their decision-making process. Female ronin students, however, were likely to be affected by their parents in their final decision, which occurred when the parents paid the admission fee to the universities that they passed. An average admission fee to a typical private university costs about 300,000 yen (equivalent to 2,400 dollars) and it must be paid to secure admission before the student finds out the result of the entrance examination of a national university. Parents have financial control over which university they will pay the admission fee to, among those universities that their children have passed. Usually a ronin student is likely to pass several private universities and she or he has to select one of them as a university to pay the admission fee to. Female ronin students want to live far away from their parents and enjoy college life by themselves. They also select one of the most prestigious and famous out of the private universities they have passed.

This tendency on the part of female ronin students is likely to be in conflict with their parents' wishes. Parents who may encourage their sons to go to a university in a large city far away from them are likely to discourage their daughters from doing so. They want their daughters to be close enough to watch them. Parents urge their daughters

to go to a university in their native city or a city near their hometown. They also do not expect their daughters to be career women in general, but to be good wives in the long run. Thus, parents do not put emphasis upon their daughters' long-term career orientation.

Female ronin students who desired to go to a university in a large city far away from their hometown expressed their feelings in this conversation.

Actually I want to leave my hometown. But my parents won't permit me to do so. Tokyo is out of the question. At best Kyoto is a possible place. They will never allow me to go farther than Kyoto. (female A)

I think that there is no difference between Kyoto and Tokyo. But my parents will never allow me to go to Tokyo. (female B)

(two females, interview, February, 1986)

Among six female ronin students in this group, only two applied to a university in Kyoto and none of them applied to a university in Tokyo.

Parents control their daughters in the final decision by paying the admission fee only to a particular university. Female ronin students complained about their parents' control:

I preferred to go to Seinan University (in Kyushu). But last night my father told me that he wouldn't pay the admission fee to the university. He also told me that I should go to Hiroshima Shudo University instead of Seinan University. He said to me, "You want to go out so much." Before I passed the entrance examination of Seinan University, he told me that I might go there. He also said, "In terms of the job market, Hiroshima Shudo University offers an advantage (because comparines in Hiroshima will employ more graduates from Hiroshima Shudo than from universities in other cities). First of all, what are you going to do with a French major (in Seinan University)? Usually you should study English first and then learn French. Can't you do this?" . . . I cried last night. (female C)

My parents are the same. When I went to Kyoto to take the entrance examination to the junior college course at Doshisha University, my parents told me that I could enter it if I would be able to pass it. But when I passed the entrance examination of Hiroshima Shudo University, they told me to go to Hiroshima Shudo University instead of the junior college in Kyoto. My mother also said, "I can't think of a life without you." She didn't say it directly. . . . They told me to go to Hiroshima Shudo University because they paid the admission fee there. (female D)

(two females, interview, March, 1986)

These female students tended to argue against their parents' selfishness, but they had to accept their parents' control in the long run.

Another example of this sort was described by one of the female ronin students about her friend who refused to attend Hijiyama Junior College in Hiroshima City and almost flunked all the courses there. She was a very good student who had almost passed the entrance examination of Ritsumeikan University by way of the recommendation entrance examination. But when the day came to send her application, her father told her not to apply to the university. She did not send the application. She took the entrance examination of several universities, including Hiroshima University which she wanted to enter. But she did not pass the entrance examination of any university except for Hijiyama Junior College. She failed to pass the entrance examination of Ritsumeikan University in the regular entrance examination. She was told that she surely passed the entrance examination of Hiroshima University by her teacher, but she did not. Now she refuses to attend any class at Hijiyama Junior College, rebelling against her father. This is an extreme case in which the female ronin student's father ruined her chance to study at a prestigious university in Kyoto simply because he did not want her to leave home. Thus, parents tend to constrain

their daughters' educational opportunities even when the daughters have both the ability and the motivation to succeed.

The final perspective ronin students shared was that they were waiting for the day of judgment by trying to study as usual. They proceeded rationally to find out the best and most appropriate university to apply to by considering all of the available data. They thought of safe ways to avoid repeating their ronin life. Their rational thinking can be interpreted as the process of "cooling-out" their ambitions from the basic term.

As a result of this rational thinking, they tended to take more than one entrance examination. Out of those universities whose entrance examinations they passed, they would select the best one according to their best interests in the immediate situation. By and large they were individualistic actors who decided by themselves, considering all the important factors. The process of ronin life may, therefore, be a powerful legitimation process of social stratification at an individual level. Ronin students did their best in the entrance examination competition, which is a visibly hierarchical structure, a minute ranking system of universities throughout Japan according to the standardized value of mock exams and the national common examinations. This is a social psychological process of legitimation since it was legitimated subjectively and voluntarily by the individual actors themselves (Gaskell, 1985).

CHAPTER VIII  
CONSEQUENCES OF RONIN LIFE

This chapter explores the consequences of ronin life and attempts to place them in a larger social context in Japan. First the social relationships which ronin students develop with their teachers and with other students illuminate the values and emotional qualities fostered by the ronin experience. Second, this chapter describes the results of individual ronin students' performance in the college entrance examination. Third, since some become second-year ronin, this chapter also discusses how second-year ronin are different from first-year ronin. The majority of ronin students become college students after one-year ronin, so the chapter attempts to explore how ronin students reflect on their ronin experience retrospectively after they become college students. Then the final three sections in this chapter attempt to relate the consequences of individuals' ronin experience with a larger social context in Japan and discuss the social consequences of ronin.

The Relationship between Students and Teachers

The detailed description of ronin students' image of either "good" and "bad" teachers helps us understand how the students' perspectives of ronin life and explain how and why they hold them. The nature of the relationship between students and teachers is one aspect of the hidden curriculum which socializes students in the yobiko.

In ronin students' eyes, the first feature of "bad" teachers is that they do not teach them materials relevant to the college entrance

examination effectively. Some ronin students in the basic term said that they preferred the yobiko teachers to their former high school teachers because yobiko teachers made jokes in the classroom. But too many jokes were no longer appreciated in the advanced term. One male student complained about one of his teachers for this reason:

I will quit attending the class on how to write an essay because it is of no use. I won't learn anything because he talks about trivial things (irrelevant to the college entrance examination). We write an essay in the form of a test. When I receive the corrected essay, I will go home soon without listening to him.

(male, interview, October, 1985)

This male student may like hearing funny talk and jokes irrelevant to the college entrance examination before the summer session, but in the advanced term he is eager to learn something directly relevant or useful to the entrance examination because he has no time to waste in class.

Second, ronin students regard their teacher as bad if he is not teaching them positively and interestingly. They want to learn from their teacher, not to copy what he writes on the blackboard. One student said:

Such teachers of mathematics who only write down answers on the blackboard lose their students' class attendance. In such a case I copy the notes of those who attend the class and I will go to the study hall and study there in the class period.

(male, interview, October, 1985)

Ronin students also expect the class to be an exciting event which concentrates their attention. They are not satisfied to learn what is written in a text. The key informant wrote about a monotonous class:

The first class today is English Translation. It is hard to prepare for this class and also it is similar

to Integrated English so that many of our classmates think that it is not necessary to attend this class. The class has decreased to less than half of the full student attendance. . . . He teaches without any break or additional comments. Time passes by without any tension on my part. (male, diary, October, 1985)

As his diary illustrates, the monotonous and boring class discourages ronin students from attending and decreases the number of students substantially. They want to have some intellectual communication with their teachers. Those who do not make an effort to teach them in an interesting way are regarded as bad teachers.

In comparison with ronin students' image of bad teachers, good teachers in their evaluation have distinctive characteristics. First, good teachers know important and relevant knowledge for the college entrance examination and present it for ronin students to learn easily and efficiently. One male ronin commented about a star yobiko teacher's class:

Mr. C's class of English Grammar is filled with 120% of student attendance. Learning English Grammar increases test scores in English easily. He is popular because he relates everything useful to the entrance examination and teaches it to us.

(male, interview, November, 1985)

Good teachers have to show that they know relevant knowledge about the college entrance examination and convince their students that they are learning something important and useful. Ronin students are likely to trust experienced yobiko teachers who present themselves as exam experts. A male student referred to an experienced professional teacher:

He is a yobiko teacher from Osaka. Although he was an old man, he was very energetic. I heard that he had been teaching in the yobiko for about thirty years, and he said to us, "In this summer session I will teach you what I have learned from my thirty years

of experience," and he gave a series of good lectures. In the classroom he sometimes said, "This question will surely appear on the college entrance examination." When he said so, everyone in the classroom took notes about it. . . .

(male, interview, November, 1985)

The point is that ronin students have to be persuaded that one is a good teacher. This old yobiko teacher uses such techniques as saying that he had quite a long experience in teaching in the yobiko, as well as presenting himself as an expert in the entrance examination. He also seemed really energetic and interesting, as the student described.

A male ronin student pointed out another teacher as a good teacher:

Mr. D is wonderful as a man. He came from the yobiko in Fukuoka to Hiroshima Seminar in Hiroshima. Then he goes to the yobiko in Nagoya since he has the ability for it. I am sure that he is famous. He himself told us that he was the best teacher in the yobiko because he got the result of the students' evaluation: 97% of "satisfactory" and 3% of "fair." I believe that he did not tell a lie to us.

(male, interview, November, 1985)

It is necessary for the teacher to present himself as an authority with strong confidence. Those who succeed in doing so, win trust and popularity from their students, although if they are very poor in teaching itself, the exaggerated self-presentation will not work well.

Ronin students trust their teachers even when they make mistakes, if they did so with confidence. A male student who had been a ronin for four years said:

I prefer a teacher with strong confidence. When a teacher teaches us without much confidence, I come to worry about whether or not I should trust what the teacher teaches. Even if he makes some mistake, I want him to do it with confidence. I can trust a teacher who says clearly later on that he made the mistake.

(male, interview, October, 1985)

The yobiko teachers teaching with confidence can create security and safety in the ronin students' minds. They cannot predict what will happen in the real college entrance examination despite their previous efforts and good academic records in a series of mock exams. Speculating on the uncertainty of the entrance examination ahead of time, ronin students cannot help intensifying their anxiety in the advanced term. They attend classes to reduce or lessen their anxiety about the college entrance examination, as well as to learn particular knowledge relevant to the examination. One male ronin explained to me why they attend classes and what they gain from attending them:

I am in the class for the University of Tokyo. Although I prepare for the other classes, I attend English Translation class without any preparation for it. I come to feel that I understand what my teacher is talking about in class. But I cannot understand it clearly. I attend the class because he gives me satisfaction.

(male, interview, November, 1985)

Ronin students also want to have only correct answers which are ready to be written on the examination when similar questions are asked. They doubt their teacher if the teacher gives ambiguous and vague answers even if the teacher tries to be careful enough to give several possible answers to one question. A male ronin student in my class explained to me why he stopped attending:

I attended your class up to the eighth class (out of twelve classes in one term) but I once sat in the center of the classroom and I was called up to answer a question and I couldn't answer the question. Then I stopped attending it. . . . In addition, in English Translation class you did not give us a clear Japanese translation of the text at the end of each paragraph. That is why I became anxious about your class. By contrast, the teacher of the class for Waseda University gives us a translation of the text in clear

Japanese. Although I still don't understand what the translation means, I feel secure to hear a perfect translation.

