4 How Japanese teenagers cope

Social pressures and personal responses

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The power of indirect social pressure

There is an intensive discourse in Japan that aims to bring attention to, seek reasons for, and propose methods of dealing with misconduct (*hikō*) among youth.[1] Largely due to this discourse, outside Japan the impression is easily gained that the country's youth are in a complete state of disarray. Given this discourse, my interest is in youths themselves: not merely how they perceive their lives, but especially how they perceive their lives in the face of what the elder generation – the generation promulgating the intensive discourse on misconduct – is saying about them.

In 2001 I spent several months in the small Japanese cities of Tsu, Yamaguchi, Hōfu, and Kurume. Within the limits of possibility,[2] I gathered through questionnaires the views of about a hundred young people on their feelings about language, about cell phones, about their grandparents' generation, and about their own futures. These disparate topics could serve, I felt, as a window into the minds of young people, enabling me to see how they responded to the social pressures of the adult world. Before exploring what they told me, let me focus on the concept of "social pressure."

Socialization – "growing up" – always implies having to deal with the pressure of expectations from people older than oneself. Such expectations might go hand in hand with force or coercion, exercised by concrete "official" persons such as parents or teachers. This kind of overt pressure is relatively easy to observe;[3] it is therefore important to pay special attention to "social pressure," i.e. to expectations that are not so much spelled out as just "present in the air," felt to be limiting or channelling the scope of action one might take. Because individuals are often unconscious of such pressure, I was not surprised that the majority of young people questioned did not relate this pressure explicitly to an older generation perceived to be spelling out expectations. Consequently, these young people were not intent on irritating, shocking, resisting, or criticizing their elders. Rather, their desire was to maintain and defend their privacy, close friendships, and inner images of a happy life, as an everyday and unspectacular way of defending against social pressure.

Let me give four examples of this indirect kind of social pressure – the kind of pressure that "can be felt in the air" and against which it is difficult to rebel. There are, first, the very terms with which young people are classified. In German, there is a clear differentiation between "child" (under 14) and "youth" (14 to 18). Japanese language usage is less clear on this point. Some authors make a similar distinction, referring to youths as *seinen* or *seishōnen* (youths, young people), or *kōkōsei* (senior high school boys/girls). However, a surprising number of books and articles – particularly those lamenting youthful misconduct – speak of young people who are well past puberty as *kodomo* (children). This may be the expression of a specific expectation – that the 17-year-old identifies with the same social status and concomitant self-image as the 12-year-old. This kind of pressure would not exist if discourse differentiated systematically between "child" and "youth."[4]

Second, there is the reiteration of values which brought success in the past that the older generation wants to pass on to the next, irrespective of the views the latter may have and irrespective of how the world may have changed. In Japan, influential segments of the now-older generation – the generation in its prime roughly from about 1970 to 1985 – are keenly aware of the country's worldwide success. The huge number of instruction books produced during this time explaining the nature of institutions and enterprises to prospective employees spell out expectations in an unmistakable language, emphasizing above all the devotion of the individual's entire physical and emotional energy to the network of persons at one's place of work. At least two elements may be seen in this discourse that no longer carry much weight in the affluent society of today. One is a high level of consensus epitomized in the call *kyō yori mo yoi seikatsu!* ("Tomorrow's life should be better than today's!") (Sofue 1987; Nissei 1994). The other element is the awareness of Japan's success and its internationally high level of reliability, safety, and order. This also led to a high level of consensus, focusing on the possibility of being "better" – more harmonious, more efficient, more sensitive, more reliable, more polite – than other, and especially Western, societies. It may be only natural that a generation, having seen its consensus-based values bring about success, should feel legitimized to claim their superiority over all others. However, such values constitute a subtle and constant pressure on the younger generation growing up in a world that has changed.

Third, there is the fact that in Japan today, ideas concerning an individual's responsibility within the social network are heavily shaped by official, government-related positions: there exists a more or less official stance shared by powerful and influential organs within the state, such as the ministries, or important industries. Thus a high degree of legitimacy is given to arguments that uphold this stance, which may be described as "pressure to maintain harmony" – "harmony" not in the positive sense it connotes in English, but in the neutral sense of "strict order." Let me take a closer look at this harmony.

