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[See table of contents](#)

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Article abstract

This paper looks at the meanings, values, and idioms associated with work for members of Japanese permanent employment jobs in a sector of society where this has not previously been well explored - large-retailing organizations. It discusses the boundary markers that distinguish members from outsiders and marginals, and explains the ambiguous identities of part-timers and "helper clerks." The initial year in a Japanese permanent employment job is presented as an intense training period and also a liminal period involving the creation of new social persona and their aggregation into corporate work communities. The paper shows how new department store employees are socialized through training programs, company retreats, and other practices, then discusses the ongoing channeling of employee identities into structured networks of *senpai-khai* (senior-junior) and entry-year cohort relationships. It also discusses cases of "individualists" who do not fit easily into the company as community ideology. Based on research conducted from the mid-1980s to early 1990s, the paper provides a comparative update to earlier ethnographies of Japanese work in the permanent employment System.

Creating Connected Identities Among Japanese Company Employees: Learning to be Members of Department Store Work Communities¹

Millie Creighton *

This paper looks at the meanings, values, and idioms associated with work for members of Japanese permanent employment jobs in a sector of society where this has not previously been well explored – large-retailing organizations. It discusses the boundary markers that distinguish members from outsiders and marginals, and explains the ambiguous identities of part-timers and “helper clerks.” The initial year in a Japanese permanent employment job is presented as an intense training period and also a liminal period involving the creation of new social persona and their aggregation into corporate work communities. The paper shows how new department store employees are socialized through training programs, company retreats, and other practices, then discusses the on-going channeling of employee identities into structured networks of *senpai-khai* (senior-junior) and entry-year cohort relationships. It also discusses cases of “individualists” who do not fit easily into the company as community ideology. Based on research conducted from the mid-1980s to early 1990s, the paper provides a comparative update to earlier ethnographies of Japanese work in the permanent employment system.

Cet article examine les significations, valeurs et idiomes associés au travail par les employés des compagnies japonaises, dans un secteur social peu étudié jusqu'à maintenant: celui des grandes entreprises de vente au détail. On étudie les marqueurs qui distinguent les "membres" des étrangers et des marginaux, et on explique l'ambiguïté identitaire des employés à temps-partiel et temporaires. La première année de

*travail permanent dans une compagnie japonaise est pour tout employé, une période intense de formation, qui se vit comme une période liminale au cours de laquelle de nouvelles "persona" sociales sont créées et intégrées dans la communauté de travail. Cet article montre comment les nouveaux employés de grands magasins s'intègrent à la compagnie par le biais de programmes de formation, de 'retraites' organisées par la compagnie et par d'autres pratiques. Il montre ensuite comment l'insertion dans les réseaux structurés de *senpai-khai* (senior-junior) et les relations entre employés qui ont pris du service ensemble, moulent l'identité de l'employé. L'article présente également les cas d'"individualistes" qui n'acceptent pas l'idée de la compagnie comme communauté. Basé sur une recherche en entreprise effectuée entre le milieu des années 80 et le début des années 90, cette analyse offre une mise-à-jour des travaux ethnographiques antérieurs touchant au système d'emploi permanent japonais.*

Both social anthropology and industrial sociology share a well-established ethnographic tradition that attempts to link ideas of work, employment, and community through studies of socialization into work (Joyce, 1987: 3). The anthropology of work asserts that there is much more to work than making a living, or getting a job done. Wallman explains the anthropological approach to work in the following way.

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Work is then not only “about” the production of material goods, money transactions and the need to grow food and to cook the family dinner. It must equally be “about” the ownership and circulation of information, the playing of roles, the symbolic affirmation of personal significance and group identity – and the relation of each of these to the other (Wallman, 1979: 7).

Work has no intrinsic meaning, but rather, as Miller (1981: 3) explains, “human beings create the meaning associated with work as they construct reality.” The goals, values, ideals, and identities associated with work are created and re-created in the on-going processes of social life such that “work is not just a way of making a living but a means by which human beings give personal and symbolic meaning to their lives” (Miller, 1981: 288). In order to better understand how work is imbued with symbolic meaning for Japanese company employees who are members of the full-time permanent employment track, I compare the established model of Japanese corporate, or *sarariman* (salaryman) culture (which developed in the post World War II period, and was well documented in the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s) with the work communities of department stores I researched during the 1980s and 1990s.

There is a long-established model depicting the nature of Japanese corporate communities for members of the permanent employment system in major Japanese companies. This model embraces three commonly accepted pillars of Japanese industrial organization, the lifetime employment system (*shshin koy seido*), promotions linked to seniority (*nenk joretsu*), and enterprise unionism. With this context of industrial organization there is emphasis on the mutual commitment of company and employee to maintaining the employment relationship throughout the working lifetime of the individual.

Based on this model, features of the industrial organization of large Japanese companies are thought to include: a heavy emphasis on commitment and loyalty to the corporate community; “permanent” or “lifetime” employment (for designated members of the company); a seniority based promotion system that focuses competition within each year’s entering cohort; a lack of interfirm mobility and a corresponding emphasis on internal labour markets; a finely graded hierarchical framework based on year of entry and experiences within the firm; and the importance of relationship

networks (among *senpai-khai*, or seniors-juniors, and among entering year cohorts) for career advancement.

This model of Japanese corporate communities was established through such works as Nakane’s treatise on Japan as a “Vertical Society” (1970) and ethnographies of Japanese work organizations by anthropologists and sociologists dealing with large Japanese corporations or their employees. These include Abegglen’s account of the Japanese company (1958), Vogel’s fieldwork among middle-class salarymen of Mamachi (1963), Cole’s depiction of blue-collar workers (1971), Dore’s comparison of Japanese and British factories (1973), Clark’s account of the Japanese company Marumaru (1973), and Rohlen’s ethnography of white-collar organization at a Japanese bank (1974).

A major question in present studies of Japanese work activity is whether the model of corporate community presented by these ethnographies is still valid. There is a great deal of discussion about recent changes in Japanese society, and questions about how these affect the organization of work activities. Japanese are now much more affluent, and more willing to demand leisure time. Some researchers suggest that Japanese today and in the future will no longer totally commit themselves to work organizations. There are also many questions about the changing values of Japanese youth, and whether they will continue in the type of organizational work patterns of their parents. The term *shinjinrui* – or “the new-breed” – has been coined to describe many of Japan’s youth who are considered more individualistically oriented, less likely to remain loyal to one company, less motivated by concerns for security, and more interested in travel, friends, and fun. There are doubts about whether the earlier models of Japanese company operations can remain salient once the *shinjinrui* take over Japanese society. Another major focus is the changing or potentially changing work patterns of women and whether new laws such as the Equal Employment Opportunity Law (passed in 1985, put into effect in 1986) will transform this model of Japanese company operations.