(male, interview, November, 1985)

This student is one of those ronin students whom I tutored until their final entrance examination, so he became frank enough to talk about the others' criticism about my class. He continued to say:

Besides, the number of your class decreased to (only) eighteen last time although the full attendance is supposed to be about one hundred students in the class. . . . Students' evaluation of your class is divided into two different views. Some would say that the number of students in your Class 4C (of your class) decreased to eighteen (which indicates that I am a bad teacher). On the contrary, some said that your Class 9C was full of students and that you are one of the popular teachers.

(male, interview, November, 1985)

This student tended to feel insecure in observing the decline of student attendance in one class and started attending the same kind of class by another teacher. Once he thought that the teacher wasn't reliable, he would stop attending his class. This is also due to his intensified anxiety in the middle of November.

Ronin students like learning from their teachers' special techniques and patterns useful for the entrance examination. The teachers are expected to have their unique way of teaching to attract their students. Since ronin students think that they have too many things to do, they want their teachers to digest the diversity of materials into compact, ready-made knowledge. The key informant wrote about two good teachers in his diary:

I attended the second class today on mathematics by Mr. F. I didn't know a teacher like him among my high school teachers. He tried to make us memorize mathematics in the form of patterns and he regards it as

a subject to be memorized. It is very efficient for us to master since we have been preparing for mathematics for the entrance examination. He is one of the most popular teachers in the yobiko. In addition, he prepares his unique "secret techniques for the entrance examination" handouts and these handouts won a reputation among us. He teaches three types of mathematics classes: Mathematics Exercise A, The Integrated Mathematics, and Mathematics Study. There are quite a few students who attend only his classes. . . . .

Mr. G won popularity and reputation among students because his teaching is clear-cut, cheerful, and quick. We naturally follow his instruction and concentrate upon it.

(male, two days diary, October, 1985)

As he describes in his diary, these two yobiko teachers are very unique and good in teaching. They are regarded favorably because they have their own style of teaching as experts in the college entrance examination from their long experience of teaching in the yobiko.

Once teachers have won their popularity and reputation as good teachers, more and more ronin students are likely to attend their classes. Since ronin students exchange their evaluation of teachers among themselves, they establish a standard evaluation of their teachers and feel safe attending these famous teachers' classes.

A detailed description of a star yobiko teacher illustrates the ronin students' perspective more clearly. The explanation of why they like a particular teacher will tell us what they expected to obtain from their teachers in the yobiko life. This reveals what ronin students expected, what was lacking in ronin life, and what were the most important concerns to them at this period. The description of a star yobiko teacher of "Classical Japanese" was obtained from two males and six

female ronin students with whom I studied until their final examination days, as well as my own observation of the teacher.

This yobiko teacher is a middle-aged man probably in his fifties. He used to be a high school teacher, but he quit and became a yobiko teacher a long time ago. He has published at least three books on the college entrance examination, a practical exercise book plus reference books on classical Japanese and classical Chinese for the entrance examination.

He is very friendly and responsive to any ronin student in the teachers' office. When a group of female ronin students visited him there, he talked to them eloquently and they listened to him eagerly. One of them did poorly in the National Common Examination and was almost crying. He explained to her that we could not know what would happen to us in the future. This might turn out to be good luck for her in the long run. He told her that she should not be pessimistic at all. He used all his eloquence and concern to console this female student. This caring attitude toward ronin students made him the most liked teacher in the yobiko.

Two male ronin students described him as a new religious leader. Almost everyone believed what he said in his class and had one of his books. One of them said:

In summer it was amazing. Those who didn't even study any of his books had a book on Classical Chinese written by him. It was a fashion among ronin students (in the yobiko) to have one. I said to one of my friends who had one, "Do you study the book?" He answered, "I didn't study it. It was good only to have it." That was Mr. H's new religion.

(male, interview, January, 1986)

This teacher was totally involved with his teaching in the classroom. He taught so intensely that everyone in the classroom felt that he understood what the teacher was lecturing about. He wrote down everything on the blackboard and emphasized the important points clearly. He did not make any jokes at all, but just taught what he thought was important for the college entrance examination.

In addition to writing down important points with explanations, he distributed to students several handouts of his own making, and said that these points were all important enough to appear in the entrance examination. And then at the end of his class he would say that the summary of these points is in one of his books.

Female ronin students were happy to carry a portrait of the teacher's face drawn by one of his students. One of them had his portrait in her notebook and showed it to the other females. She got it when she went to see him to get a handout. She said, "I feel that I will pass the entrance examination if I carry this with me." Actually the teacher himself distributed his portraits to every student who came to see him at the teachers' office. But he won this popularity and reputation and even converted some of his students into believers. Another female student said, "I am also a believer in Mr. H's new religion because he is wonderful." For these female students, the teacher was not a mere teacher at all, but has become a god-like figure to worship and pray to for help in passing the college entrance examination. In this sense they attended his class not only to get technical knowledge useful for the entrance examination, but also because of their fulfillment and faith in him.

The teacher had a firm principle in teaching ronin students: that he would not give any anxiety to his students. He answered my question about whether or not he had made any mistakes in teaching by saying:

I teach ronin students decisively. Even when I sometimes made mistakes, if the mistakes were minor, then I would not correct the mistakes although I explained about them. It is much better not to give any anxiety to my students by speaking decisively without correcting them, than by correcting them (in the classroom). Of course, if the mistakes are crucial, then I will correct them because I have to do so.

(a star teacher, interview, January, 1986)

As an experienced yobiko teacher, he knew the psychology of ronin students so well that he would not do anything to create any anxiety in his students' minds.

What are the distinctive characteristics of this yobiko teacher and his teaching? With a smiling face, he is always responsive and supportive to anyone. He seems not to have any feeling of rejection toward his students and others. Ronin students are out of the institutionalized school system and they do not know what to do for the entrance examination so they are eager to rely upon someone for salvation in passing the entrance examination. This teacher is always there to listen to ronin students' questions wholeheartedly and gives them firm answers to the point. This is a strong, supportive authority figure who engenders confidence.

Second, he is so energetic and devoted in teaching that ronin students are very motivated and encouraged to study harder. Since they are alone in preparing for the college entrance examination, they need encouragement from someone. Otherwise they cannot continue to study for it because they have to learn too many things which are not

intellectually stimulating to them or are rather boring and require memorization of trivial facts or information. His example provides the necessary motivation.

Thirdly, ronin students need a means to reduce their anxiety. They can get satisfaction or security by attending his class because they believe that he teaches them without any mistakes. They think that if they follow his instruction, they will be sure to pass the entrance examination.

Fourth, the teacher knows what is important for the college entrance examination and what is not. Ronin students recognize his rich experience in teaching entrance examination-related knowledge because they know that he has published three books on the subjects. He, in turn, propagates that what is needed to pass the entrance examination is in one of his books. In their uncertainty about what will be asked in the real entrance examination, ronin students turn to him for inside information.

These characteristics are commonly shared by the other star teachers in the yobiko. Mr. G explains English grammar points one after another with impressive energy and with sweat on his face. Mr. I explains historical facts and relates all of them logically. All of them teach their students decisively by using such expressions as "You have to memorize these points for the entrance examinations."

To summarize, what has been learned about ronin students' perspectives through their views of either good or bad teachers? First, ronin students have been socialized toward the entrance examination so intensively that they evaluate everything in terms of the entrance examination.

They share the perspective of looking at what is the most useful or relevant knowledge for the entrance examination. This tendency is also true of high school students who are preparing for the college entrance examination.

Second, the prevailing anxiety of the ronin students' psychology matches the way in which they evaluate their teachers. They want to have a teacher to rely upon for success in the college entrance examination, because they are very anxious about the possibility of a second failure.

Third, ronin students need encouragement and warm psychological support from others in preparing for the uncertain examination. They are isolated from other parts of the society and feel lonely without the social support of having a firm social status in the society. They prefer good-natured teachers, and expect their teachers not to reject them. That is why they do not like teachers who criticize them.

Thus, the relationship between teachers and students in the yobiko is similar to the relationship between salesmen and consumers. In the yobiko, teachers sell a feeling of satisfaction to students by understanding the students' needs. Students feel satisfied when they attend the classes with the following characteristics: (1) they can listen to the teachers' explanations about knowledge or techniques useful for the entrance examination; (2) the teachers' explanations go beyond what they have learned from their textbooks; (3) the teachers teach wholeheartedly and encourage them to study more; (4) the teachers give students a feeling that they have learned in the class; and (5) the teachers teach students with confidence. The relationship between teachers and students in the yobiko is summarized in Figure 1.

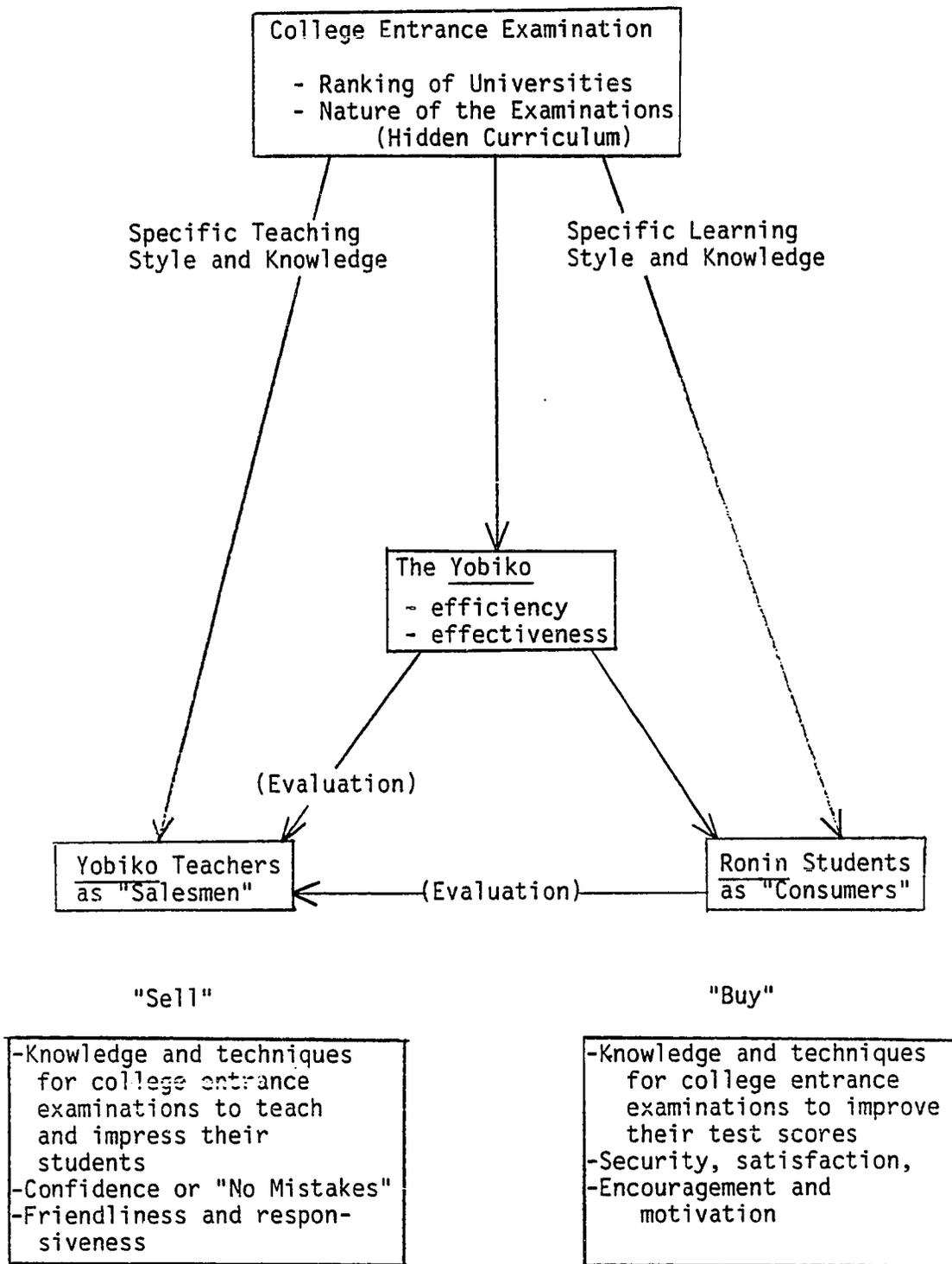


Figure 1. A Schematic Understanding of the Relationship Between Yobiko Teachers and Ronin Students