Numerous guidelines for correct behavior in organizations and institutions, as well as manuals for schoolteachers, begin with a definition of what it means to be human. To be human, we read, is to live within a social network, outside of which the individual cannot exist; one's duty is the maintenance of this network so as to enable others to lead a wholly human life.[5] In Japan the young generation is exposed to this line of thinking to a considerable degree. In effect, if the social network is the basic precondition for an individual's life, then if an individual suffers, this cannot be attributed to the social network but always to the misconduct of individuals. This places enormous responsibility and stress upon the individual, who must not point to "others" or to "society" as the source of one's problems. It is always the individual who upholds or destroys the social fabric. On a practical level, socialization at home, at school, or at one's place of work can thus easily rob a person of possibilities for discussing contexts and external structures and leave only introspection – and feelings of guilt – as the locus through which to frame a problem.[6]

In his studies of Japanese approaches to deviant behavior, Metzler (2000a, 2000b, 2001; see also Foljanty-Jost and Rössner 1997) concludes that there is a strong tendency to limit discussion to the micro-social level, i.e. to take an isolated view of the person who is guilty of misconduct and to shut out macro-social considerations (Metzler 2000a: 10–11). Non-deviant, "good" behavior, according to Metzler, appears in a majority of cases to be defined from the point of view of the social network. Deviance, on the other hand, is defined as egoistic behavior that cannot be brought into line with the demands of society on the individual (Metzler 2000b: 18).

Fourth, a considerable degree of pressure on the individual is rooted in the vision of an ideal, well-functioning social structure. This ideal is put forward in a surprisingly aggressive fashion in books, articles, and television programs, where it is contrasted to a reality that falls short. If the ideal is that of a well-functioning, harmonious society, then reality is characterized by decay, collapse, erosion, danger, and chaos. This reference to an abstract system of norms against which the individual must constantly measure oneself can exert a considerably higher amount of pressure than when reality is seen for what it actually is.

There is a tendency for Japanese writers to take this ideal state of "harmony" as a point of reference against which the individual must measure oneself, and a corresponding disregard for the complexities of social reality. Two examples illustrate this process well. Kamata (2001), dealing with the breakdown of the family, postulates the ideal of a harmonious family which is made impossible by the "brutal structure of present Japanese society." For Kamata, the Japanese father works himself to death for his family – "*kazoku no tame ni*" (2001: 55–6). However, Kamata's image of a harmonious Japanese family, where the husband, spending long hours at his company, yearns to return to his wife and children, does not seem to take into account the actual interpersonal dynamics in many real Japanese families. Why does

Kamata not even as much as hint at problems such as tensions between husband and wife, or the blind ambition and career orientation of so many husbands? Surely an analysis of what actually shapes the interactions of individual family members would suggest that reality is far too complicated to be reducible to a vision of an ideal "harmonious family."[7]

Similarly, Ogi, a well-known commentator on educational matters, describes the breakdown of an idealized concept of Japan as follows (2000: 120–33):

> The family is no longer a place where one feels security. If children thought of the family this way they would not commit suicide. The family has become a place where there is no more communication among its members.
>
> The individual homes in the local district have no contact with each other any more. Therefore the morals, the habits, and the common sense of the local community can no longer be transmitted to the children through the home. The children feel no more pressure from the local society and walk along the streets proudly smoking cigarettes, gather in front of convenience stores until late at night, or calmly put on makeup on the train. Children who do not feel the gaze of other people have lost their sense of morality.

Can Japanese readers of these texts, who must know very well that times cannot be turned back, feel anything other than guilt that they are not behaving according to "proper Japanese norms"? If these texts were structured around arguments that discussed the dilemmas many present-day families faced, it would be possible to understand why a plurality of life patterns have arisen. However, as the arguments revolve around contrasting a negative reality with a positive ideal, and appear to be telling the young generation that – for reasons it cannot help – it has lost its sense of morality, it seems difficult to see how the young generation can develop a positive view of itself. Who, then, is really creating "the generation gap"?

How young people resist pressure

My research in 2001 focused on the quieter processes by which young people resist the pressures of the adult world. How do these young people respond to social pressure created by a discourse that laments so vociferously the disappearance of old ways and "good morals"?