In recent years, ethnographies of Japanese work places have switched focus from the permanent employment track of major companies to other types of workers, previously largely ignored, such as contract workers, part-timers, and women.

Examples of this trend include Kondo's (1990) account of work for women and others marginalized from the corporate community in Japanese sweet shops, and Roberts' (1994) portrayal of blue-collar women who stay employed to bring home a paycheck, not because they have been socialized into a strong sense of work identity. Roberson (1995) presents the transition to employment, and adult social status, for the majority of Japanese men who are in working-class job trajectories, not the more elite routes of permanent employees in large companies. Shimada (1994) documents another recent focus on the influx of "guest workers" – labourers from other countries who stay for short periods – often filling jobs Japanese consider undesirable.

My purpose in this article is to re-focus on the permanent employment track of large companies by comparing Japanese corporate communities presented in existing ethnographies of large organizations, to my own findings in fieldwork conducted in the Japanese retailing industry. In presenting this case study of members of the permanent employment track of Japanese department stores, I neither intend to extol the merits of the permanent employment system, nor suggest that this is the dominant form of employment for most Japanese. The *sarariman* culture of permanent employees in large firms was often wrongly accepted as the average lifestyle of contemporary Japanese because of the numerous case studies on this form of organization. In actuality this has been an elite track, obtainable for a segment of Japanese workers; only about one-fourth of those in the Japanese labour force have corporate membership in permanent employment positions. Structural barriers created by the existence of this system also raise problems of employment equity for men in set-term contracts, women, and minorities in Japan.

There are two main contributions to be gained from the ethnographic presentation of the meanings surrounding work for permanent employees of large Japanese department stores. First, the data suggest that the idioms of "permanent employment" found in other sectors of Japan are also effective in an arena of Japanese employment, department stores, where they have not been previously well-investigated. Extending research on permanent employment in Japan to another arena provides further insights into how the meanings, moods, and motivations for behav-

our involved in large industrial organizations as they might exist anywhere, become entwined with local idioms of Japanese culture. Second, whereas many of the studies upon which the model of Japanese corporate culture in major companies is based were conducted from the 1950s to the early 1970s, my research on department stores was conducted from 1985 to 1987, with follow up visits in 1991 and 1992. This research can help shed light on whether the Japanese corporate model has changed drastically, or how pervasive and potentially long-lasting it might be.

The bulk of the data presented here was gathered during a two-year anthropological study of Japanese department stores, conducted predominantly in the Tokyo area, utilizing methods of participant observation. During this time I interviewed department store personnel directors, trainers, managers, and employees who had recently completed training sessions (either initial training or training for advancement to a higher level of employment). Employees who had been with their stores for years also discussed their recollections of their early training period with me. I observed many of the employees interviewed during their work activities. I also interviewed some previous members of the permanent employment track of department stores or their subsidiary companies who had dropped out of membership to seek other types of jobs. In most cases I heard about and was introduced to these people by current employees who had previously been their co-workers. I also spent a brief period of time working for a large department store in Tokyo. As a special category of employee I did not undergo socialization training similar to that of regular full-time employees, but was able to engage in many informal discussions with my co-workers about their experiences both during their initial training period and later in their employment.

Socialization into the collective meanings of an occupational community involves the interrelated construction of values, identities, and relationships. In order to explore these interrelated constructions, I utilize three explanatory concepts which emerged as significant in my research, and which are frequently mentioned in some form in other Japanese work ethnographies, Belonging, Initiation, and Relationships within the Community. The section on belonging explores the asserted values of membership and the means by which the boundaries of membership are defined.

The following section on initiation deals with the experiences of new members as they are socialized into their new identities as company members. The section on relationships within the community looks at how, once initiated, identities of members are continually re-created within a relational context involving other members of the collective.

1. BELONGING TO THE CORPORATE COMMUNITY

An occupational community anywhere implies that members invest a great deal of their identities in their work and the relationships surrounding work activity. In Western countries Salaman (1974) defines members of occupational communities as developing a self-image based on their job or occupational role (policeman, doctor, etc.). Members of Japanese corporate communities do not identify as much with the activity they perform. Instead, there is an emphasis on the connected identities of members and a self-image based on belonging to, or merging one's identity with, the organization in which work takes place, no matter what one's job task within that organization is (see Hayashi, 1988: 67-81). The value of work for those in Japanese corporate communities is different from the conventional Western ideal of individual development, creative expression and self-actualization through work. Rather, the value of work is more consistent with that described by Miller for the Kibbutz in which the ideal of work involvement "is to achieve personal growth and fulfillment by subordinating one's individual interests to those of the community" (Miller, 1981: 310).

An occupational community also implies the existence of conceptual boundaries, such that those within these boundaries (members of the work community) view their identities as markedly different from, or even created in opposition to, outsiders. Those within the boundaries of a work community inhabit "the same normative and associative world" (Salaman, 1974: 25-26). They may or may not live together spatially,

but, they live together socially and culturally. They inhabit the same world of meaning and identity; share a language, a vocabulary of symbols, knowledge of the work world, a world of taken-for-granted and shared references, mythic figures, incidents, jokes – in short a culture (Salaman, 1986: 75).

I will explore this world of meaning and identity for members of Japanese company communities through the perpetuation of the "company as family" (*ie*) ideology, the construction of inside and outside boundaries of community membership, markers of identity, expectations for personal development within the community, and the sharing of exclusive language.

1.1 The Company as "Ie"

Many accounts claim that Japanese companies progressed and prospered in part because they were able to define themselves in ways consistent with dominant cultural ideology given to the *ie* and *iemoto* systems. The company community is defined as an *ie* (household/lineage) where all members are expected to forego personal, selfish, or individualistic goals in order to work for the preservation and enhancement of their *ie*. This, however, is not seen as totally self-sacrificing because individuals are believed to ultimately prosper this way by sharing in the prosperity and reputation of the *ie*. Employees who are members of the corporate community refer to the company as an *ie*, speak of their own company as *uchi* (my house) and someone else's as *otaku* (your house).

I did find that this conceptualization and these terms were still commonly used by department store employees in the 1980s. I also found clear indications that people still believe the status of the organization reflects on the employees. For example, "elevator hostesses" at Kinokuniya, a large bookstore in the Shinjuku district of Tokyo, expressed keen envy of the higher status Isetan Department Store elevator corps. The higher status organizations also project a stance of "protecting" members as part of their social responsibility. A Kinokuniya manager admitted in a Tokyo Journal interview that company policy required their elevator operators to put up with things such as episodes of sexual harassment or molestation from customers and stated that police were never notified in such cases. Such a stance could not be maintained by Isetan Department Store, located in the same district, because the concept of community membership requires a greater stance of caring for its members.