### Student-Student Relationship

The relationship among ronin students can be characterized as cooperative rivalry. Ronin students are rivals in the entrance examination in general. But the departments of universities for each student of a circle of friends to apply to are not necessarily the same. Each student applies to the department of a university of his choice, without being influenced by others.

The social relationships among students, striving in a one-dimensional test scale and evaluating others as persons by the results, tend to be de-humanized. When students meet one another, they try to compare themselves with others by the results of previews of these test scores, so that they cannot make meaningful social relationships among themselves. They are always concerned with whether they are superior or inferior to others in terms of the results of the examination. Thus, the basic nature of the entrance examination is to create an alienated relationship among students.

Yet there are other dimensions to the social relationships among friends than alienation and rivalry. Ronin students have experienced a failure in common, and share the feeling of having the same goal. Since they all do not apply to the same universities, they do not compete with each other, but with someone else from some other place. What they can share is their feeling that they are studying together without any social status. There are no rules or regulations which they have to observe. There is no fixed classroom in the same sense that they had in their homerooms in high school. All the social relationships are formed on the basis of their own choice. They do not have to be together

if they do not want to be. Because the relationship is their own choice, its degree of intensity is strong.

When each student studies alone, he tends to feel isolated from the society. He does not have any intrinsic interest in what he is studying, since it is only a means to enter the university of his choice. Whenever he feels that he is isolated, he can see similarly isolated people in the yobiko. Everyone is alone with regard to preparation for the entrance examination: each one has to take his examinations by himself, and no one can help him. By recognizing that he is alone in this world, he realizes that he needs someone to share the isolated or anxious feelings which he cannot hold by himself. So each one tends to be dependent upon the other.

When ronin students meet each other, their greetings focus on their preoccupation with the exam. They say things such as Ganbatteru or Are you studying hard? Which university are you going to apply to? How was your test last time? The questions represent meaningful communication through which they try to encourage one another's support. In this sense ronin students are cooperative with one another and encouraging each other.

Whenever ronin students had troubles, they consulted with their friends in the yobiko. They did not look to their parents for any advice. The parents seemed a nuisance to them, often asking whether their children had been studying. Ronin students thought that other people who were not ronin could not understand their anxious feelings.

Ronin students made friends with others of the same level of academic achievement. They attended the same classes with their classmates but

the class itself did not create friendships among students since the classroom was so large and students attended other classes freely. Initially they began to talk with those who happened to sit next to them. But after talking long enough to find out their specific level of academic achievement in mock exams, they tended to be friends with similar others in the mock exams. The result of each mock exam is so important to evaluate others in the yobiko, if each one's test result is so different, they could not be friends. They had to be good rivals to each other by slight differences in academic achievement. They did not have to feel either inferior or superior to each other if they were similar in their academic achievement. The student-student relationship is summarized in Figure 2.

#### Results of the Entrance Examination

A follow-up study of sixty high school graduates who became ronin shows how much they improved their test scores after one year of study in ronin life (Wada, 1984). Studying for a year significantly improved their test scores, as expressed by the standardized value. Ronin students aiming at national universities went up an average of 10.5 points in the standardized values of several different mock exams, and those aiming for private universities went up an average of 16.6 points. These increased standardized scores represent a significant improvement in their academic ability since a 2.5 point difference in standardized values is equivalent to one rank difference in the ranking of universities throughout Japan. Theoretically, after one year as ronin they could apply to universities five or more ranks higher than they had applied to at their graduation from high schools. But actually,

(The Nature of the College Entrance Examination  
 Numbering the results of each exam, announcing the results only in one-dimensional scale, the relative position in the scale is visible, and the results are everything.

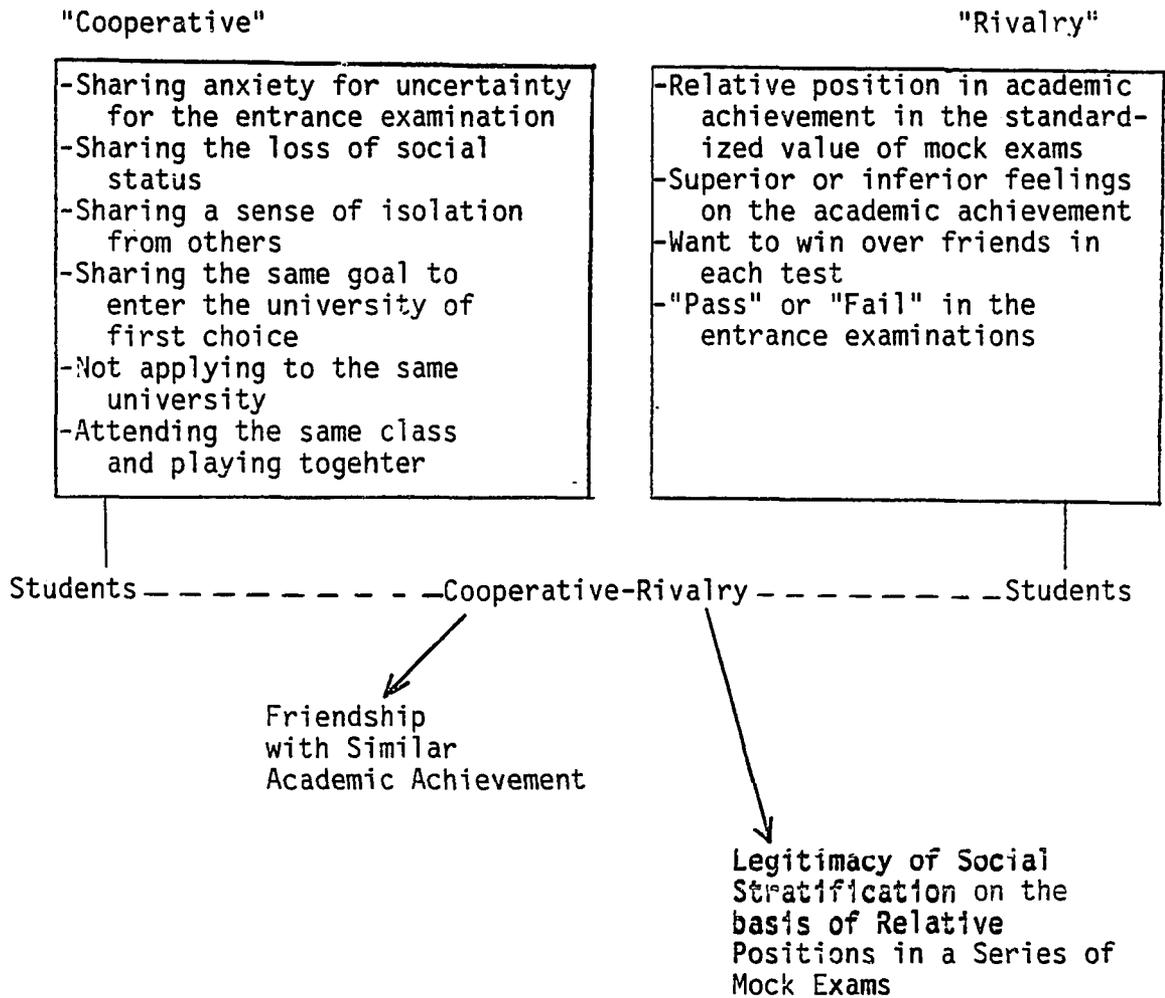


Figure 2. A Schematic Understanding of the Relationship between Students

students applied to a university ranked much higher than their standardized value on the mock exam indicated that they would be able to pass. Therefore, they would not necessarily pass the entrance examination of the university of their first choice even after one year of ronin life, despite their improvement in test scores. And of course, the amount of improvement varied from student to student.

The result of the entrance examination is one way to evaluate the value of ronin life. Comprehensive follow-up data for all Hiroshima Seminar students' entrance examination performance are not available for analysis because Hiroshima Seminar regards such information as confidential. Results of the entrance examination were available for two groups: the thirty-six ronin students I interviewed in fieldwork, and all ronin students in the Tokyo University Course in 1985. Among ronin students interviewed, 36.1 percent of them entered the universities of their original first choice as shown in Table 8.1. They are called "goal-achieved" ronin here. Twenty-seven percent of them changed the university of their first choice, considering the results of the mock exams and the National Common Examinations, but did succeed in entering the lowered first choice. They may be formed "cooled-out" ronin. The rest (33.2 percent) passed the entrance examinations of one or more "safe choice" universities. Three-fourths of them compromised and entered a lower, safe choice university, but the remaining three students refused to compromise and instead became second year ronin. These students I interviewed and got their entrance examination results which ranged from those having applied to the top national universities, such as Osaka University or Itotsubashi University or the department of medical science

Table 8.1  
Results of the College Entrance Examinations

	Interviews	Students in Tokyo University Course
Achieved-Goal	36.1%	37.1%
Cooled-out	27.7	24.3
Compromised	25.0	24.3
No-compromise	8.2	14.3
Total Cases	100.0% (36)	100.0% (70)

to those having applied to the lower ranked national universities such as Yamaguchi University or Kouchi University.

A similar pattern was found in the results of the entrance examination for ronin students in the Tokyo University Course (which is the top class at Hiroshima Seminar and not all of the students aspire to Tokyo University, but some aspire to the department of medical science). Thirty-seven percent are of the "goal-achieved" type and twenty of them, or 76.9 percent, entered Tokyo University. Another 24 percent of them entered the university of their revised first choice after cooling-out their original ambitious plans. Twenty-four percent failed to pass the entrance examination of national universities and entered private universities. But unlike the other group of interviewees, the private universities they entered as their safe choice were three of the top private universities such as Waseda University, Keio University and Tokyo Rika University. These universities are the ones which all of the students in the Private University courses wish to enter.