As I did not wish to influence the direction of responses I received, I consciously did not refer directly to social pressure, and to the discourse reflected in the media and in publications placed conspicuously in bookstores and evidently widely read. I also did not refer directly to the current adult generation – these students' parents and teachers – and its efforts to shape

young people; given widespread discussion of the gap between youth and their elders in Japan today, I felt that students might simply repeat for me a set of stereotypes. Rather, I asked more indirect questions, centered on (1) feelings about the use of language, and especially of verbal communication, particularly between different generations, (2) feelings about the use of the cell phone as a means of maintaining or increasing contact outside the control of the elder generation, (3) feelings towards the grandparents' generation – the generation of elders "no longer threatening," and the latter's relation to young people, and (4) these young people's visions of their own future, when they themselves become adults. Let me discuss each of these areas in turn.[8]

Language

The responses I received from young people tended to emphasize their feelings of tenseness concerning language use. Not infrequently, they saw language as a means to conceal rather than enhance communicative exchange. These characteristics seem to contribute to a marked distance between the generations. Some of their responses ran as follows:

> "Language is not necessarily used to get someone else to understand your feelings. Sometimes I use language to *prevent* another person from knowing my feelings and my values, for instance when I lie, or say something close to a lie.... Language is used to get people to understand you, and therefore demands a very careful and cautious attitude (*taido*).... Language is also used to keep an adequate distance between one human being and another.... *Angō* (ciphers, codes) and *kotoba asobi* (word plays) are expressions common just to the insiders of the group to which one belongs, and they serve to keep secrets, strengthen intimacy, and keep distance from other groups. Language is a means to show distance in personal relationships."

> "*Wakamono kotoba* (expressions used by young people) are made up of values and opinions that only one generation has in common, and used only by this generation. Such communication can be difficult for other generations to understand. This is particularly so when one wants to exclude other generations from one's communication.... *Wakamono kotoba* are used to separate oneself from the elder generation, and to make concrete the common consciousness of one's own generation."

> "If you 'feel the body' of someone, i.e. are 'touched' by someone's physical appearance or voice, you become *tense* and take on a posture. It's different if you can contact someone by e-mail – it's much more relaxing than if you meet or talk to someone."

These responses reveal considerable communicative stress. Such stress may be a general characteristic of the Japanese language, because of the status hierarchy intrinsic to the language, but this stress seems to be experienced very acutely by young people: language, to them, is a way of keeping outsiders, and particularly the older generation, apart from one's own realm of discourse. Yet even among one's own generation, tension may be pervasive in face-to-face communication, as the third response above implies. Discussions with teachers in Yamaguchi and Mie prefectures showed that an important source of stress at school had its roots not in classroom study but in extra-curricular activities (*bukatsu*), where slightly different age groups of pupils create harsh hierarchies among themselves.[9] This reveals how youths themselves may re-create the social pressure they experience at the hands of the adult world. One recourse to the tension of day-to-day communication is the cell phone.

Keitai *(cell phones)*

Keitai are a ubiquitous tool in the communicative processes of young people. How far, I wondered, is the massive use of *keitai* – either for e-mail or for telephoning – bringing about a new kind of communication and new kinds of networks to establish identity in the face of the external pressures of the adult world? I organize my findings into several categories, each reflecting the awareness of a gap between the values one was taught (the "ideal," as it were) and the reality to which young people must, and are, adapting.

A first group of answers suggests a very keen awareness of "good," "proper," "polite," and "decent" attitudes, and shows a high regard for, and a high level of reflection upon, social pressure that requires well-defined standards of behavior. These young people seemingly have no intention of widening the generation gap – they see *keitai* as having negative effects on "proper behavior":

> "Things have become convenient. *Keitai* makes possible fast, immediate information. However, it is important to keep manners. It worries me that, unlike when using a regular telephone, you do not say hello to their family any more when you call your friends. . . ."

> "Life has changed since the introduction of *keitai*. . . . I always have to have the thing with me, otherwise I feel uncomfortable. It makes you restless, jumpy [*ochitsukanai*]. Even at the bedside you must have it. This is strange, really. Formerly people used to speak face to face, or put their thoughts into writing. It scares me to think that this is no longer so."

> "When they have a *keitai*, people in trains and elsewhere start talking without paying any attention to those around them. . . . It's strange to see people walking along the road talking into their *keitai*.*"[10]

A second group of answers focused on fears of isolation – an attitude that contrasts with the experiences of the older generations who, when they were small, usually spent more time playing with other children than is the case in recent years.