Conceptualization of the company as *ie* (household) goes beyond the use of terms for "my home" and "your house." The company is analogous to an *ie* because it transcends the lifetime of

individual members. In a well publicized suicide case, an employee of a large firm who was in a responsible position during a major crisis in his division, took his life leaving a suicide note apologizing for his failure and for any shame his suicide might bring to the company. This note poignantly enunciated the view that as individuals we have just a fleeting existence but “the company is eternal.” This statement echoes the values through which the *ie* (household) system in Japan projects ultimate meaning in life. The existential limitations of one’s own individual life are overcome through identification with and surrendering of self to a collective that transcends generations and hence offers a greater sense of long-lasting value and purpose.

During my research, informants not only referred to their company as *ie*, and *uchi*, they utilized metaphors of the *ie* in constructing their sense of identification or loyalty to the company. Although this was predominately the case for men, it also occurred among women who were long-term members of the permanent employment track. For example, a female manager at Mitsukoshi Department Store discussed the company as family (*kaisha wa kazoku*) and the history of Mitsukoshi as a store in the terms of a “family history” (*ie no rekishi*). She spoke of employees’ obligations to continue the household line, but also to initiate change and innovation.

If there are no changes maybe the history will end here. In every era there must be innovation. This building was a big innovation from a previous era. Japanese department stores never had a magnificent building like this. It was a big innovation then. We owe everything to those who preceded us. Our employees are constantly taught, “let’s think about this.”

She spoke of the responsibility of “this generation” of employees to the Mitsukoshi house, discussing this responsibility in terms of what current employees owed their corporate “ancestors,” referring to former Mitsukoshi employees, who fought and struggled to make the Mitsukoshi house a great one. She asserted that current employees were obligated to these family forerunners to struggle and work hard to maintain Mitsukoshi’s greatness for the benefit of future generations of employees.

1.2 Demarkation of “*Uchi*” and “*Soto*”

Concepts of inside (*uchi*) and outside (*soto*), are a particularly important means of organizing behaviour and social relationships in Japanese society (see Bachnik and Quinn, 1994). The word *uchi* in Japanese refers either to a home/house, when written with the same ideograph used for *ie*, or, when written with a different character, means inside. The designation of one’s company as “*uchi*” defines it both as the “home” and the “inside group” to which an employee belongs. As tends to be the case for early socialization into the family, socialization into the Japanese corporate community reinforces the widespread cultural demarkation between *uchi* (inside) and *soto* (outside). This is enhanced by the expectation that employees will remain with a particular firm, their *uchi*, for their career lifetime. From early training, retailing companies seek to instill the importance of maintaining “face” for the *uchi* in the eyes of the outside, or *soto*, world. Employees must practice polite behaviours for customers who are conceptualized as outside guests visiting the household. Employees are also taught that they always represent the company *uchi* and are responsible for its reputation in the eyes of the *soto* world, even during non-work hours. For example, Mitsukoshi has extensive regulations regarding what employees may and may not do, particularly on subways, coming to and from work. According to company rules they may not slouch, scratch their heads, doze off, or compete for seats on crowded commuter trains, etc. Employees are taught that people will recognize their uniforms even in public and therefore they must take great care with their behaviour so they do not bring shame to the Mitsukoshi house.

Concepts of *uchi* and *soto* define boundaries between members of department store company communities and outsiders such as customers or employee members of other stores. These concepts are also pertinent to defining boundaries of membership among employees working in the same department store. All people working in a particular department store are not necessarily members of its occupational community. Full-time members of the permanent employment track are *shain*, company members; they are *uchi*. Part-timers and temporary workers are not considered members of the community, even though they work in the store, and even though they may be with the same store for decades or their entire working lives. They work within the spatial boundaries of the

inside, but conceptually are not considered inside; they are defined as *soto*. Japanese department stores also have a large number of another category of such "inside outsiders" working the sales floors. These are called *tetsudai tenin*, or "helper clerks." They wear the department store's uniform while at the store but they are not employees of the department store at all. They are employees of manufacturers and wholesalers sent to work at the stores. Their employers believe their presence in the stores will increase their own companies' sales because they have extensive knowledge about their own companies' product which the department store clerks cannot be expected to have because of the wider range of goods with which they deal. Since they wear the same uniform as the department store employees, customers to the store usually cannot differentiate between the two types of clerks, but if a customer asks for assistance or advice, *tetsudai tenin* will try to sway the customer towards purchase of their own companies' products.

Part-timers, seasonal or temporary employees, and *tetsudai tenin* ("helper clerks"), represent a case of marginality in the Japanese work place. They are inside, in the sense that they work within the spatial boundaries of the store, interact with store customers, make sales and ring up purchases. In terms of the work community, however, they are conceptualized as *soto*, outsiders, because they are not *shain*, members of the company. *Tetsudai tenin* even carry the understood identity of belonging to an outside house, since they are members of another company. These three categories of employees represent what Douglas (1966) has called "structural dirt." In a society and setting which emphasizes distinctions between "inside" and "outside," they straddle and confuse the boundaries between these two concepts. They are problematic because they violate the important categorical boundaries upon which meaning is based.

How *uchi* and *soto* boundary constructions affect work activity is interestingly reflected in store responses to shoplifting. Although shoplifting is not as common in Japan as in North America, in recent years Japanese department stores have become increasingly concerned about shoplifting. It is difficult for these Japanese department stores to adopt measures commonly used in North America such as surveillance cameras, two-way mirrors allowing observation of fitting rooms,

or computerized tags on items to monitor shoplifting because of the sales metaphor of customers as guests visiting the household. Even the word used for customer in Japanese is the same as for a guest to one's home, *okyakusan*. Customers are *soto*, but like guests to the household, they must be accorded respect and good treatment. Therefore, stores do not treat customers as shoplifting suspects even though they lose some money through customer thefts. Stores can, however, require that employees reveal contents of pockets, purses, bags, etc. before leaving work for the day. Stores often do this, but only with part-timers, temporary workers or *tetsudai tenin*. The assertion of occupational community will not allow the contemplation that *shain* might also steal from the store to which it is expected their loyalties lie.

Department stores are most concerned with one type of shoplifting which they believe to be on the increase. This is cooperative shoplifting involving employees and their friends. It is believed that these accomplice/friends enter the store and have items wrapped and bagged by the store clerks. This is significant because purchases at department stores in Japan, are all elaborately wrapped in pleasing wrappings, and placed in attractive bags with the store logo and designs known to represent that store. If clerks assist shoplifters by wrapping and bagging items, it makes theft easier because removal of the items from the store is less likely to be noticed. Store directors were convinced this type of shoplifting was occurring and believed it was particularly difficult to spot or to stop. In fact, they indicated it was so difficult to spot that they had not yet caught anyone doing it. What I found most interesting was that this suggested form of shoplifting was always attributed to part-time, temporary, contract, or "helper" employees. No one ever suggested, or seemed to imagine, the possibility that *shain* could be involved in such activity even though it was admitted that no one really knew who was involved, or if indeed such activities were truly occurring.