Among those ronin students who entered Tokyo University, only 40 percent of them had applied to Tokyo University at their graduation from high school. The majority decided to apply to Tokyo University after a year as ronin, improved their test scores, and succeeded in entering it.

#### Becoming a Second Year Ronin

The second year of ronin life is no longer hopeful and challenging, unlike the first year. When students become second-year ronin, they feel more stigma than the previous year. A female student decided to become a second-year ronin although she passed the entrance examination of a private university in Hiroshima. She did not want her friends and neighbors to know that she became a second year ronin and therefore she went to a yobiko in Tokyo instead of Hiroshima Seminar.

A male ronin student also decided to become a second year ronin despite his passing of the entrance examination of a private university in Hiroshima. He went back to his hometown to study for an additional year in preparation for the entrance examination. He visited me in Hiroshima several times and talked about how different it was to be a second-year ronin compared to being a first-year ronin. He did not mention the difficulties of studying for the examinations but actually was happy that he was beginning to understand the exam materials better now than in the previous year. However, he suffered from more anxiety about failing the exams again. He found that it was difficult to be isolated from his friends and to study at home by himself. Except for a little interaction with family members, he had only a routine schedule of studying daily from morning till night. After spending an additional

year of study for the entrance examination, he passed the examination of a public university that he would not apply to in his first ronin year. He was happy to inform me that he finally became a college student in the long run although this university was not his first choice.

The second-year ronin students tend to get together among themselves in general as well as in the yobiko, thinking that the first-year ronin could never understand their feelings as second-year ronin.

The profile of a second-year ronin student is different from the profile of first-year ronin students in several ways. As discussed earlier, becoming ronin is more of a stigma for females than males. Since becoming a second-year ronin is more of a stigma than being a first-year ronin, fewer females (5.0 percent) than males (10.0 percent) were second-year ronin at Hiroshima Seminar. Table 8.2 shows differences in the profiles between first-year ronin and second-year ronin at Hiroshima Seminar. A higher percentage of second-year ronin students than the first-year students came from higher social status families. The second-year ronin have more fathers with a college education and managerial or professional occupations than the first-year ronin.

More second-year ronin than first-year ronin are assigned to higher ranked classes in the yobiko. This means that those who become second-year ronin tend to achieve higher test scores. This is supported by the results of a multiple regression analysis of academic achievement. Being a second-year ronin in comparison with being a first-year ronin increased the National Common Examination score by 53 points at the level of .01 statistical significance while controlling for father's education and occupation, mother's employment, high school tracking, school activity and sex (see Table 8.3).

Table 8.2  
 Profile Differences Between First-Year Ronin  
 and Second-Year Ronin

	First-year	Second-year
Sex		
Male	90.0	95.1
Female	<u>10.0</u>	<u>4.9</u>
	100.0%	100.0%
	(n=1255)	(n=101)
Father's Education		
College	45.4	54.0
Senior High School	46.2	42.5
Junior High School	<u>8.4</u>	<u>3.5</u>
	100.0%	100.0%
	(n=1145)	(n=87)
Father's Occupation		
Managerial	22.9	30.8
Professional	9.8	22.0
Teacher	8.9	6.6
White Collar	40.7	29.6
Blue Collar	16.4	11.0
Primary	<u>1.3</u>	<u>0.0</u>
	100.0%	100.0%
	(n=1164)	(n=91)
Ranks of Classes in <u>Yobiko</u>		
Rank 1	10.9	12.9
Rank 2	32.2	41.6
Rank 3	23.5	12.8
Rank 4	22.2	24.8
Rank 5	<u>22.2</u>	<u>7.9</u>
	100.0%	100.0%
	(n=1255)	(n=101)

Table 8.3  
 Multiple Regression Analysis of Prediction of  
 Academic Performance on the  
 National Common Examination  
 (Including Two or more years Ronin n=1222)

	Unstandardized Coefficient	Standardized Coefficient	T-statistics
Father's Education			
Junior	-5.43	-0.012	0.30
Senior	a.		
Junior College	6.52	0.011	0.30
College	-3.58	-0.017	0.39
Father's Occupation			
Managerial	12.87	0.052	1.06
Professional	25.39	0.077	1.62
Teacher	-22.00	-0.049	1.13
White Collar	7.60	0.037	0.74
Blue Collar	b.		
Primary	13.62	0.008	0.23
Mother's Employment			
Worker	-0.71	-0.002	0.07
Professional	19.72	0.048	1.26
Housewife	c.		
HS Track	42.83	0.549	14.6**
Club Activity			
Sport	-14.42	-0.067	0.082
Culture	21.89	0.077	0.058
None	d.		
<u>Ronin</u>			
First Year	e.		
Second Year	53.73	0.118	3.217**
Sex			
Male	f.		
Female	-25.60	-0.067	0.072
Intercept	849		

F-statistics = 17.3 P>F 0.0001  $R^2 = .340$  Adjusted  $R^2 = .320$

Note: The letters of a, b, c, d, e, and f indicate respective comparative group (with a dummy variable) in each category.

\*\*indicates statistical significance at the level of .01.

Second-year ronin students have a more realistic assessment of the level of university which they may aspire to than first year ronin. A multiple regression analysis of the level of university aspired to shows that being a second-year ronin significantly lowered student's aspirations while controlling for father's education and occupation, mother's employment, high school tracking, the ranks of classes in the yobiko, academic achievement scores on the National Common Examination, school activity, and sex (see Table 8.4).

The second-year ronin students had particular academic majors to which they aspired. Twenty percent of the second-year ronin in comparison with 9.5 percent of the first-year ronin aspired to enter medical school. Fifteen percent of the second-year ronin students in comparison with 9.3 percent of first-year ronin aspired to departments of literature. These findings indicate that more second-year ronin students than the first-year ronin have a specific career-orientation or a specific academic interest.

#### The Retrospective Perspective

What do ronin students think of their ronin experience after becoming college students? Do they think of it as a waste of time or a meaningless period? Or do they think that their experience as ronin was meaningful in itself? If they interpret their ronin life as a meaningful experience, what aspects of ronin life do they think are meaningful? This section explores ronin students' interpretation of the ronin experience as one of the consequences of ronin life.

There is a sharp difference between ronin students who achieved their goal and the other types. Goal-achieving ronin reflected upon

Table 8.4  
 Multiple Regression of the Level  
 of University to Aspire  
 (Including two or more years Ronin n=1222)

	Unstandardized Coefficient	Standardized Coefficient	T-statistics
Father's Education			
Junior	0.028	0.007	0.181
Senior	a.		
Junior College	0.214	0.041	1.109
College	-0.018	-0.010	0.222
Father's Occupation			
Managerial	-0.162	-0.074	1.526
Professional	-0.310	-0.109	2.268*
Teacher	-0.034	-0.009	0.201
White Collar	-0.052	-0.028	0.580
Blue Collar	b.		
Primary	-0.102	-0.007	0.199
Mother's Employment			
Worker	-0.123	-0.055	1.430
Professional	-0.175	-0.050	1.299
Housewife	c.		
HS Track	-0.035	-0.051	1.128
<u>Yobiko</u> Rank	0.490	0.556	10.673**
Academic	0.0009	0.100	1.824
Club Activity			
Sport	0.104	0.058	1.404
Culture	0.037	0.015	0.714
None	d.		
<u>Ronin</u>			
First Year	e.		
Second Year	-0.383	-0.097	2.577*
Sex			
Male	f.		
Female	-0.057	-0.017	0.461

F-statistics = 16.786    P>F 0.0001    R<sup>2</sup> = .376    Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = .354

\*Statistical significance at the level of .05.

\*\*Statistical significance at the level of .01.

their ronin experience very satisfactorily. They were satisfied with their sense of success and accomplishment in the college entrance examination after one year's struggle. They were also satisfied to achieve the goal that they had failed to reach when they graduated from high school.

However, even if ronin students failed to enter the university of their first choice, they evaluated their ronin year as a precious and meaningful experience. First, most of them emphasized that they found true friends in ronin life. One ronin student wrote a letter to me, which said:

I will never forget the friends I met in ronin life. We talk with one another endlessly because we fought together. . . . If you pass the entrance examination of a university, you should go to the university. But if you have a goal, I wonder if you should become ronin and achieve the goal. College life you win this way gives you satisfaction and strengthens your friendship with friends in ronin life.

(male, letter, July, 1986)

Another female ronin student wrote:

The best thing about my ronin experience was to make a lot of friends. After I became a ronin student, I began to talk with former classmates in high school whom I had not spoken to before and I made friends in Hiroshima, too. Without the ronin experience, I would not have met these friends. I want to keep in touch with these friends.

(female, letter, July, 1986)

After becoming college students, ronin got in contact with one another if they went to the same area or university. According to one study, even five years later they get in touch with one another once in a while because of "Nakama Ishiki or a sense of brotherhood as well as rivalry consciousness in ronin life" (Daigakushingaku Kenkyukai, 1984: 26). In ronin life they shared the same anxiety over the uncertainty

of the entrance examination, and they encouraged one another to pass as "cooperative rivals." This relationship as friends was so intense that they will not forget it and want to meet with one another again.

Second, ronin students pointed to personality development or training as one of the consequences of their ronin life. They thought that they had suffered from a severe life with anxiety and studied every day. Now they believe they can cope with any difficulty in life by thinking of the hardship they overcame as ronin. They feel that they have matured through ronin experience. One college student said:

You can distinguish students with a ronin experience from students without it. Students with ronin experience look mature and study more in college life.

(male, interview, October, 1985)

One female ronin student wrote:

I learned to endure in ronin life. Before experiencing the ronin life, I gave up when the situation became bad for me, but I think that I acquired a sense of endurance in ronin life.

(female, letter, July, 1986)

Third, former ronin students thought of their ronin experience as a good chance to think of things that they had not thought of before. Until their graduation from high school, everything was taken for granted. Everyone around them thought more or less in a similar way in the same school culture. In high schools, they postponed thinking about serious life questions because they always had something to do for tomorrow's schedule. They did not have to think about life or their future because the others also were doing the same things and they expected to go to a university smoothly. But in ronin life they realized that they would not have any future if they failed to enter the university of their first

choice again. There were no rules or regulations in the yobiko that ronin students had to observe, so they had a lot of time to reflect upon their lives when they did not feel like studying.

Among the ronin students, there were some who entered the safe choice or compromise universities and did become college students, but continued to prepare for the next year's entrance exam at a better university while attending a few classes at their university. There is no transfer of credit from one university to another in Japan, but a student who subsequently passes the entrance examination at a better school can begin again as a freshman.

One female student entered a private university which does not offer a teacher's certificate and at the same time continued to study for the entrance examination of a national university for the next year. Because such students did not want to be second-year ronin, they entered a university and started attending classes. But looking around at their classmates at the university noisily talking in class, and listening to the lectures by professors at the university, they became disappointed with their decision.