> "*Keitai* gives you a feeling of *anshin* (peace of mind, the sense of having been reassured); *keitai* gives you the feeling you have many friends."

> "Thanks to mails you become acquainted with people with whom you would otherwise not be on close terms (*nakayoku*). You can contact people any time (*itsudemo*), anywhere (*doko ni ite mo*), casually (*kigaru ni*). Feeling ties with others gives you a sense of *anshin*. However, seeing people face to face can now make you feel tense."

> "When you meet people, you immediately exchange *keitai* numbers and feel, 'I have many friends.'"

> "Since I have a *keitai* I don't feel lonely and isolated (*kodoku*). If I'm alone I can catch someone. Someone will be there for me (*aite ni shite kureru*). On the other hand, now I think less for myself. I look less into myself (*jibun jishin o mitsumenaosu*). I think less of the future and about life. I know this is not good, but I can't say no when people call me.*"

A further group was very outspoken about the wish to be left alone and have private time for oneself. This emphasis on privacy and on structuring one's own time I hold to be an important aspect of the "generation gap," because "privacy" can easily get in the way of the rules for "polite, social behavior." In addition, stress on privacy contrasts with the widespread fear of loneliness:

> "*Keitai* means you are subject to stress from outside. You get all sorts of advertisements and invitations from broadcasting companies, newspapers, religions. . . . It's really disagreeable being called without considering whether it suits me.*"

> "*Keitai* is a good thing if you get lost. But it is also a pain. . . . Because of *keitai* you become tied, controlled, managed from outside."

> "Human beings can't live alone, some say [echoing the 'official discourses' we earlier discussed], but I think also the opposite can be true.... I don't like it if this time for oneself alone is interrupted by *keitai*.*"

> "I like to have time for myself. I noticed this for the first time when I got a *keitai*. I had no privacy any more. It's like being a dog on a leash."

The next group of answers stresses a qualitative change in the nature of interpersonal relationships as compared to past generations, a change created by the new technology of *keitai*:

> "Now I can end a relationship by just not answering the mail. As the tie to the other person 'just has the degree of a mail acquaintance' (*meiru teido no naka*), that person is not so hurt..."

> "Formerly, when I called, I had to ask the parents of my friends to pass on the telephone. Now I can contact my friends by mail whenever I want to. When I call someone at home the person I want answers, so I don't need *keigo* [formal polite language] any more."

> "The pattern of making friends has changed. I can talk to people casually. By using mail it is easy to converse back and forth. I can also say things that I could not if I had to use my mouth...."

> "Seeing people face to face can now make you feel tense. Through *keitai* you can tell people directly what you want to tell them, even though this is somehow strange."

Finally, several answers related *keitai* explicitly to a profound change in the relationship to parents, and to the generation that the parents represent:

> "I have my own room, where I have my TV, my telephone, everything I need. I don't have to go into the living room.... Even though I'm at home, I can communicate with whomever I want to, I don't have to ask my parents to use the telephone.... Formerly parents knew everything about who you mixed with, but now they know nothing. Thanks to *keitai* my freedom has increased, I can easily contact all sorts of people...."

> "Long distance calls in the middle of the night have increased; life has become irregular. Parents no longer know that you are telephoning; you can do and say what you like.... *Keitai* is like an invisible wall between parents and children."

Generally, *keitai* seem to facilitate an extraordinary new set of connections that young people experience in a way quite removed from their parents. Through *keitai*, young people bypass their parents, to be in direct and constant contact with the world of their peers, a world that makes them feel connected to others but that also causes some to feel a loss of privacy for oneself. In general for young people, *keitai* strengthen the social pressure from peers, and weaken the social pressure imposed by elders, who are largely excluded from young people's *keitai* world.

Young people and their grandparents

If we assume that the relationship between the generation of young people and the generation of the parents is changing, not least because of *keitai*, then we may ask whether this change is reflected in feelings towards grandparents. Grandparents are worth considering because they are the older generation past, but are not at present usually in a position to directly pressure young people. By considering grandparents, we can see how young people view past generations apart from the social pressure of the adult world that they experience on a daily basis.