1.3 Markers of Company Identity

Membership in a Japanese corporate community is attested to by identity markers. These include company insignia which *shain* tend to wear on their lapel pins and have printed on business cards. Such items are not unique to Japanese companies, but just as when they occur elsewhere, they inscribe a sense of individual identity invested

with the work organization. Japanese companies often go much farther than this in terms of identity markers. Vogel (1963), Dore (1973), and Rohlen (1974) discuss such things as company mottos, company songs, and company catechism – often the president’s teachings or the founder’s philosophy – taught to new recruits. I found that modern Japanese department stores still attempt to teach an ideology of work involving commitment and obligation to the social realm. Most did indeed have a company song, and learning that song was a part of initial socialization into the company. Employees talked about having to learn these songs and also having to remember them. The songs are sung on special store occasions for employees and it was noted by those who had undergone managerial training for any level that the company song was an important aspect of re-socialization at each level of management training. Some lower-ranking employees recalled learning these songs but could not remember the words. Managers all seemed to be familiar with the songs and knew the lyrics. Perhaps this is because employees must re-learn the songs during training for each management level. The following is my translation of two verses of the Isetan company song.

Amidst this ever thriving megatropolis Tokyo, our brilliantly coloured Isetan building stands up breathtakingly, here in Shinjuku, the future centre of Tokyo. Our goal is to contribute to the nation’s prosperity through our business. The Isetan logo sits proudly on our chests.

The sky is a clear-cut blue, our minds are always filled with hopes and ambitions. Come gather all our colleagues, though we are young in this business we have high aims towards profound glory. Make our service the best of all. Our company policy centres on the credibility which is of utmost importance and our utmost priority. The mark of Isetan stands out, representing our pride and glory.

This idealistic song, filled with hopeful and positive imagery, reiterates philosophical themes of inside belonging to Isetan, accountability to the social realm (as embodied by the nation) realized through one’s work efforts, duties to colleagues (members of the company community), and responsibilities to other elements of the local business neighborhood (the Shinjuku district).

1.4 Continuing Education for the Company Community

As will be described later, education is an important part of socialization into the corporate community. Although initial education is emphasized most, Japanese companies devote extensive resources to training and re-education as part of their members’ career development. In one sense this is seen as something the company offers, or gives, its members. However such educational development is, of course, geared toward meeting the needs of the community as a collective. Department stores have an analog for the silver and diamond lapel pins with which the bank Uedagin described by Rohlen (1974) honours its employees of particular merit in a given year. For many department stores this comes in the form of special award certificates recognizing valiant efforts. According to one manager, “when employees use their own time and initiative to learn something we provide them with a certificate, but not for training they receive on company time.” There, as at most department stores, employees work five days a week and have two days off. (This was considered special in the mid-1980s when most Japanese firms still had a six day work week including a shortened work day on Saturday.) The company’s policy is that having two days means that one day is for rest and one day for education.

To provide for this educational day, the store gives classes for ongoing development. Department stores have a wide assortment of continuing education classes. Some of the more popular class offerings at this store include: “How to Sell the Best-Seller”; “How to Get the Customer”; “Area Presentations”; “Math”; “The Store Plan”; and “Advanced Register Operation.”

1.5 The Local “Dialect”

In addition to designated identity markers such as songs, logos, and insignia, an occupational community is bonded by other shared associations that develop in the process of ongoing social life. Common among these is the development of a shared language, dialect or use of terminology specific to the limits of the community involved. Japanese corporate communities, as exemplified by department stores, develop such a shared language. According to employees of numerous department store companies, each department store has its own language code. Department store

people believe they can recognize when clerks at other stores are speaking in code, although they admit to not knowing what is being said. This shared language also reaffirms the boundaries between those who belong to the store as inside members (*shain*), and outsiders who visit the stores as customer/guests. There are for example communications to or about staff that must be made while customers are present. For example, if a manager asks for a specific employee who happens to be in the rest room, one must never mention that this person went to use the toilet if customers are in the area. So each department store work community develops code words for such situations. At one department store the code word to cover this situation says the person is *jinkyū*. A combination of "person" and "vacation," this word suggesting a "personal vacation" is not part of the Japanese language. However, it follows common linguistic rules, and common patterns of Japanese language formation. According to department store employees, most Japanese customers would not ever notice that a word not really part of the Japanese vocabulary had been slipped into the exchange of conversation. At the same time, such words are a form of local knowledge whose meaning is shared only among those who are part of the work group.

2. LIMINALITY AND INITIATION RITES

With this emphasis on belonging to the corporate community, new recruits are neophytes, and the initial training period is a period of liminality. Describing the role of initiation rites into occupational communities in general, Salaman explains,

These initiations demonstrate to the recruit that s/he has achieved entry, and by virtue of the pain involved in gaining entry, they make membership itself that much more significant and valued (1986: 75).

In large Japanese companies new full-time employees are no longer part of their former groups and operating world, but they are still a collection of separated individuals with no strong ties to each other, or to the work community. Early training is much more than learning new job skills; it involves a process of initiation into the community that builds connected social identities among the new recruits. The initiation rituals in Japanese firms are often very difficult and demanding. The

hardships new recruits face have been planned by their trainers and seniors, because one of the values of the work community they have internalized is the conviction that enduring and overcoming such hardships creates strong bonds among new recruits and teaches them the value of their hard-earned membership in the company community.

The greater emphasis on the initiation phase in Japanese companies is reflected in the fact that, whereas many Western companies employ individuals at different ages and at different points in their career cycle, individuals can normally only be admitted to the "regular" or "permanent employment" track of a large Japanese firm upon graduation from school: university, junior college, or high school (see Dore, 1973: 31-32). This establishes the importance of receiving new members early in life and in their career paths before they have had a chance to develop a strong sense of self as an adult in other arenas or with other organizations. Given Japan's permanent-employment system, the fact that one may only enter this track in a certain age range, and that one usually may enter it only once, the Japanese system is one that places an incredible emphasis on internal labour markets (Koike, 1983, Shimada, 1983) where upgrading or downgrading occurs within a specific firm and prospects of mobility between firms are extremely limited (Cole, 1979: 35; Vogel, 1963: 261; Clark, 1973: 140-142; OECD, 1973). It is in reference to new recruits in this regular or permanent employment track that companies place extreme emphasis on their involvement in the initial activities and programs of their first employment year.

