

The Social Construction of Japanese University Sport Club

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Abstract

Japanese university sport clubs possess a strong hierarchical structure on the basis of senior-junior relationships. In addition to sporting achievement, this hierarchical structure is shaped by the role played by parties in the sub-culture of clubs. The parties are routinely held at certain times of the year. During parties a senior club member pays for juniors and the expectation is that juniors will get completely drunk. When junior club members become seniors themselves it is expected that they in turn will honour their former debts by paying for juniors. Each member of the club pays for parties with a proportion peculiar to grade-year, regardless of the same sum cost totally throughout four years. This open-chain of exchange contributes to the fixed hierarchy on senior-junior relationships.

Introduction

Japanese university sport clubs possess a strong hierarchical structure on the basis of senior-junior relationships. The purpose of this paper is to explain in part why the clubs are constructed very hierarchically.

As far as sport clubs have achievement-orientation, it is rather general that they are constructed hierarchically on the basis of grade year as grade years are in proportion to sporting achievement on the average. Here, I will discuss other reasons for the hierarchical structure.

In Japan many university students take part in the extra curricular activities named "Clubs".

According to a survey²⁾, the students prioritized in their university life in the following order; affluent human relations (20.4%), study (18.5%), club (13.4%) and hobby (12.9%). Clubs are the most influential organized activities for Japanese university students. Club members allocate their resources (e.g., time, money and physical fitness) to club activities. Okada's survey⁶⁾ indicates that 69% of club members allocate over 50% of their resources to club activities.

Club members' activities are highly evaluated for job hunting upon graduation. Graduates continue relations with the clubs and establish the club-alumini organization after graduation.

Hierarchical Structure of Japanese University Sport Clubs

The structure of clubs is prominently hierarchical.

Table. I shows the distribution of respondents to the opinion, juniors must obey seniors' unreasonable directions. 15.0% of respondents didn't agree very much or at all with the opinion, but 58.8% of respondents agreed strongly or agreed.

Table. I Juniors must obey senior's unreasonable directions

agree strongly	agree	neutral	do not agree very much	do not agree at all
10.9%	45.1%	27.5%	13.2%	3.4%

Note : Survey on Social Relationships on Clubs T. Okada 1993 n=385

Over 50% of the respondents would obey senior's directions even if the directions were unreasonable. This showed how strong a senior's power over a junior was in clubs.

Previously, the hierarchical structure on the basis of senior-junior relationships in university sport clubs was emphasized with the following phrase ; the senior is a god, the junior is a emperor, the sophomore is a commoner and the freshman is a slave. It seems that the hierarchical structure has survived in university sport clubs although the intensity has decreased.

Sociological Group Approach to Japanese University Sport Clubs

University sport club phenomenon has been studied in sport sociology in Japan⁷⁾.

The sociological inquiries of university sport clubs in Japan are mostly concerned with the socialization into clubs, the patterns of structure and the effect of structure on the clubs.

Examine one typical study. Niwa et al.⁵⁾ questioned 3,010 members of 100 Rugby-Football clubs from universities and colleges all over Japan and concluded;

As far as Authority-Power Structure is concerned, the stronger the Rugby-Football clubs are, the more clubs are of the outsider control pattern and of the outsider including oligarchy pattern. On the contrary, the weaker the clubs are, the more clubs are of the outsider excluding oligarchy pattern and of the membership pattern. (p. 29)

Why the structure of many clubs is prominently hierarchical has rarely been explained in

Japanese sport sociological studies. In other words, the club structure is framed as an independent variable not as a dependent variable.

Social Background

It could be pointed out that the peculiar social composition of Japan might influence the hierarchical structure of university sport clubs. It is said that Japanese society has been composed of familial principles even after the war. Under the influence of such a social composition, the seniority ranking has characterized Japanese companies. Seniority ranking is the customary practice of having salary and status rise in accordance with the length of service.

Fukuzawa¹⁾, a very famous thinker who exerted a huge influence on Japanese modernization in the late nineteenth century, characterized Japanese society as “making too much of power” from the point of view of the intercourse among people.

Here are persons A, B, C, D and E. While B is seemingly servile and disgraceful to A, B is pleasantly proud to C. The former disgrace is compensated by the latter pride, and the complaint is balanced. C is compensated by D, and D is by E, and such kind of relations are chained infinitely. It is as if people demanded the east-neighbour the money lending the west-neighbour. (p. 206)

Nakane⁴⁾ concluded that the “social structure” of Japan is characterized not by the horizontal relationships but by vertical relationships from the point of view of social anthropology and stated;

It is observed that the ranking-consciousness such as 1st year, 2nd year and 3rd year is emphasized more strongly than achievement or ability among students. It is really a good illustration of the strong ranking-consciousness in Japanese society. (p.90)

Party in the Sub-Culture of Clubs and Payment for Party

The clubs routinely hold some official parties. “Welcome party (in May)”, “Leading-staff change party (in May)”, “Year-end party (in December)” and “Farewell party (in February)” are common to clubs. In addition to them there are many other random parties.