It was surprising to me that many answers given by my respondents were vague, and showed that contacts with grandparents were sparse and often limited to one meeting a year. On the other hand, a few answers did portray very fond recollections. What I had not expected, however, was the surprisingly intense association of the grandparents with the topic of "war."[11]

> "The topics my grandparents talk about are their childhood, and the war. When they talk of the poverty during and before the war, this is very instructive for me.... My grandparents, who lost brothers and friends during the war, taught me a lot about how to think about human life. They have lived from an epoch of poverty up until today.... It's very important to hear from them of times when education did not take place in a context of merchandise and money.*"

> "I learn from grandmother about 'what you should know in life' (*seikatsu no chie*), i.e. how to make laundry clean without the material losing its colors, how to keep foodstuffs over a long period of time, etc. Also, my grandparents told me about the war. Grandmother worked in a factory. Grandfather ... lost friends. I can only meet my grandparents once a year."

> "My grandparents lost many things during the war: friends, family members, their pride, things they treasured. I learned the terrible reality of an education that taught about the goodness of conquering other countries, and also of not getting education because children had to work."

> "My mother's parents were very peaceful and I often went to play at their house. They had a little field and planted all sorts of vegetables. They were never angry, and even when we made holes in their field we were told: 'You really played quietly, causing no trouble for grandma and grandpa, you are such good children' [*minna ojiichan ya obaachan no jama ni naranai yō ni shizuka ni asonde itan da ne. hontō ni ii ko da ne*]. My grandparents read me a lot of picture books, and talked of their youth and their experience of the war."

As in the last quotation above, grandparents may seem to represent a nostalgia for a more peaceful past; they may also be seen as the purveyors of a non-threatening, unobtrusive wisdom, not bearing the social pressures of parents and teachers in the adult generation now in power. More often, they were seen as victims of the past that they had no choice but to live through, of a war and a poverty that young people today can hardly imagine. Both because of the decline of the three-generation family – many of these students did not live with their grandparents – and because the grandparents' youth seemed so far removed from the world of today, grandparents seemed to have little moral authority in directing the young: their world was truly a world apart from that lived by today's youth.

Young people's senses of the future

We have seen how, through their grandparents, young people relate to the past, but what now of the future? How do youths' visions of their future reflect the pressures they are exposed to? Do these visions suggest conflict with the elder generation? Or indifference? Or perhaps a self-reliance of the young generation, to an extent where what is being said about it, and what is expected of it, leaves but a weak impression?

Students were asked, "How do you see yourself at age 30 to 35?" When looking at replies, we should take note of differences between males and females. The females were outspoken, even resolute, in their visions of a self-determined life that did not tolerate pressures from social norms and outside criticism. True, these were only dreams and not reality; but their assertiveness was striking.

On the other hand, it was difficult to obtain well-formulated answers from males, and what they said was marked by uncertainty over how to react to pressures from outside and from the elder generation. Some answers from males ran as follows:

> "Usually one does *shūshoku* (finds career-track employment) ... and then enters a company. But if you say what you can do, you may purposely not be given that job or position. It is basically the company that decides."*

> "I'm now 18. Will Japan still exist in the future? Maybe not. We are in an economically bad situation and dark things are happening.*"

> "I don't like to think about views of the world and human beings. I want to do work in which I can express the world in my mind, such as writing novels.*"

> "My wishes can't be integrated into plans for finding a job. I like music, film, tennis. I'd like to study complicated rhythms, but nobody understands this wish.*"

The pessimism, and indeed, escapism of these young males is striking: there is no confident striding into the adult future, but a desire to hide from the conventional adult world. Many of the answers by females concerning the future portrayed a more assertive will to respond to pressures from society:

> "The nicest thing for me is if I am able to work. I won't be married; I'll be working energetically. I have always wanted to work abroad, as a reporter, not in a company. . . . In Japan, people work too much and too restlessly (*sewashiku hatarakisugiru*). So people are dead tired. I can't live in such surroundings. Everything is too fast. . . . I want to be by the sea or in the mountains, live with cats and dogs, live with someone I love and share work with him. . . ."

> "I want to be someone who can live alone. So I must work maybe as a career woman in a bank abroad. But I also want to make a family, marry someone I like, have children, finish work early in the evening, prepare dinner, and spend the weekend with the family. The surroundings in which I live should not be dirty and littered (*gomigomi*) like in Japan. I want to be somewhere with a lot of nature."

> "I want a happy family, live by the seaside or in the mountains, be in nature. I will live happily with my husband and children and not be chased by time. I want to be able to watch the passing of the seasons."