The Japanese have two proverbs which reveal the cultural emphasis placed on beginning anything appropriately. One of these, "*hajime yokereba, subete yoshi*," relays the wisdom that "If the beginning is good, everything else will be fine." The other, "*nani goto mo hajime ga kanjin*," even more strongly asserts that "In all things, the beginning is imperative."

When it comes to the initial period of employment as a company member there is more evidence than proverbial wisdom to support the assertion that the beginning is imperative. A case involving the JUSCO Co. and a newly accepted member of its permanent-employment track reveals the emphasis large Japanese corporations still place on full participation of new recruits in the collective activities designed to mark the beginning of their employment. In 1986, a female university graduate

had been promised employment as a regular company member by the large retailing chain, JUSCO Co. As is the custom in Japan, she was to begin her employment on April 1. This young woman had been chosen to represent her university department at that year's graduation ceremonies, a significant honour in the Japanese context. She was later informed that JUSCO would hold an initiation ceremony for new recruits on March 25 – the same day she was scheduled to take part in the graduation ceremonies. Although this date was prior to the actual legal commencement of her employment, when she informed the company that she could not be present for the initiation ceremony, the company revoked their employment agreement with her. The incident reveals the stance a large Japanese corporation takes toward a new recruit who misses one day of the initiating activities that mark the initial employment period, and who from the beginning does not establish his or her foremost loyalty to the company above all others, one of the social norms of a Japanese company community.

In addition to the three generally accepted pillars of the Japanese employment system (lifetime employment, promotions linked to seniority, and enterprise unionism), a publication of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development concluded that a fourth, and even more important element of the Japanese industrial relations system, what it called the "fourth pillar," was comprised of "the social norms within the enterprise" (discussed in Shimada, 1983: 4; Brinton, 1988: 324). Three of these "social norms" are the emphases placed on loyalty to the firm, on identification with the work group and entering cohort group, and on the appropriate socialization into the corporate community. Companies link all of these to the initial months of employment. According to the Japanese anthropologist Nakane:

The odd definition of a change of employment in Japan was in terms of "soiling one's *curriculum vitae*," and no doubt this native moral orientation was closely related to the fact that the individual's group identification is formed during the fairly early stages of his career, and that the individual's loyalty towards a group (always one particular group to which an individual gives his primary concern) also develops early (Nakane, 1970: 107, 108).

The crucial importance placed on involvement in the collective initiation period, involves a

somewhat different interpretation of employer/employee relationships in Japan than in the West. Ouchi explains,

Most Western organizations practice an attitude of "partial inclusion", an understanding between employee and employer that the connection between them involves only those activities directly connected with the completion of a specific job. ... The Japanese organization, by contrast, forms inclusive relationships. (Ouchi, 1981: 52).

Combined with the emphasis on internal labour markets, this attitude of inclusion means that employees' fates are also tied to their appropriate socialization into the corporate community (Whittaker, 1990: 322).

The emphasis that Japanese companies place on the collective socialization of new recruits in the initial months of employment have been discussed by numerous industrial relations experts and Japan area specialists. In *Kaisha* [Company], his 1985 analysis of Japanese corporate operations, Abegglen claims that,

The leaders of the *kaisha* can speak, and do, of entry into the company as being born again into another family. Furthermore, rather like the family, there is a real socialization process that takes place following entry into the Japanese company (Abegglen, 1985: 200).

Kamata, in his treatise on Japanese work styles and organization, *Nihonjin no shigoto* [Japanese people's work], also discusses the emphasis placed on the initial months of training in terms of socializing new recruits to be true *shain*, or company members (Kamata, 1986: 322, 548). In his anthropological account of the Japanese banking system, Rohlen makes it quite clear that companies place more emphasis on the introductory training and socialization sessions for new recruits than on any subsequent education or training enhancement employees receive. Contrasting these two types of programs, Rohlen points out that those directed at some later point in the career path,

...seem rather insignificant compared to the much larger and infinitely more involved training new members receive. This program, constituting, in effect, an elaborate socialization attempt, is far and away the most important educational effort in Uedagin (Rohlen, 1974: 193).

Dore, in an extensive sociological comparison of British and Japanese firms, discusses both the differences in attitude towards this initial period, and the imperative importance given to it by Japanese firms. These are exemplified in the following passage, in which the first firm mentioned is the British firm English Electric which is then contrasted with the Japanese company Hitachi.

The English Electric production engineering course devoted the first three or four days to lectures on the structure and history of the firm. The Bradford graduate trainees missed this by being sent for the alternative course at Colchester, though the Bradford personnel manager did give them lectures on the structure of the firm on their return. That induction of this kind should be treated in such an offhand fashion would be unthinkable in Hitachi for it is considered the most important of the two-month course. Nor is the course concerned merely with the cognitive process of getting to know one's way around the firm, *but more particularly with the related process of being socialized into the Hitachi community* (Dore, 1973: 50, my emphasis).

For men in particular, entrance into full-time adult employment is an important event in Japanese society because this is the point at which they are considered *shakaijin*, or "adult members of society" (Fields, 1983: 215-130). Roberson's (1995) recent research on Japanese men in working-class employment trajectories of small to middle-size companies confirms that transition into full-time employment is still the point at which Japanese men are considered *shakaijin* in the 1990s. Large Japanese companies, stress the collective initiation period for members of the full-time permanent employment track because this is the time when men in white-collar organizational job trajectories are socialized into their adult roles according to the concepts of that company's particular corporate philosophy. According to Woronoff,

It is not enough to find people who "fit" the company image. Once within, they must become a different kind of person. This process begins with the initiation ceremony and carries over to a bit of training that places more emphasis than elsewhere on the spiritual side (Woronoff, 1983: 38).

This concurs with the findings of my own research in the Japanese Department Store industry. Training and personnel directors stress the impact of the initial training period in terms of

reforming the attitudes and behaviour of their new recruits as they enter their adult *shakaijin* roles. The personnel director for a large department store explains that the goal of the first week of the initial training program,

is not to give or add new knowledge but to change their thinking from a student oriented style to a professional or *shakaijin* style. They must develop a "salaryman way of thinking" now. We want them to be really mature people. Students are allowed to be very free. They don't have to keep appointments or be very disciplined. We don't try to teach new recruits difficult things but the basic rules of society, they must learn to greet each other whenever they meet someone. Also we want them to learn that when they get paid they have an obligation to the company and to society.

It is to be expected that personnel directors still espouse these beliefs; a bigger question is whether new employees still relate to such ideas. Do they still believe that entering a company marks the establishment of their adult social being? Many of the statements of young employees I spoke with clearly echoed these sentiments. A young woman in her early twenties who had worked at her store as a part-timer while a university student discussed the transition she felt when she joined the company upon graduation and passed through the initiation period.