Two ronin students talked about their classmates at the university:

I think that I enjoyed studying in ronin life because I was forced to study for the entrance examination. But now take an example of English class at the university, the professor only translates a text just as our former high school teachers did and does not explain anything about grammatical points for us to understand the text better. It is boring. . . . (female A)

Students without ronin experience are noisy in class. Because we learned to train ourselves in ronin life, we listen to lectures. I wonder that it is O.K. for them to attend the classes noisily because they didn't have a ronin experience. (female B)

(two females, interview, July, 1986)

These two female students have a specific occupational goal to become elementary school teachers, which they could not give up even after a year of ronin life. But they could not be second-year ronin students, either. Their solution was to enter a compromise choice university, but continue to aspire to and work toward their goal.

Two other small studies of students' reflections on their ronin experience also found positive evaluations. A report of interviews with twenty people with ronin experiences, half of them one year later and half five years later, showed that they evaluated their ronin experience positively as a period of "energizing," "making true friends," "thinking what I did not think before," and "studying very much" (Daigakushingaku Kenkyukai, 1984). A similar finding was responded by a professor who assigned his students to write a paper on the best educational experience in their lives. Many college students mentioned that they experienced a true education in yobiko, unlike their experience either in high school or in college (Ogata, 1983).

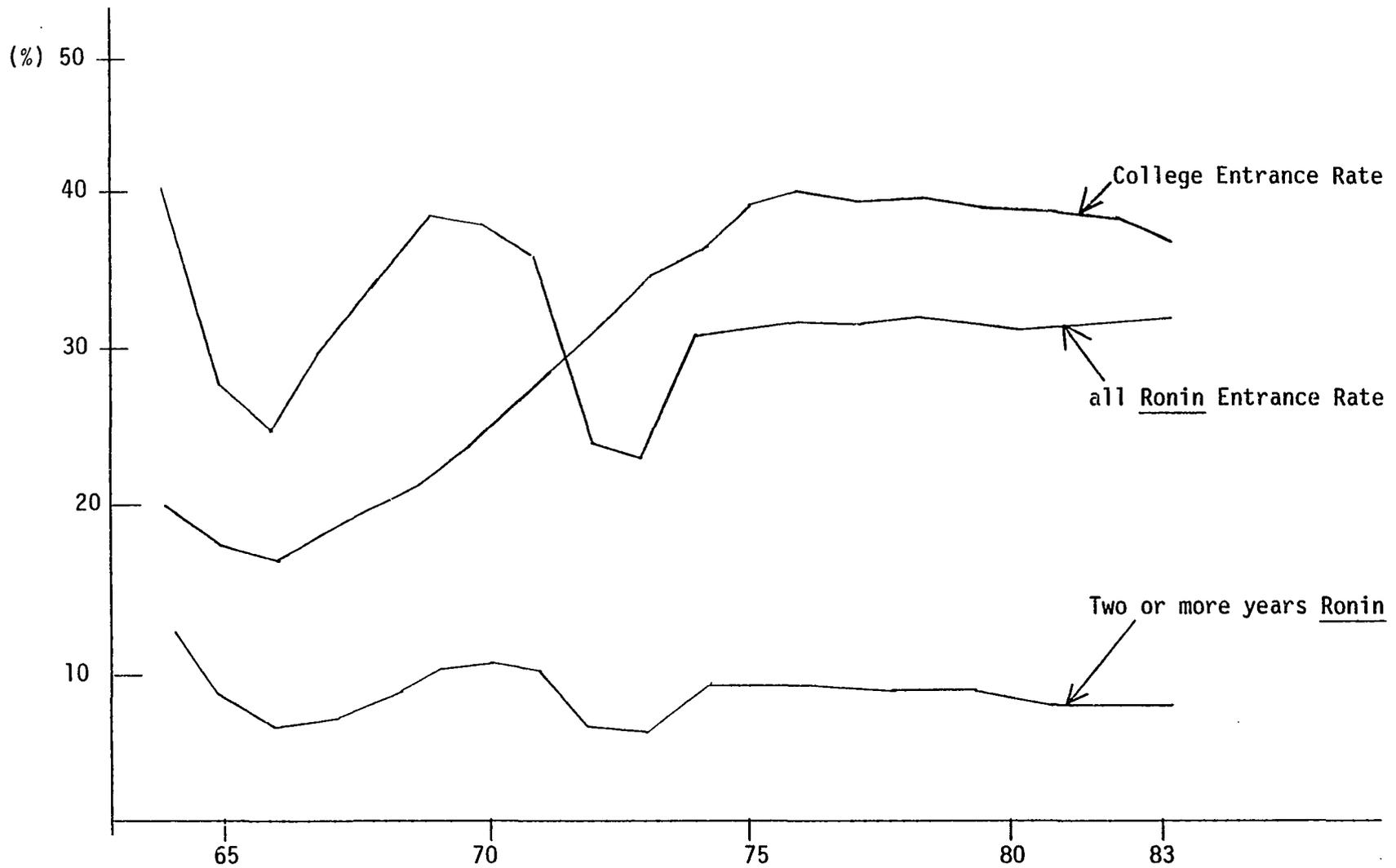
Ronin students learned how to be college students in Japan from their year of ronin. Japanese high schools are rigidly organized in curriculum and high school students do not have any free time to manage by themselves. In high schools students attend the same classroom with classmates and their teachers come to teach them. By contrast, there are no strict rules at universities. The students are expected to attend lectures but actually less than 30 percent of the students attend them. Those college freshmen without ronin year tend to lose themselves in the midst of too much freedom at college. But those college freshmen with ronin experience have already learned how to manage their freedom

and daily schedule. They are better prepared for Japanese college life which does not demand academic achievement in grades unlike American colleges.

#### Social Consequence of Ronin Experience

Since World War II the yobiko has provided substantive linkage between secondary education and higher education in Japan. Figure 3 shows the historical change in the distribution of college entrants with one year and two or more years of ronin experience, and the college entrance rate. The college entrance rate increased steadily until 1975 and has remained about 36 percent since then. The proportion of entering students with ronin experience was 39.5 percent in 1964 (n=128,131) when the Ministry of Education began gathering data on ronin phenomenon. It rose and fell periodically over the next decade, and then stabilized at about 30 percent.<sup>1</sup> Students with two or more years of ronin had the same pattern as those with one ronin year. Those with two or more ronin years consistently constituted about 25 percent of the total number of college entrants with ronin experience historically.

Does the rank of universities affect the distribution of ronin college entrants? Table 8.5 shows the distribution of ronin college entrants for the seven former Imperial Universities, the most prestigious private universities, and selected national medical colleges in 1983. The average proportion of ronin entrants among the former Imperial universities was 44.4 percent which was higher than the average ronin college entrants' distribution of all the colleges and universities throughout Japan. In the most prestigious national universities, Tokyo University and Kyoto University, ronin entrants constituted 51 percent



Source: Appendix in A History of Hiroshima Seminar

Figure 3. A Historical Change of College Entrance Rate and the Distribution of Ronin among College Entrants from 1964 to 1983

Table 8.5

Distribution of Ronin Entrants Among Former  
Imperial Universities, Prestigious Private Universities  
and National Medical Colleges in 1983

Types of Universities	Distribution of <u>Ronin</u> Entrants (%)
a. Former Imperial Universities	
Kyoto University	53
Tokyo University	51
Hokkaido University	46
Touhoku University	46
Osaka University	44
Kyushu University	39
Nagoya University	33
Average	44.4%
b. Prestigious Private Universities*	
Keio University	68
Doshisha University	65
Jouchi University	63
Kansei Gakuin University	62
Ritsumeikan University	59
Kansai University	51
Average	61.3%
c. National Medical Colleges**	
Saga Ika College	73
Kouchi Ika College	65
Ooita Ika College	60
Shimane Ika College	53
Average	62.8%

\*The Ronin entrant rate of Waseda University was not available.

\*\*This list is not comprehensive

Source: Daigaku Shigaku Kenkyu, July 1984, p. 21.

and 53 percent respectively. Considering the proportion of ronin entrants at more remote national universities (Ehime University = 19 percent, and Miyazaki University = 18 percent), the general trend among all national universities is clear: the higher the rank of universities, the higher the proportion of ronin college entrants.

Ronin college entrants constituted an even higher proportion among entrants to the most prestigious private universities than among entrants to the former Imperial universities. Over 60 percent of all the college entrants to the six most prestigious private universities had been ronin for one or more years. The higher proportion of ronin college entrants among these private universities than among the former Imperial universities could be attributed to the tendency of ronin students who failed to pass the entrance examination of the former Imperial universities to enter these private universities as their second choice.

Former ronin constituted a higher proportion of entrants into national medical colleges than the other types of universities. This seemed to be related to students' specific career aspirations to become medical doctors as well as the high prestige of the national medical colleges.

Ronin experience is so institutionalized that about 30 percent of all the college students in Japan entered colleges and universities through this path. In this sense ronin experience is not only for those students aspiring to the top universities, but also those aspiring to lower ranked universities. However, the prevalence of the ronin phenomenon throughout all the colleges and universities implies that students tended to apply to universities one or two ranks higher than

their cumulative academic performance in mock exams indicated their success potential to be upon graduation from high schools. Upon failing to enter their desired universities they were likely to try for a slightly more prestigious university by spending an additional year of preparation for the next college entrance examination.

The yobiko contributed to improving students' academic performance during the ronin year to a certain extent, but it basically rationalized students' decision-making process to identify an appropriate university at the end of the ronin year.

However, the higher proportion of ronin college entrants among higher ranked universities indicated the overall positive consequences of the ronin year.

#### University Entrance Exams and Rewards

Rewards resulting from education vary not only by the level of attained education, but also by the rank and prestige of the universities from which students graduated. As in other countries, the annual income differential between different levels of attained education is evident in the starting salaries of male school graduates in Japan. University graduates expected to earn 1.2 times as high a starting salary as high school graduates and 1.4 times as high as that of middle school graduates.

Entering prestigious universities is highly correlated with material rewards, social prestige, personal power, and self-esteem in Japanese society (Amano, 1986; Rohlen, 1983; Shimahara, 1979; and Ushiogi, 1986). Rohlen (1983) argued that entering high ranked universities was the key factor in being employed by the right organization with the best future prospects and reputation. By investigating the proportion of graduates

from the most prestigious universities in top corporations and in the national bureaucracy, he reported that graduates from the prestigious universities constituted a substantial number of the companies' presidents and section chiefs. Graduation from Tokyo University was much more important in obtaining positions in the national bureaucracy.

The rewards from entering prestigious universities were not only for a better chance to become company presidents or section chiefs or national bureaucrats, but also better employment for larger companies. The differential benefits between large companies and small- and medium-size companies are a distinctive characteristic of the Japanese employment system. The larger companies provide better annual incomes, fringe benefits, and social prestige than the smaller companies.

The Japanese recruitment system basically favors specific faculties and universities. As a formal policy the major companies claim that they recruit prospective employees from any university, but in practice they give priority to graduates from the most prestigious universities.