> "I will be married and have more than two children. . . . I want to be at home when my children come home. Sometimes I'll make cakes; in the holidays we'll go places; for breakfast and supper we'll all be together."

Of the more than one hundred answers, only two mentioned a concrete partnership, using the expression *koibito* [lover]. Indeed, many of these young women had little concrete idea of career or marriage plans – what they stated seems more often to be a matter of personal fantasy than of a concrete plan.[12] Nonetheless, these young women generally had a positive

outlook towards their future that young men lacked. Why? A female student who was asked to interpret this referred immediately to pressure:

> "There is high pressure on male students. . . . Men are not supposed to give up their job, no matter how unbearable it is. They are not supposed to change their working place much. This may lead them to withdraw into themselves, so they shrink and grow timid."

Perhaps these young men had already internalized this message from their elders – and in Japan's era of economic downturn, this filled them with all the more trepidation about the future, a trepidation that young women largely lacked.

Conclusion

What I have aimed to discover in this research is how, against a background of information that relies heavily on problems and misconduct of youths, "unspectacular" youth have perceived themselves to be under the pressures of adult social norms. As I felt it important to draw attention to the less noted aspects of "the generation gap," I stressed the position that "the generation gap" need not imply young people energetically proclaiming different values for themselves or catching the eye of the media; rather, it may be far more subtle.

Looking at the context in which the younger generation grows up, it is essential to take note of covert types of pressure that are continuously present. These pressures are reflected in language usage, in values that brought success in the past but seem out of place in the present (such as those contained in the definition of the individual as subservient to the social network), or that are caused by persons in prestigious positions measuring life's realities against visions of how society should ideally be. Such pressures are often beyond immediate awareness. For these reasons I tried to gain insight into how young people perceive themselves by looking at areas which would not compel them to think directly in terms of "pressure" and "response," and thereby possibly reiterate clichés of youthful misconduct. The information gathered was thus based on questions pertaining to language, the cell phone, the grandparents' generation, and visions of one's future.

In the answers given above, language appeared generally as a cause for tenseness, reflecting strict standards for maintaining distance between elder and younger people. This tenseness pertained not only to inter-generational communication, but also to the relationship between elder and younger pupils themselves.

The use of the cell phone was evaluated along conflicting lines. The cell phone was seen as contributing to a qualitative change of interpersonal

relationships, decreasing stress, and relieving fears of isolation on the one hand, while bringing out outspoken comments about wanting to be left alone and undisturbed on the other. The cell phone was also mentioned as leading to increased inter-generational distance by eliminating parents' control and excluding them from knowledge about one's life.

Grandparents appeared to have little impact on the young generation. Feelings towards them, if they existed at all, were positive, and usually included thankfulness for being told about former times of hardship and the war. The grandparents have passed beyond the realm of "adult pressure": the world they grew up in is so far away from the world of youth today that the latter feel almost no moral pressure from the former. This may be one reason why these young people tended to view grandparents in a positive way.

In their visions of their future, males adopted a more troubled attitude than did females, and suggested that their "inner selves" were not up to the pressures they perceived in the outside world. Beyond this, the answers obtained from young men and women in common included no reference to members of the elder generation as having given, or giving, any direct guidance, or of serving as a model for one's own life course. The only emphatic support of any norm expressed in the young people's answers related to preserving "good manners," as we saw in the discussion of cell phone use. A degree of rejection of the elder generation's world could, on the other hand, be detected in the relatively naive, idealistic dreams these youths had of their own future, in which there was a definite "no" to lack of time and leisure, disinterest in nature, and disharmonious family life – the world of many of these youths' parents, and of contemporary Japan as a whole.

None of the answers given by these youths took an aggressive or self-assertive position. At the same time, practically no communicative or argumentative exchange between the different generations could be discerned. The answers I received from the young people themselves about the way they deal with the pressures bearing upon them give the impression that they do not pay much attention to what is being said about them. There appears neither to be open conflict, nor much interaction between the generations. This stands in sharp contrast to the immense amount of material printed or conveyed through the media suggesting a hitherto unheard-of level of misconduct among youth.