There is a big difference between just being a part-timer and a full-time permanent employee. When you're a part-timer you're just there to sell things. But being a *shain* means a whole lot more. It's a totally different social role, now you have lots of obligations to the company and to society. You are now wrapped up in a whole series of human relationships and directly related to the retailing industry. I felt those changes very much.

The types of activities new recruits are expected to undergo in their first months of employment, and which comprise their socialization into their firms, have been thoroughly documented by Rohlen (1974). He describes this period as involving collective morning exercises in front of the training institute, discipline training in *zazen*, physical labour in tangerine orchards, a 25-mile marathon run, and an assignment in which new recruits were required to enter a strange town and not allowed to return until they had gone door

to door begging strangers for work they could do without receiving payment and completed these odd jobs without ever being allowed to explain their purposes. This last assignment was seen by the company as a means of teaching new recruits the importance of work. After having to first gain their work assignments by begging for work from strangers, the company believed they should thereafter understand why they should be grateful for work assignments they were "given" rather than resenting these or complaining about them. Many companies require new recruits to live in group camps (Woronoff, 1983: 38; McMillan, 1985: 134), or Zen temples (McMillan, 1985: 189), or to train together with the national Self-Defense Forces (Woronoff, 1983: 38; McMillan, 1985: 189). According to Rohlen, socialization into the company community emphasizes, "*seishin kyiku*," "spiritual education," involving "any and all processes by which individuals develop stronger character and a more complete respect for social requirements" (Rohlen, 1974: 194).

Implicit in the corporate stance toward initiation training is the belief that new recruits must encounter and overcome certain experiences together, usually including feats of physical endurance, in order to prove their loyalty to their new company, and in order for the company to accept them as fully incorporated members. Japanese newspapers commonly carry news reports of the collective endurance tests new Japanese company employees are required to endure each April. For example, an Asahi Evening News report in 1986 featured a large photo of 44 young new male recruit trainees of Seibu forced to stand near-naked in the near-freezing waters of Kani, an area of Gifu prefecture where the frigid water created by melting snow from the mountain tops flows into these rivers in the spring (*Asahi Yukanshi* [Asahi Evening News] April 7, 1986). The collective endurance of such a physical hardship builds bonds among those who pass through the trial together, as well as serving as a test of their worthiness for membership in the work community.

Educational emphasis during initial training was not placed on developing individual abilities but on making new recruits more like each other. Another primary concern was developing an attitude and ability to conduct work efforts in small groups. The personnel director at one major department store discussed the goals of the first

week of training, and its effects on transforming recruits from carefree students into serious *shain*.

We are not trying to develop their individualistic characteristics, abilities or personalities but shape them all into one mold. ...[it's] very interesting, their faces on the first day and when they leave after six days are very different...[almost to himself, he repeats the last sentiment, saying, "*hont ni kawarimasu ne!*"]

Initiates spend a great deal of time learning appropriate greetings, cleaning together and participating in group sports activities to train their bodies for the appropriate behaviours of company members, and to build collective identities. At this department store, according to the same personnel director quoted above,

The emphasis of the training program is on various behaviours like greetings, how to bend and bow, how to receive customers. Two days are spent learning actual actions, there are other classes for one day. For the rest of the time they play baseball and other games together to create a "team spirit."

A "team spirit" is encouraged in ways that involve an integration of developing individual abilities along with collective efforts. Despite the emphasis on connected identities employees are motivated to act and aspire toward achievement individually, but this individual achievement is then re-directed to group goals. At one department store, during the first months of training new recruits are divided into eight teams. Every day, the first thing each morning, they are given a test on the previous day's material. Each person takes the test individually, but they do not receive their individual score. Instead the scores of the eight team members are averaged, and each person receives the average score of the group. In this way even though people are expected to study and perform individually, their records are based on overall group performance. Competition is thus channeled away from individualistic forms, and all employees learn that their group as a whole is competing against others. This also increases the pressure to do well because of the weight of obligation to other group members. As indicated by the personnel director, "each one has to study very hard for the rest of the team." There are very real consequences in this competition since members of the highest scoring group will receive first choice of division placement within the company after the initial training period.

A few more restraints are placed on these initial evaluations. During this initial training period the daily schedule is rigidly determined. Everyone wakes up together at the same time, eats together, attends classes together. Wake-up time is fixed at 6: 30 A.M. and the entire daily schedule until 11: 00 P.M. is rigidly determined. The period from 11: 00 P.M. until 6: 30 A.M. is designated as "free-time." "Free time" implies that people may do what they want, but it is quite understood that no one is really expected to, for example, go to sleep yet. No one is allowed to ask any questions during the day, despite the upcoming test the following morning, until it is "free time." During "free time" recruits have a chance to ask questions, and clarify anything from the lessons and lectures that they did not understand. According to the personnel director, it is naturally understood that "both trainers and trainees are up very late." Trainees and trainers alike get about three to four hours of sleep each night. Rohlen (1974: 145) notes that health is a consideration not just in initial hiring but at each promotion level. Given the expectations of late hours, the personnel director of this department store also notes that "the first qualification of trainers is that they have to be physically strong."

Some employees (such as the woman university graduate who had recently made the transition to member status quoted earlier) clearly seem to accept the company indoctrination of their new *shakaijin* roles and group obligations. In an early ethnography of a Japanese village Embree (1939) points out that "[t]he most striking type of misfit is an individualist." There are such "misfits" in the modern corporate community as well. The following are excerpts from an interview I conducted with two female four-year university graduates who were *shain*. One (A) was a licensed pharmacist, and the other (B) a woman who had spent time living in the United States in high school as a foreign exchange student. More children and young people spend time outside of Japan either residing with their families, usually because their fathers are temporarily stationed abroad for work purposes, or pursuing education. When they return to Japan such youth are called *kikokushijo*, "repatriated" or "returnee youth" (see Goodman, 1990) and there are concerns within Japanese society about whether they are sufficiently Japanese or not. These two women expressed their feelings about the group training and testing experience.

study something and the next day we had a big test. They took a group score then ranked the groups. ...they were trying to promote group spirit but I just hated it. ... It would have been much better if they just let everyone get their own score.

B: It's a very typical pattern of Japanese education – we've done it this way since grade school. But that doesn't mean I like it, or that I'm even comfortable with it. I hate it. I studied in the U.S., so maybe that's at fault. [She then explains that every time she states a different opinion people always begin picking on her and saying it is because she lived abroad, but she feels convinced she would feel the same way about things whether she had ever lived in the U. S. or not.]

A: While I never lived in the States and I just hated it.