Ushigi (1986) reported that according to the results of a 1979 survey on companies' recruiting policies, 28 percent of the companies surveyed responded that they would permit only students of particular departments of particular universities to take their companies' tests and interview for employment. Only 36 percent of the companies allowed graduates from any department of any university to apply.

Ushigi (1986) also reported that only 6.4% of graduates from private universities established after World War II were employed in big companies employing more than 5,000 workers whereas 52.2 percent of the graduates from the seven former Imperial universities were employed by the big

companies. The consequences of entering different sized companies were important. For example, in 1982 among workers 45-49 years of age, the average annual income of male university graduate workers in the smaller companies with 10-99 employees was only 45 percent of the annual income of university graduates working in big companies with more than 1,000 employees.

This reward system related to winning admission to the most prestigious universities serves to promote the entrance exam competition among students and their parents. The mass media also reinforces the importance of entering prestigious universities by reporting the list of students who pass the entrance examinations of the prestigious universities in special issues of weekly magazines and newspapers in February and March.

#### Consequences of Exam Socialization and Japanese Culture

Since World War II Japanese culture has emphasized equality which laid the foundation for students to aspire to the most prestigious universities. On the basis of a strong belief in equal opportunity for anyone in Japanese culture, people believe that with effort anyone can accomplish anything, whereas in American culture there is a greater belief in innate talent or aptitude unlike Japanese culture. Internalizing this belief in personal effort, students also believe that their success in the college entrance examination depends upon the amount of efforts they make in preparation for the entrance examination. Ronin students attributed their failure in the entrance examination to insufficient effort in their high school days.

The importance of effort as a criterion to evaluate students reflects the nature of qualities tested in the college entrance examinations. Living in a society which emphasizes the importance of education, especially the importance of the kind of universities one should go in terms of prestige, employment opportunities, and self-esteem, high school students decided to become ronin in order to enter a more prestigious university than the one they failed the previous year. The ronin could think of ronin year as a chance to do better, since they believed in the importance of effort on the basis of the myth of equal opportunity for everyone in Japan.

The yobiko itself has played a significant role in ranking all the departments of universities throughout Japan. Since mock exams have been nationally administered by the publishers such as Obunsha, or mammoth yobiko, the ranking of each department of every university was reinforced repeatedly, so that ronin students and high school students preparing for the entrance examinations believed in the ranking as objective and real. Students' parents also learned the firm ranking of the departments of particular universities through their conferences with their children's tutors.

High school teachers also rely on the yobiko's data on the ranking of universities for their guidance session for their students. The yobiko sometimes invites high school teachers from each high school and explains the validity of their yobiko data as a reliable guide for counseling students.

The yobiko as a commercial enterprise tries to improve on their data to sell the students, the parents, and high school teachers. By

analyzing the results of students' test scores and the universities they indicated as their first choice in a computerized system efficiently and scientifically, the yobiko created the relative ranking of all the universities.

The standardization of test scores of one mock exam into one-dimensional scale showed each test taker's position in a hierarchical scale clearly and visibly. This standardized value of test scores which was created by the education industry functioned as real forces for students to rely on in their decision making and evaluating their academic performance because of uncertainty of the entrance examination and their wish to assure their success in the next entrance examination.

The yobiko created the myth of the ranking of all the universities repeatedly through this standardized value of each mock exam, and indoctrinated the visible hierarchy of the universities into students. Even though university professors generally criticized the value of the ranking system as a way socially to evaluate the prestige of each university, the ranking of standardized value of each university has come to determine the prestige of the university. Thus, the prestige of Japanese universities is evaluated by the level of students admitted to the universities through the universities' entrance examinations. By contrast, the prestige of American universities is mainly determined by the productivity and prestige of the faculty as well as competitiveness of admission itself (Iwata, 1981).

As discussed in Chapter II, the college entrance examination tested their applicants in academic performance in one test. The questions asked in the entrance examinations concern the facts and pattern of

problem solving with fixed frameworks. Within this fixed knowledge applicants are expected to solve each question accurately and efficiently. There are fixed correct answers to each question, so the best way to prepare for the entrance examination is to learn the pattern of frequently asked questions, and the key points to be included in correct answers. Through this testing system, students are evaluated by their efficiency and correctness, accuracy on the one hand, and on the other hand by their endurance to learn key points repeatedly, and their goal-rationality to solve questions without questioning their values. These qualities tested in the college entrance examinations were actually congruent with values qualities Japanese big business and the government bureaucracy desire in their employees.

Ronin students themselves may not be concerned with their future employment opportunities as their immediate interest but they feel that they have a better chance to be successful in society under the societal influence of emphasizing the importance of graduation from prestigious universities. More importantly, the competition in the entrance examination is their competition for better self-esteem to prove their potential or worth to their classmates in a visible one-dimensional scale. Their competition for better self-esteem is interpreted differently by their parents, but they are encouraged to be successful by their parents. During the ronin year after their failure, students are more concerned with their better success and in order to assure their success they engage in rational thinking by considering the yobiko data on the ranking of universities in connection with their individual test scores in the mock exam. Thus, the ranking of companies which seems to have nothing to

do with ronin students promotes their orientation for higher ranked universities which seems to provide them with better employment opportunities in the labor market.

The sequence of emotions and perspectives that ronin students experience during the ronin year can be compared to "youth's rite of passage to an appropriate position in a society." Internalizing the values of equal opportunity and freedom in the schooling process within the formal educational system, ronin used not to have any adjustment and doubt about their special position in each situation because the position was officially assigned to them and the position was worthy in itself as part of their official status. However, once high school students became ronin and were out of the official status, they could not have any security in itself and then they began to engage in a conscious effort to seek an official position in the form of admission to a university. One year of ronin life was long enough for them to feel the discomfort of not having a clear social status and to seek an appropriate position by adjusting their ambitious desire to the existing status in the society.

## CHAPTER VIII--NOTE

1. During the late 1960s there were student riots on many Japanese universities campus against various political issues such as the Vietnam War, instruction at the liberal arts courses at universities, raising college tuition and so forth. As riots intensified students blocked their campuses to stop the entrance examinations of several prestigious universities such as Tokyo University (1969), Tokyo Kyoju University and Hitotsubashi University. Since these prestigious universities did not administer their entrance examinations, students who aspired to these universities became ronin to wait for another year. Consequently, the rate of ronin entrants increased in 1969 and 1970.

## CHAPTER IX

### CONCLUSION

#### Individuals and the Social Stratification Process

This dissertation attempted to describe and explain the relationship between individuals and social stratification in Japan by utilizing a case study of ronin students who are affected by social arrangements in the yobiko and in the larger society. It focused upon the process of how individuals acquire a sense of stratification in the society and legitimize it.

Because the scope of this dissertation was limited to the particular segment of young people in Japanese society who attend a yobiko, its findings should not be generalized to describe the whole population of high school graduates in Japan. The sample in the study excluded those who entered the labor force with a high school diploma. It also did not include those who entered universities directly upon graduation from high school. Third, it excluded most of those who had relatively low educational aspirations, such as high school graduates who aspired to enter junior colleges, or those who entered universities by the school recommendation route (Shimura, 1985). The sample focused on those who aspired to enter relatively prestigious universities, but failed to pass the universities of their first choice upon graduation from high school. Rather than reduce their aspirations, they chose to spend an additional year or more preparing to retake the college entrance examination.

To conclude the discussion of the relationship between individuals and social stratification in Japan, it is argued that a case of ronin students in the yobiko delineated how the social stratification process took place for students through the dynamics of the causal chains from the macro-level social arrangements, historical tradition and culture in the Japanese society, the organizational arrangements in the yobiko which were structured to frame the social stratification in a wider society, to the micro-level, the social psychology of ronin students in their subjective justification and legitimating process of social stratification in the wider society in the form of ranking of universities in Japan. If we focused only on the macro-level characterization of the Japanese educational system and social stratification, we would fail to understand how the educational system contributes to shaping individuals' psychology of legitimation of the social stratification. The inclusion of an analysis of the organization in the yobiko shed light upon the dynamic mechanism of how individuals were specifically influenced by the social stratification in one organization because it dealt with the specific organizational arrangements which impinged upon individuals on a daily basis. An analysis of both the macro-level social structure and organizational arrangements in the situation tends to assume that individuals in a given social situation were likely to internalize what are normatively provided by the social structure and organizational arrangements. In so doing, they treat individuals as the "black box" or "passive beings." As the symbolic interactionists argue, individuals act toward the definition of the situation in which they are. Ronin students as active actors interpret what they see in the social structure

and organizational arrangements in considering their embedded interest in the immediate situation.

In sum, the social stratification process for ronin students takes place in the following way:

1. The Japanese educational system has a long historical tradition of hierarchical structure starting its establishing period led by the central government;

2. The hierarchical structure was visible to everyone and was emphasized to "recruit" the men of talent throughout Japan so that the hierarchy of educational institutions was institutionalized ranking system of education;

3. Because of the hierarchical nature of the educational institutions, the supplementary educational institution, the yobiko, emerged to provide applicants for the entrance examination with special preparation to succeed in the educational competition historically;

4. The organizational and institutional arrangements of both formal and supplementary educational institutions reflected the nature of social stratification in the Japanese society and especially the secondary educational institutions were characterized as the tracking system;

5. The organizational arrangements in formal and supplementary educational institutions had tracking within them and through this tracking individual students tended to learn ranking of themselves in the educational competition;

6. The comparable test scores and later the standardized value of test scores were invented and developed to estimate the probability of students to be differentiated and be tracked into different chances in educational competition;

7. In perceiving the hierarchical structure of educational institutions in a wider society and organizational arrangements in the yobiko, ronin students interpreted them by their perspectives in order to strive for better self-identity or esteem to themselves as well as the others;

8. Early in ronin life, students who they thought were considered "losers" in educational competition but aspired to a prestigious university to their best academic performance conceived hope by giving positive meaning to ronin life;

9. Later in the ronin life they created and intensified anxiety over hope due to the passage of time which made anything exciting routine;

10. With the approach of the college entrance examination the anxiety for uncertainty or failure in the college entrance examination were prevailing in the ronin students' minds and at the same time they had been assessing the standardized value of a series of mock exams and became more realistic about the probability of passing the entrance examination of their first choice;

11. Their realistic estimation of the passing probability of the entrance examination and intensified anxiety about it along with a wish to terminate ronin life regardless of the rank of the university they would finally enter;

12. Through taking the entrance examinations and receiving their results ronin students convinced themselves that they made the best effort to their limit of academic performance and psychology during ronin life and the university they entered would be their proper university in the hierarchy of universities in Japan; and

13. Recognizing their relative position in the minute ranking of universities in Japan, ronin students, now college students, legitimated the hierarchical structure of educational institutions and placed themselves in the ranking in comparison with others in universities in terms of self-evaluation or evaluation of others. With this subjective legitimation of educational ranking after one year's effort in the college entrance examination in ronin life, they fostered their tendency to evaluate others this way. The legitimation of social stratification in the Japanese society was strengthened because entrance examination applicants' subjective legitimation of social stratification at the individual level. The social stratification in a wider society at the macro-level is interpreted and, to the extent of their definition of the situation, internalized into individuals' consciousness of social stratification by way of organizational arrangements in the yobiko.