Let me conclude by quoting from an interview conducted in October 2001 with a particularly insightful teacher. He believes we should be critical of what is said about young people – a bigger problem, he argues, is the attitude of the older generation, which he holds mainly responsible for creating "the generation gap." In his words:

> "Most teachers are in their thirties. These teachers have enough 'power' to face up to the pupils. But for teachers in their fifties, work at school

> is very hard. So these elder teachers fall ill, and sometimes even commit suicide. By and large, while academics in Japan are talking about all kinds of problems of young people, I, for my part, can see a lot of young people who are leading perfectly healthy lives. Unfortunately, many people in their fifties and sixties use the times in which they themselves were educated to measure the present."

Perhaps, therefore, we should pay more attention to what youths themselves make of their lives. Many seem not at all intent on creating a "generation gap," but do appear quite adept at warding off pressure: the pressure of an adult world that perhaps no longer fits the world of today.

Notes

1 It is impossible to list the many titles on this subject that appear month after month, so I shall give only random examples: Kubota 1994; Nakajima 1997; Ogi 1999; *Keishichō shōnen ikusei ka* 2000; Machizawa 2000; Nishiyama 2000; Ogi 2000; Yamaoka *et al.* 2000; Kamata 2001; "Shinkokuka suru bōryoku kōi, ijime, futōkō nado no genjō" [On the present situation, in which violence, bullying, refusal to go to school etc. are becoming ever more serious problems] in *Monbu kagakushō* 2002: 26.

2 Possibilities are always limited: not everyone can be induced to answer questionnaires, and degrees of reflection vary considerably from person to person. Another difficulty that carries particular weight in Japan is the long time usually necessary to reach a stage where a researcher and a young person – in Japan perceived very consciously to belong to different generations – are able to communicate.

3 Such pressure includes *bōryoku* [force, violence], but also the "examination hell," and mothers who demand constant study from their children (*kyōiku mama*) – these are overt forms of pressure that will not be considered here.

4 As long as the young people themselves do not have the opportunity for comparison (for instance, through a period of stay in a foreign country), they would have difficulty translating the emotions they probably feel into intelligible arguments on this point.

5 An analysis of teacher's manuals may be found in Ackermann (1992a: 255–80, and 2002: 56–87).

6 School essays by children and youths are a particularly interesting source for tracing such processes of introspection and the accompanying pressure felt by their authors. Many schools publish their own collections of children's essays. I have discussed children's essays in Ackermann (1992b: 43–56, and 2002: 88–108).

7 There is a strong tradition in Japan of describing social reality in a writing style that is idealistic and/or normative. A reaction against this may be seen in the critical stance taken by the *Seikatsu tsuzurikata kyōiku undō* [Educational movement for spelling out life as it is]. This movement, which began in the Taishō era, trained schoolchildren in the precise observation and description of everyday life in rural and industrial areas. In postwar Japan this movement has played an important role in political opposition as well as in its sharp criticism of normative styles of writing, and it has invested much energy in getting

schoolchildren to learn to express themselves carefully and exactly when describing the lives they and members of their families and their neighbourhoods are leading (see *Nihon sakubun no kai* 1972; *Nara sakubun-kai* 1976; Yamazumi 1987).

8 Unless stated otherwise, the answers were given to me in written form, covering one to two pages. For reasons of space, I can cite only a few answers here, and, from these, only certain passages.

9 Kamata (2001: 82–5) describes how *bukatsu* are often marked by rivalry and in-group pressure, especially when dictatorial relationships between the older and the younger pupils (and not between teachers and pupils) dominate. According to Kamata, older pupils not infrequently put ruthless pressure on younger pupils, for instance, with the aim of pushing the group for which they feel responsible to some victory in sports. Such pressure on weaker pupils may sometimes lead to extreme responses such as suicide, even in calm rural schools.

10 Answers marked with an asterisk * were given by males.

11 This might partly be explained by teachers encouraging pupils to reflect on this subject, and also to directly talk to grandparents about it.

12 Discussions with some of the informants seemed also to suggest that their scope of experience and knowledge of developments in the large cities of Japan was very limited. Moreover, the visions they had of *shūshoku* [finding career-track employment] were based on the expectation that the major decisions affecting their future lives would be made by the company that employs them, and in no way by themselves. Their "naive" perspective of life could therefore be attributed partly to reluctance to making concrete plans for their future, as these would in any case be decided by others, by the company, and by the elder generation that is already part of the corporate hierarchy.

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