The feelings of these two young women show that not all employees fully accept the ideology of company community. As younger Japanese grow up more familiar with foreign ways of life and with greater expectations of individualism, this may cause shifts away from existing models of company community and organizational involvement. However, it is noteworthy that although these two women did not share the company ideology, they succumbed to it. In a similar way that young Japanese children who appear to be individualistic and uninterested in group activities are, with gentle persistence, drawn into accepting a collective orientation (see for example Peak, 1989; Tobin et al, 1989) they were led through resistance to accepting and being socialized into the occupational work world of the company. Their irritations at the way things are done cause personal tensions for them, but this is not yet enough to cause the system, or the overriding model of corporate relationships to change.

The attitude of these two women does not necessarily indicate a major change among Japanese youth. A close reading of the earlier ethnographies shows that similar cases are mentioned in them. For example, Rohlen (1974: 87) who conducted his research in the 1960s, described an "individualistic misfit" who could not continue with the collective orientation of the bank's company community, so he dropped out and ran a small drinking establishment. Interestingly, most of his clientele were his former bank associates. In my own research I also interviewed Japanese men

A: It was awful. For example we had to

10-15 years older than the women quoted above, who in their own early years of employment likewise discovered they were “too individualistic,” hated the group socialization, and quit their companies to start independent businesses. For example, a former employee of Seibu and a former employee of Mitsukoshi, who had both been involved in the food and catering divisions of their companies, dropped out of the permanent employment track and together started a small bar. As in the case described by Rohlen, their clientele was predominately made up of former work associates who frequented their bar for another well-known aspect of Japanese work communities called *tsuki-ai*, the after work socializing of company members together at drinking establishments. Although they were happier running their own bar, the men officially expressed a “repentant” attitude about dropping out, saying that persevering in permanent employment membership was the better choice even if they themselves could not cope with the expectations of membership. That such people existed in the studies done in the 1960s, and that people in my study had dropped out while in the 1970s, and some appeared to be on the verge of doing so in the 1980s or 1990s, suggests the possibility that this is not just a new trend reflecting the greater individualism of youth, but rather that such cases have always been around, and that the system is flexible enough to find a place for them to fit in as well.

3. RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

The socialization period discussed above helps create and strengthen connected identities among new recruits. These connected identities are channeled into two types of relationships throughout involvement in the work community. These are relationships based on hierarchical, or vertical, ties, and those based on horizontal ties of greater equality. Most relationships in Japanese company communities are conceptualized vertically as *senpai-khai* (senior-junior) relationships, with the exception of the persisting relationships among members of each year’s entry cohort, which were built during the socialization period. Brinton discusses the linkage between these two, the expected importance of senior-junior relationships and of strong ties among entering cohorts who shared the experiences of initiation.

Many Japanese and Western observers have argued that human relations within the Japanese firm assume no less importance than structural features. ...

A great deal of socialization occurs in the Japanese work organization in interactions the employee has with superiors as well as colleagues. Age grading within firms promotes solidarity among members of an entering cohort and creates a clear age hierarchy within the firm, with older cohorts responsible for the informal socialization and training of younger ones (Brinton, 1988: 324).

3.1 “Senpai-Khai”

Nakane explains the division of an individual’s world into ranked senior-junior relationships in the following way.

A Japanese finds his world clearly divided into three categories, *senpai* (seniors), *khai* (juniors) and *dryo*. *Dryo*, meaning “one’s colleagues,” refers only to those with the same rank, not to all who do the same type of work in the same office or on the same shop floor; even among *dryo*, differences in age, year of entry or of graduation from school or college contribute to a sense of *senpai* and *khai*. These three categories would be subsumed under the single term “colleagues” in other societies (Nakane, 1970: 26).

Rohlen also discusses how *senpai-khai* relationship links become established in the initial training period. According to Rohlen, “The most apparent significance of senior-junior relationships is their contribution to the socialization of new members” (Rohlen, 1974: 129).

Although most of the training during the initial period in department stores is directed at socialization into the work community, there is some training of behaviours and job skills needed in the course of the job. However, it is pertinent that such training is often conducted not by the department store company trainers, but by *senpai* (seniors) in each work division. *Khai* (juniors) learn specifics from their *senpai*, as they are continually re-socialized into a pattern of on-going learning and development that takes place within these vertical relationships. For example, a *shain* of Seibu Department Store remembers his early training as a time spent learning about “the visual appeal of how something is wrapped.” They learned “general” things like how to say “*irasshaimase*” properly

and “everything about *noshi*” (the paper congratulatory messages wrapped around gift packages).² This *shain* explains that after this period of learning basic department store behaviours, greetings, and customary wrappings, “we went to work at our various divisions and learned the specifics of each job from our *senpai*.”

3.2 Entering Cohort Group

Another general characterization of Japanese company communities involves the strong bonding and identification among members of an entering cohort group (members who begin in the same year and go through the initial socialization period together). Since all other work relationships in the company are conceptualized as “vertical,” it is only among members of this group that horizontal relationships can prevail. Just as the earlier work ethnographies make the claim that this cohort identification remains strong and is reinforced for years after the initiation program (see for example Dore, 1973: 50-52), my later research on department stores confirms this expectation for men. The Assistant to the President of a major Tokyo department store discusses this situation in their company the following way.

In general Japanese employers want employees to be very loyal to the company. In most cases it is true that the employees’ loyalty is very strong. There is a big difference from American companies in that we hire new graduates at once, right after they have graduated. We have very few people who have worked other places before or who are hired at different times of the year. The people who are hired together have a strong sense that they are friends or comrades. Members of this group always try to help each other. This feeling is carried over after many years.

For members in their early years of employment, department stores host parties, special events, and provide organized clubs to increase social interactions and continue the strong relations developed among new recruits.³

It is clear that more is involved in this strong identification with age cohorts than simply a warm feeling among comrades. Strong ties between members of this group are mutually beneficial in progress up the career ladder. As people from this group begin to be assigned to different divisions or areas of the company, these relationships provide

important links between divisions while enabling individuals to further the goals of their own divisions, something for which they are eventually rewarded with upward movement through the career grades. As in the case of *senpai-khai* relationships, those individuals who are most successful at nurturing these relationships reap the greatest rewards from the Japanese employment system.

For the company, the strength of entering cohort bonds provides cross-cutting horizontal relationships that transcend division boundaries. This can be an important means of connection between divisions in a system where otherwise information tends to flow up and down vertical lines within each division or sub-division. The connected bonds of entering cohorts also continue to keep all members competitive, while again diverting awareness away from individual competition. Kumon (1982) has described Japanese competition as a *yokonarabi*, “to line up sideways,” type. He suggests that Japanese people are very competitive, but they tend to compete not to stand out or “get ahead” but to keep up with others in their group. By virtue of entry in the same year, members of a cohort group share a sense of equality, but eventually some will be promoted further up the career ladder than others. These differentiations often do not occur until twenty or more years after initial employment, therefore everyone feels they must work very hard not to fall behind the rest in their group.