Findings in this dissertation suggested that the revisionist view explained the ronin and yobiko experience better than the meritocratic view. The yobiko as a class-biased institution reproduced the tracking of high schools and thus social stratification through the college entrance examination competition. However, the yobiko as a second chance school provided a chance for some losers to win, unlike Rosenbaum's tournament thesis.

The children of the higher social status families were likely to go to the college oriented and higher ranked high schools rather than high schools for vocational education and the lower ranked high schools. Among ronin students, the children of higher social status families were overrepresented, as were graduates from the college entrance exam

oriented high schools. This was due to the high cost of tuition for the yobiko and the costs of an additional one or more years of expenses necessary for attending a yobiko, sometimes living away from the student's home. The children of limited means were precluded from benefiting from the yobiko education. Or they were discouraged from aspiring to more prestigious universities because they needed an additional year or more preparation to enter the prestigious university.

Although class assignment in the yobiko was made on the basis of objective academic performance at their entry test to the yobiko, ronin students were likely to receive counseling messages from their tutors that were biased by their test scores and yobiko class ranks. Students theoretically had free choice to aspire to any university regardless of the tutors' persuasion and the rank of the class to which they were assigned. The students could feel free to decide the university of their first choice. Thus, their choice, as the meritocratic view argued, could be a function of their academic performance and aspirations. However, the ranks of classes in the yobiko and the tutors' counseling discouraged the students in lower ranks from aspiring to prestigious universities beyond the level that their academic performance indicated. Students chose the university of their first choice but the self-selection was done within a limited range of choice, considering their cumulative academic performance.

The stability of class composition at two points in time and the adjusted aspirations according to the rank of classes also indicated the plausibility of the revisionist view although some individuals competed and won back their losses during the ronin year. The majority

of the students did not improve on their academic performance high enough to negate the continuity of the same track. Nor did the majority have high aspirations regardless of the rank of classes to which they were assigned.

Consequently, the results of the college entrance examination reflected in the original tracking of students in high schools and tracking with the yobiko. Almost no students who aspired to a lower ranked university and were assigned to a lower ranked class at the beginning of ronin year ended up aspiring to a much higher ranked university than they had originally and actually succeeded in entering it. Only about 20 percent of the ronin students accomplished their original goals of entering one rank higher universities than the ones they failed to enter upon graduation from high schools. The revisionist view, not the rigid tournament thesis, explained the ronin and the yobiko experience better than the meritocratic view.

The yobiko and ronin experience played an important role in stratifying students and legitimizing the stratification through the entrance examination system. The yobiko's internal mechanisms such as class assignment based on academic performance, a series of mock exams, and tutors' counseling functioned as stratifying forces for students and further legitimized the stratification.

The high visible correlation between the ranking of universities and employment opportunities, a historical and cultural tradition of the importance of the names of the universities as status symbols, and self-evaluation on the basis of academic performance all served as external factors to reinforce the internal mechanisms of stratification

in the yobiko by affecting students' consciousness about the ranking of universities.

The ronin experience was the process of adjusting process of students' aspirations to their actual academic performance in mock exams. Facing uncertainty and anxiety of the second failure, students engaged in a rational calculation of success potential based on their relative position in each mock exam. This rationalizing process to assure their success led the students to be stratified in one-dimensional scale of the ranking of universities. The relative position in each exam was so visible and discrete to them expressed in objective numbers that students confirmed their relative position by receiving the results of each mock exam, and they legitimized their position as right and appropriate.

Having gone through schooling selection process through objective test scores especially since they began to take mock exams for their entrance examinations to senior high schools, students regarded academic performance as a criterion to evaluate themselves as well as others. The academic performance which was only based upon a specific test score became the core of self-identity for ronin students since their ronin year was organized to improve on their academic performance to enter the university of their first choice. Ronin students expressed either a feeling of inferiority or that of superiority according to their relative position in academic performance. This sensitivity to the level of academic performance and thus the rank of the classes to which they were assigned reinforced their sense of stratification in subjective terms.

This social stratification process was best understood by examining students' family background, gender, and previous schooling experience as well as ronin year in a longitudinal model. Family background operated as a factor to exclude the children of the lower social status families. The tracking system of high schools functioned as a sorting device to distinguish potential ronin candidates with high aspirations from students who could enter a university without ronin experience or that did not want to go to any university. The school subcultures based upon the ranks of high school were forces to stratify students in aspiration and academic performance through three years of differential curriculum, teacher-student relations, and model values.

The yobiko also reproduced gender division in Japan through the college entrance examination as another dimension of the social stratification. The yobiko is institutionalized for aspiring students to compete for higher ranked universities. Females were discouraged from becoming ronin not only because they were expected to achieve a lower educational level than males, but also because being ronin itself was more of a stigma for females than for males in the Japanese society.

The gender dimension of social stratification process was also best understood in the longitudinal model by identifying important differentiating points by gender in life history. The selection of the type of high schools in connection with the type of academic majors, considering their sex-typed plan took place prior to entering high schools. Then the decision process of whether or not to go to a university was important and then the next decision was made regarding the type of higher educational institution. Then when females failed to pass any

university, becoming ronin was the last choice. During ronin year females experienced more discouragements to aspire to prestigious universities by their parents and tutors than males.

This stratifying process in the ronin year should be understood as a continuation of a long-term differentiation process of students prior to the ronin year. At the same time, this stratifying process also continued by entering appropriate universities in the hierarchy of universities throughout Japan. Thus, the social stratification process was best understood as a long-term process of stratification from high schools through entering a university.

Focusing on actors' perspectives, this study revealed the dynamic process of justification of the stratification on the students' part, coping with their conflicts and tensions between anxiety and hope, between uncertainty and security, and between ideal self and actual self. The focus on perspectives shed light on how individual students interpreted their immediate situation and internalized the values in a larger social context selectively through their interpretation of the immediate situation.

APPENDIX A

A LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

I.D.	Class	Rank	Level of Univ. <sup>a</sup>	High School <sup>b</sup>	Inter- view Date <sup>c</sup>	Times	Year Ronin	Sex	Residence
# 1	9A	4	N-2	P-U	5/10	1	1	M	Home
# 2	5A	2	N-1	P-E	5/10	3	1	M	Dorm
# 3	5A	2	N-1	P-U	5/10	3	1	M	Home
# 4	5A	2	N-2	P-U	5/12	2	2	M	Home
# 5	4B	3	N-1	L-E	5/12	4	1	M	Apt
# 6*	3B	2	N-1	L-E	5/12	**	1	M	Home
# 7	9A	4	N-2	P-U	5/12	3	2	M	Home
# 8	9A	4	N-3	L-E	5/15	**	1	M	Dorm
# 9	3B	3	N-3	L-E	5/15	2	1	M	Dorm
#10	4A	2	N-1	M-A	5/16	1	1	M	Dorm
#11*	4A	2	N-1	L-E	5/16	2	1	M	Dorm
#12	9A	4	None	L-E	5/16	4	1	M	Dorm
#13*	4B	3	N-2	L-E	7/14	3	1	M	Dorm
#14*	5B	4	N-2	L-E	8/5	**	1	M	Dorm
#15*	-	-	-	-	8/5	1	1	M	Dorm
#16*	1C	2	P-1	M-A	8/5	1	1	M	Dorm
#17*	4A	2	N-1	L-E	8/6	1	1	M	Dorm
#18*	1C	2	P-1	L-E	8/6	1	1	M	Dorm
#19*	1D	1	N-1	L-E	8/6	1	1	M	Dorm
#20*	1D	1	N-1	P-E	8/6	2	1	M	Dorm
#21	4A	2	N-1	P-E	9/13	3	4	M	Home
#22	3B	2	N-1	M-A	9/13	1	3	M	Apt
#23*	5A	2	N-2	L-E	9/26	3	1	M	Dorm
#24*	2C	4	P-1	L-E	9/26	2	1	M	Dorm
#25	1E	4	N-3	L-E	9/27	3	1	F	Home
#26	1E	4	N-2	L-E	9/27	3	1	F	Home
#27	1E	4	N-2	L-E	9/27	4	1	F	Home
#28*	3B	2	N-1	L-E	9/28	4	1	M	Home
#29*	3B	2	N-1	P-E	9/28	**	1	M	Apt
#30	9A	4	N-1	L-E	10/18	2	1	M	Apt
#31*	3B	2	N-1	L-E	10/19	2	1	M	Dorm
#32*	3B	2	N-1	L-E	10/19	2	1	F	Apt
#33*	3B	2	N-1	L-E	10/19	2	1	M	Apt
#34*	5B	4	N-2	L-E	10/19	1	1	F	Home
#35	4A	2	N-1	L-E	10/29	3	1	M	Home
#36	3B	2	N-1	P-E	11/2	2	1	M	Home
#37	3B	2	N-1	P-E	11/2	1	1	M	Home
#38	3B	2	N-1	P-E	11/2	1	1	M	Home
#39	1E	4	None	L-E	11/8	4	1	M	Apt
#40	3C	5	N-3	M-A	11/9	1	1	M	Apt

I.D.	Class	Rank	Level of Univ. <sup>a</sup>	High School <sup>b</sup>	Inter- view Date <sup>c</sup>	Times	Year Ronin	Sex	Residence
#41	4A	2	N-1	L-E	11/21	***	1	M	Dorm
#42	1D	1	N-1	L-E	11/21	***	1	M	Dorm
#43	6A	3	N-1	M-A	11/29	***	1	M	Dorm
#44	3B	2	N-1	N-L	11/29	3	1	F	Home
#45	3B	2	N-1	N-L	11/29	2	1	F	Home
#46	3B	2	N-2	L-E	11/29	2	1	F	Home
#47	6B	4	N-2	L-E	11/30	***	1	F	Home
#48	6B	4	N-2	P-U	11/30	***	1	F	Home
#49	6B	4	N-2	P-U	11/30	***	1	F	Home
#50	6B	4	N-2	P-U	11/30	***	1	F	Home
#51	6B	4	N-2	P-U	11/30	***	1	F	Home
#52	6B	4	N-2	P-U	11/30	***	1	F	Home
#53	6B	4	N-3	L-E	12/2	***	1	M	Home
#54	6B	4	N-3	M-A	12/2	***	1	M	Dorm
#55	3B	2	N-1	P-U	12/3	1	1	F	Home
#56	3B	2	None	L-E	12/3	1	1	F	Apt
#57	3B	2	N-1	P-U	12/3	3	1	F	Home
#58	3B	2	N-2	P-U	12/3	1	1	F	Home
#59	5B	3	N-2	P-U	12/10	2	1	M	Home
#60	4B	2	N-2	P-U	12/20	2	2	F	Home
#61	9A	4	N-1	P-U	4/20	3	1	F	Home
#62	1C	2	P-1	none	5/10	2	2	M	Home
#63	5B	4	N-2	P-U	5/16	2	1	M	Home
#64	1E	5	N-2	M-A	6/19	2	1	M	Home
#65	1E	4	N-3	P-U	7/10	1	1	M	Home
#66	1C	2	P-1	P-U	7/8	1	1	F	Home
#67	1C	2	P-1	P-U	7/8	1	1	F	Home
#68	1F	-	P-1	L-E	7/12	1	1	F	Home
#69	1F	-	N-1	L-E	7/12	1	1	F	Home
#70	1F	-	P-1	P-U	7/12	1	1	F	Home
#71	1F	-	N-1	P-U	7/2	1	1	F	Home

High School Students

#72			N-2	P-U	8/20	1		M	Home
#73			N-2	P-U	8/20	1		M	Home
#74			P-1	P-U	8/20	1		M	Home

College Students

#75					8/30	2		M	Dorm
#76					8/31	1		M	Dorm

Anonymous Essays

#77	A High School Student				October				
#78	A Ronin Student				October				

<sup>a</sup>National universities and private universities are ranked at three levels: the highest group of national = N-1 includes "former Imperial Universities" and additional five prestigious universities, and N-2 are a group of "former first period universities, and N-3 includes the rest of the national universities. In private universities' classification, P-1 is the highest rank, P-2, the middle, and P-3, the lowest respectively.