The parties are usually followed by second and third voluntary “after-parties”. Although these “after-parties” are voluntary, junior members feel a strong pressure to attend. The parties have been pointed out to have a maintenance-function to facilitate communication among club members.

Each member pays equally at the official party regardless of grade-year. At the “after-parties” each member of the club pays an amount proportionate to grade-year. The members of a club pay with the greatest proportion for seniors, less for juniors and free for sophomores and freshmen. The members of another different club pay with a proportion that seniors pay for juniors and sophomores pay for freshmen. Payment systems vary from club to club, and each club’s payment system becomes a tradition for that club. Each member has to take the status-role peculiar to grade-year regarding payment for parties.

Generally speaking, during parties a senior club member pays for juniors and when junior club members become seniors themselves it is expected that they in turn will honor their former debts by paying for juniors. Despite the fact that throughout four years each member pays the same sum cost totally, this kind of paying system results in the unchangeable debtor-creditor relationship between juniors and seniors.

In contemporary societies the closed bilateral exchange relationships existing between people are prominent. They are typically exemplified on economic markets. Such a system of exchange doesn’t give rise to social relations, because it is a pure business exchange with little or no personal contact between the exchanging parties concerned.

It is said that the forms of gift exchange and pure exchange have a close correspondent relationship to the types of social relations. The gift type of exchange system leads to social relations characterized by the senior-junior mentality. However, the bilateral exchange relationship does not lead to long lasting senior-junior relations⁸⁾.

This debtor-creditor relationship in paying for parties gives rise to the gift relationship between juniors and seniors and is established during students’ university years and is continued in the future. While the pure exchange lacks in any social relations and needs outside elements for validity, the gift exchange gives rise to social relations such as familiarity and control. The gift relationship, a kind of open-chain of exchange, on paying for parties could produce power relations among members and contribute to the hierarchical social construction of university sport clubs.

By the way, how do the reciprocity norms work in this case? Reciprocity is considered the relational concept which on the whole prescribes the gift and the exchange as actions. Extending the moving goods from instrumental goods to expressional goods makes it likely that juniors give

seniors back control-power instead of getting alcohol, and the reciprocity principles work in the senior-junior relationships during parties.

Features of Alcohol

During parties drinking facilitates frank communication between seniors and juniors.

The actions that make members reconfirm the seniority-hierarchy are observed during the parties.

Juniors have to go to seniors' places earlier and perform greetings. When juniors drink a toast they have to touch seniors' glasses with their glasses in lower position.

Juniors have to perform to make seniors laugh by singing, gesturing comically, when seniors direct them to do so.

Juniors have to confess their first kissing partners, the members who they are attracted to or their most disliked club members, etc., when seniors urge them.

There are some newcomers who can't tolerate such duties and quit the clubs. Most of them are weak drinkers.

The club members who are strong in drinking can tolerate such absurd duties. Most of them enjoy the reverse-role when they become seniors themselves.

Toss-offs are casual drinking practices that sometimes lead to death, and are socially criticized. But generally speaking, the drinking facilitates the communication between seniors and juniors and moderates the frustrations which juniors accumulate because of their servile practices at parties. The entertainment combined with alcohol liberates people from role-characters, and loosens the restraints of their super-ego and makes possible the in-depth connection of egos.

That the object of the gift is alcohol seems to have somewhat special significance for keeping the hierarchical structure of clubs.

Many members look back upon those parties as good opportunities to talk with seniors casually about their true motives.

Concluding Remarks

Japanese university sport clubs have been pointed out to possess a strong hierarchical structure on the basis of senior-junior relationships. The group approaches to university sport clubs in Japan have mostly dealt with the hierarchical structure as an independent variable.

The relationships between seniors and juniors are described as a fixed debtor-creditor relationship through the paying system for parties. This is one of the factors shaping the hierarchical structure of university sport clubs.

Although the paying for parties is unequal on year level, throughout four years every member pays the same sum cost totally.

This paper points out that the paying system for parties is an elaborate system designed to maintain the hierarchical structure of university sport clubs without imposing an uneven burden on certain club members.

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