Both through *senpai-khai* relationships and the maintenance of entering cohort ties, the connected identities of members of the work community are repeatedly re-affirmed. The strength of these connected identities often assures that corporate operations run smoothly and that members strive to their utmost abilities, both for themselves, and from a sense of responsibility to others with whom their identities are strongly intertwined.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Throughout my research I found attributes of corporate community among the department stores I was studying that were identified and discussed in earlier Japanese work ethnographies dealing with other sectors of the economy. Expectations of loyalty to the company community, the importance placed on the socialization period, the development of cohort bonds and *senpai-khai* relationships all proved to be emphasized by

these companies, and still important for employees, particularly for men in the permanent employment system. (Some of these things did diminish with time among female employees, see for example Creighton, 1989, 1990.)

The initial training period in Japanese companies emphasizes socialization into the corporate community, and the creation of new identities for new recruits. It is their interrelated identities as *shakaijin* (adult or “social person”) and *shain* (company member), along with the establishment of connected identities among themselves and with the organization that is emphasized. Rather than specific training for the job, the early socialization period focuses on creating a group spirit, and enduring or overcoming hardships. An analogy can be made between this initial period of company employment and the liminal period of initiation rites into adulthood in many cultures. For example, among the Ndembu, described by Turner (1967), the liminal period leading into adulthood involves the separation of neophytes from their previous social roles, intense collective involvement and shared experiences among neophytes, dangers and hardships which they must overcome in order to be accepted into their adult social identities. In both examples, the liminal period of small-scale societies and the liminal period of company training and socialization, an individual who does not pass through this sequence is unlikely to be accepted as a full member of the community. This passage from one’s previous identity through collective hardships is how connected identities signifying membership in the company community are achieved and imbued with value. “The identity is earned, sometimes uncomfortably, often with difficulty, always at a cost. It is worth something” (Salaman, 1986: 76).

Such symbolic representations mediate individual interests and behaviour. As Joyce (1987: 9) explains, “Collective social identities are the crucial link between social structure and social action. Interests depend for their realization on the creation of such social identities.” The creation of such collective and connected social identities has long been a part of Japanese company communities. Not everyone accepted the emphasis on interconnected identities easily; there were people who responded with resentment toward group training procedures or group oriented work roles. However, in many cases they were able to *ganbaru* (persevere) and conform to the system even if they did not like it. I found cases of permanent employ-

ees who had dropped out of the system over a decade earlier, and similar cases were reported in the earlier ethnographies, suggesting that such cases do not necessarily represent the changing nature of Japanese youth.

Certainly Japanese companies have been shifting some emphases in the past two decades. There is a greater desire and expectation for leisure time among Japanese, and an increasingly greater orientation of the economy toward the service sector. Issues surrounding employment of women and of foreign workers are causing some impetus for change in the company community model, but as yet do not proclaim the end of this model. There is a growing number of imported foreign labourers coming to Japan from other countries, and a growing debate over their place in Japanese society. However, these workers are currently being brought in to fill undesirable job tasks, thus serving the same function that those in the non-permanent employment tracks have always filled—reserving the more prestigious and better positions of company membership for those white-collar employees who gain entrance to the community. Many companies have introduced new options, such as multitrack employment and managerial possibilities for women – a slow but growing process.

The introduction of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEOC) in the mid-1980s, followed by the Young Child Care Leave Law in the early 1990s, at first suggested a substantial shift in employment prospects for women and men that would begin to alter the permanent employment model of company community. However, many researchers have since documented the limitations of the EEOC in introducing any real change. Furthermore, after Japan’s economic bubble burst in the late 1980s, and the country was ushered into a recession, there was a clear social backtracking on any commitment to make changes to accommodate women’s work employment needs. In the “burst bubble” economy the permanent employment company culture ideal was initially re-embraced as a symbol of security and the prosperity of Japan’s high growth decades. The long-term impact of the “burst bubble” economy must be watched and assessed. Japan may be at a crossroads, in terms of the persistence of the company community model, as after a long period of recession many companies are beginning to consider serious restructuring of industrial relations.

Although winds of change exist, for the present moment at least, the idioms associated with company community persist. In an assessment of potential changes in Japanese-style management, Whittaker concludes, "Evolution is taking place but we are not yet witnessing the end of Japanese-style employment" (Whittaker, 1990: 343). My research on Japanese department stores shows that the meanings and values associated with work for members of permanent employment in other sectors of the Japanese economy are also found in large retailing institutions, and that these were relevant throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s. Human goals cannot be furthered without work, but work becomes soulless if it does not have meaning for those involved. The work cultures of Japanese companies situate work within a system of meaning, by the cultivation of values, relationships, and connected identities, that is consistent with the meanings its members have learned in other arenas of Japanese life and culture.

Notes

1. Most of the research on department stores presented here was conducted between 1985 and 1987 under a Fulbright-Hays, U. S. Department of Education grant. The paper also draws on later visits to these department stores under a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (UBC/HSS) grant to study retailing directed at Japanese youth in 1991, and a Nakasone Fund grant to study advertising imagery in 1992. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the Japan Studies Association of Canada meetings held in Winnipeg, Manitoba in 1991, the 45th Annual North West Anthropological Conference held in Burnaby, British Columbia in 1992, the American Anthropological Association meetings held in San Francisco, California in 1992, and the Association for Japanese Business Studies annual meetings held in Vancouver, British Columbia in 1994. I would like to thank Nancy Donnelly, Steven Sangren and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this manuscript. I would also like to thank Jill Kleinberg with whom I have had many intriguing conversations about the Japanese corporate work model. Her work on Japanese management styles transported to North America provides excellent insights to the persistence and flexibility of dominant Japanese idioms associated with work.
2. The things mentioned by this employee are very important elements of Japanese department store retailing, where proper greetings and visual pre-

sentation are essential. Nearly all purchases at department stores are wrapped. Often they are "wrapped" several times, in the sense of first being wrapped in the store's official wrapping paper, placed in a decorative bag suitable to the size of the purchase, then placed in a larger decorative shopping bag. Department stores, because of their prestigious niche among Japanese stores, have long maintained a major segment of the Japanese gift-giving market (see Creighton, 1991). Wrapping is important when giving gifts, as is *noshi* a large paper "belt" which goes around the package, "wrapping" it again with the appropriate congratulatory messages for the occasion. The appropriate body postures and polite verbal greetings such as *irasshaimase* are essential aspects of clerk training because the clerk and customer relationship takes place in the metaphor of a guest (*okyakusan*) to the [company] household.

3. Department store companies have a long history of doing this. There are reports that the forerunner to Mitsukoshi sent clerks for an expense paid night on the town to the Yoshiwara district during the Edo era.

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