<sup>b</sup>These abbreviations come from "ideal-types" of high schools discussed in the section of school subcultures: N-L = National-Liberal high school; P-E = Private-Elite high school; P-U = Public-Urban high school; L-E = Local-Elite high school; and M-A = Marginal-Average high school.

<sup>c</sup>Interview dates indicate the first interview dates.

\*indicates that these students wrote self-report essays.

\*\*indicates that these four students were key informants. They brought their friends for interview. I frequently met and talked with them at lunch time and on other occasions. I met each of them more than five times.

\*\*\*indicates that these students studied with me for the college entrance examination by seeing them once a week for about two months. One of the key informants also belongs to this group.

## APPENDIX B

### AN INTERVIEW TOPIC LIST\*

\*Unstructured interviews with ronin students and key informants were conducted in natural settings. Questions and wordings asking the questions were not determined definitely in advance. Questions and the way of asking them depended upon situations and respondents in the situations. The following list of questions was constructed after a pilot study of twelve students in Hiroshima in May. The listed questions were designed to be used as long as they stimulated and facilitated the actors' natural conversations with the researcher.

#### 1. General Background Information

- a. Name and Sex
- b. Respondent's present age including what year of being ronin.
- c. Where born and grew up, with attention to size of geographical unit (village, city or town under 50,000 and city over 50,000).
- d. Resident of Hiroshima or non-resident of Hiroshima
- e. Composition of family respondent grew up in, with attention to birth order of children.
- f. Respondent's complete educational history: when, where, what type of school?
- g. Current living arrangement: type of residence? Living in the dormitory or an apartment or lodging house.

#### 2. Background Information: Mother and Father

- a. Work history: when, what type, childcare arrangements if both worked after marriage
- b. Ages
- c. Educational history

#### 3. Background Information: Siblings

- a. Ages
- b. Present status of each
- c. Education of siblings relative to education of the respondent: in particular how the respondent's level, quality of education compare with that of other siblings. If they are in college, specify the name of the college or university.

#### 4. Information of Self-Concept

- (1) What does Respondent think of how others view him or her?
- a. Do you feel a sort of inferiority by being a ronin student? If so, to whom do you have such a feeling?
  - b. How do you think others in society view you as a ronin student? What do you think of their view of ronin?

- c. How do you think your friends view you as a ronin student?
- d. How do you think your family members view you as a ronin student?
- e. What do you think of those of a higher level in academic achievement?
- f. How do you compare your life with that of high school students or that of college students?

(2) How does Respondent evaluate his or her academic achievement?

- a. How confident are you that you will pass the entrance examination of the university you plan to apply to next year?
- b. Do you think that you are basically smart although you failed in the last entrance examination?
- c. Do you think that you can be regarded as an elite?
- d. What was your academic achievement position in your high school?

(3) How does Respondent experience his or her life now?

- a. Do you often feel anxious because you are a ronin?
- b. Have you felt that you are neurotic because of the entrance examination?
- c. Are you basically happy with your present life? If not, by comparing with whom do you feel unhappy?
- d. If you compare your present life with that of your high school days, which do you feel happier either now or then? How do you describe your life now by comparing it with that of your high school days? (Freedom, Independence, Suffering, Tension, Anxiety or No Change).

## 5. Family Relations

(1) Family in general

- a. What do your family members think of the fact that you failed in the entrance examination?
- b. Are your family members supportive for you in studying?
- c. How do you feel at home? Do you feel comfortable and relaxed at home?
- d. Do your family members understand your situation well?
- e. Have your family members changed their attitude toward you since you failed in the entrance examination. If so, how have they changed?
- f. Do your family members often say, "Study harder"?
- g. Do you think that there is a mutual trust between your family members and yourself?
- h. Do you think that your life style influences the family's life style?
- i. Do you think that the family members are worried about you and do anything to facilitate your study?
- j. Do you feel a high expectation from your family?
- k. Are your mother and father on good terms with each other?

## (2) Parents

- a. What do you think of your mother?
- b. What kind of person is your mother?
- c. What is your relationship with your mother?
- d. What do you think of your father?
- e. What kind of person is your father?
- f. What is your relationship with your father?
- g. Do you feel too much "interference" from your parents?
- h. Do you talk about your day with your parents?
- i. Do you think that your parents like you more than other siblings in the family?
- j. Did your parents accompany you when you took the entrance examination?

## 6. Friendship or Socially Meaningful Network

- a. Do you have any friends?  
If so, are they friends in the yobiko?
- b. Do you have a boy friend or a girl friend?
- c. Do you often study with your friends?
- d. With whom do you talk most daily?
- e. If you have any trouble, whom are you going to see?
- f. How is your relationship with your friends from your high school days?

## 7. Significant Events Regarding the Entrance Examination

- a. Have you attended any juku?  
If so, how long did you attend it?
- b. Have you had any tutors?
- c. What high school did you graduate from?
- d. Have you failed in the entrance examination in addition to the college entrance examination?
- f. How did you decide to become ronin?
- g. Why did you take the entrance examination of the particular university?

## 8. Daily Activities

## (1) Daily Activities

- a. How many hours do you study including attending class per day?
- b. Some say that the Japanese society is a credential society or Gakureki Shakai. What do you think of this idea?
- c. One of the public high schools in Kofu tried to send its students to Yoyogi Seminaru (a yobiko in Tokyo) as part of the school activities to make the students better prepared for the entrance examination. What do you think of this news?

## 12. The Entrance Examination and Gender (for females only)

- a. Was your high school coeducational?
- b. Were you raised differently from your brothers if you have any?
- c. What university do you plan to apply to? Why?
- d. What major are you going to study in a university? Why?
- e. Do you think that you are viewed differently from male ronin by others in society?

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONNAIRE

(an English translation)

Home Class ( )

1. Sex      1. male      2. female
2. What is your class ( )
3. Where do you live?
  - 1) dormitory
  - 2) lodging house or apartment
  - 3) home (in Hiroshima City)
  - 4) home (not in Hiroshima City)
4. Which high school did you graduate from?  
( )
5. What percentage was the college entrance rate of your high school?
  - 1) almost 100%
  - 2) more than 90%
  - 3) 70% - less than 90%
  - 4) 50% - less than 70%
  - 5) less than 50%
6. What was ronin rate of your high school?

Both sexes	males only	females only
1) more than 50%	1) more than 50%	1) more than 50%
2) 40%-less than 50%	2) 40%-less than 50%	2) 40%-less than 50%
3) 30%-less than 40%	3) 30%-less than 40%	3) 30%-less than 40%
4) 20%-less than 30%	4) 20%-less than 30%	4) 20%-less than 30%
5) 10%-less than 20%	5) 10%-less than 20%	5) 10%-less than 20%
6) 5%-less than 10%	6) 5%-less than 10%	6) 5%-less than 10%
7) Little	7) Little	7) Little
7. What do you think is the average college entrance rate (including junior colleges) in Japan?
  - 1) more than 70%
  - 2) 60% - less than 70%
  - 3) 50% - less than 60%
  - 4) 40% - less than 50%
  - 5) less than 30%
8. Did you have any rivalry consciousness toward other high schools when you were in high school?



- 11) I want to terminate my ronin life. I think that I will be able to enter the university. +-----+
- 12) I like the city where the university is located such as Tokyo, Kobe, and Kyoto. +-----+
13. Why do you want to enter a more prestigious university? Please check an appropriate point on the scale.
- 1) I will be able to obtain a good job when I enter a more prestigious university because Japan is Gakureki Shakai or a credential society. +-----+
- 2) I want to prove my "real ability." +-----+
- 3) I want to prove that I am "superior" to others. +-----+
- 4) I want to enter a more prestigious university than the ones my friends entered at their graduation of high school. +-----+
14. Why do you go to a university?
- 1) To get a better job. +-----+
- 2) To reflect on myself and improve myself before working. +-----+
- 3) To enjoy my youth before working. +-----+
- 4) Because all of my friends also do so. +-----+
- 5) Because my parents tell me to say so. +-----+
- 6) To obtain a certificate. +-----+
15. Questions on your Ronin Life. Please check an appropriate point on the scale.
- 1) I feel enjoyable free of high school life +-----+
- 2) I feel anxious about the entrance examination next year. +-----+
- 3) I feel enjoyable to make a variety of friends. +-----+
- 4) I feel that my ronin life is more meaningful than my high school days. +-----+
- 5) I feel hard in studying hard for the entrance examination every day. +-----+
- 6) I feel severe without any social status. +-----+

16. Do you think that your ronin life is better than your high school days? If so, please specify what points are good about ronin life.

17. What are the good teaching methods of yobiko teachers?

- 1) Interesting (funny) classes. +-----+
- 2) Useful classes for the entrance exams. +-----+
- 3) Classes with clear explanations. +-----+
- 4) Teachers teach wholeheartedly +-----+
- 5) Not interesting, but serious classes. +-----+

18. Have you sneaked into classes other than the ones assigned to you by the yobiko?

1. yes (    )    2. no (    )

If yes, please check an appropriate point on the scale why?

- 1) Teachers of the classes are bad. +-----+
- 2) The classes do not fit my schedule. +-----+
- 3) The classes do not suit my academic ability. +-----+
- 4) Friends of mine do not attend the classes. +-----+
- 5) I want to attend my favorite teachers' classes. +-----+
- 6) I want to attend a class ranked higher than the classes. +-----+

19. How many hours do you study per day, including class attendance?

- 1) More than 10 hours
- 2) 9 - less than 10 hours
- 3) 8 - less than 9 hours
- 4) 7 - less than 8 hours
- 5) 6 - less than 7 hours
- 6) 5 - less than 6 hours
- 7) 4 - less than 5 hours
- 8) 3 - less than 4 hours
- 9) 2 - less than 3 hours
- 10) 1 - less than 2 hours
- 11) Less than 1 hour

20. How do you study?

- 1) Mainly studying with Hiroshima Seminar texts and reviewing class notes.
- 2) A combination of using Hiroshima Seminar texts and studying with practice and exercise texts.
- 3) Mainly studying with practice and exercise texts.



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