Social Class and Education in England and Japan:

Examining Middle-Class Boys' Schools

Robert W. ASPINALL*

Drawing partly on the author's own experience as a boy and a teacher in England and Japan, this paper is a comparative study of boys' secondary schools which examines the roles these single-sex schools play in preparing boys for their future positions within society. This is an essential part of a process that reproduces social class and gender roles that are taken for granted as being 'natural' or 'common sense' by most of the boys and their families. The paper begins with an overview of the historical development of middle-class boys' schools in England and Japan, as well as a study of the histories of the individual schools. It then moves on to the author's experiences in England and Japan in the 1970s, '80s and '90s.

By focusing on schools that are affordable to the majority of the population, the analysis carried out in this paper discounts the influence of economic capital and instead discusses the role of other forms of capital. The cases that will be examined include the ways in which boys are selected to enter the schools, the 'ethos' of each school, and the ways the schools help boys in the next stage of their development as middle-class young men. The concepts of social and cultural capital will be utilized to help analyze the concrete ways in which a boy's time in this kind of school can help him pursue a middle-class career and life course in adult life. Finally, there is a discussion of the ways in which education reforms in both countries in the 1980s and 1990s which focused on increasing choice and diversity in the secondary school sector have worked to the advantage of the middle classes.

Keywords

social class, secondary education, boys' schools, cultural capital, education reform

Contents

* Doshisha University / Nanzan University

I Introduction

Social anthropologist Roger Goodman recently wrote, "[E]very research project starts with the researcher. We study—or we should study things that we know about and things that interest us. We tend, however to be very bad at acknowledging that fact." (Goodman 2020: 29). In this current project I intend to be as open as possible about my own close connection to the subject matter of the research. I make use of my own experiences as a schoolboy and then school teacher in both England and Japan as a resource. Being so close to the site of research has advantages as well as risks, and it requires proper reflexive consideration of the author's own biases and positionality. In addition, at the time I was in those three places I was not a trained ethnographic researcher, and had no idea that I would one day write a book-length study of those schools. In order to reduce the subjective nature of my own experiences, I have revisited the three schools and talked to students and staff. Looking at my own notes, diary entries and examples of school work from those years and revisiting the old buildings and grounds has not only been nostalgic but has also allowed me to reflect on how my impressions of those schools have changed with the passage of time. Looking back at my own experiences with some distance I can now reflect on the influence of shared norms and expectations on my own personal development, outlook on life and how I approached planning for the future.

The particular focus of this paper is the connection between schooling and social class. To introduce this topic I will refer to two vignettes from my own biography; two events which did not make much sense to me at the time, but I found I could understand much better after later reading some relevant social science literature.

Vignette One: whether to leave or stay on at the end of compulsory schooling

I attended a comprehensive school in South Wales from the age of eleven to sixteen. In 1977, when I was fifteen years old I decided to continue into the 'sixth form' (the final two years of secondary schooling in England and Wales) in order to take 'A' (Advanced) level exams that would enable me to go on to university. At the same time my friend Nick decided to leave school at the age of sixteen (the end of compulsory education in England and Wales) and get a job with a local firm. Since we were roughly the same level of IQ, why did I make my decision and why did Nick make his?

Explanation of Vignette One

In 1977 the sociologist Paul Willis published the book *Learning to Labour: How working class kids get working class jobs*, an ethnographic study of teenage boys in an industrial city in England in the 1970s. The working-class boys in his study rebelled against the middle-class rules and conventions of the secondary school they attended, and in the process created an anti-school sub-culture. Most of the boys left school as soon as they could and got jobs at local factories where they found "profound similarities between school counter-culture and shop-floor culture" (Willis 1977: 39). The important insight of this study is that although the boys acted out anti-establishment and rule-breaking behaviours during their time at school, they were simultaneously 'learning to labour' in the sense that they were learning the rules of working-class shop-floor culture that would allow them to move seamlessly from school to work. In this way "the functioning of the structure of class-reproduction is seen as more complex and certainly as less direct" (Wexler 2009: 77). The end result, however, is the same: working-class kids get working-class jobs and middle-class kids get middle-class jobs. Returning to my own personal experience, I could now see that the difference between Nick and I was that I accepted (uncritically) the middle-class norm of using the education system to attain qualifications that would lead to a professional career later, while Nick was part of a group similar to the 'lads' studied by Willis that took pride in rejecting those middle class norms. If Nick had changed his mind, stayed on to study 'A' levels and then gone to university he could only have done so by betraying the lads who were his close friends.

Vignette two: a relaxed approach to school uniform rules

In 1989, on my first day as an English teacher at

Daitoshi High School (DHS) in Japan, I was surprised to find students dressed quite casually. Some boys were wearing PE kit during regular classroom periods. It made practical sense, because T-shirt and shorts was more appropriate attire in the heat and humidity of a Japanese summer.[1] Before arriving in Japan, I formed an image of Japanese schooling as highly regimented. I assumed school rules, including uniform and appearance, would be enforced very strictly. In the case of most secondary schools in Japan this was a correct assumption—but Daitoshi High School was different.

Explanation of Vignette two

Understanding the function of schools as institutions that reproduce social class helps us to make sense of this apparent discrepancy. Schools have the function of training young people for their future. In the vast majority of cases their future economic and occupational position will reflect their current social class position. In Japan selection for future occupation begins with entrance to senior high school (at age fifteen), and therefore regimentation and enforcement of rules will differ depending on the type of school. According to academic ranking, DHS was the top school in the prefecture. It is common the world over to find that elite schools have a more relaxed atmosphere that the majority of schools. As Sever comments:

> "[s]tudents of working class origin are trained to take orders, to be obedient, and are subject to more discipline whereas children of professionals are trained with more progressive methods which gives them more internal discipline and self-presentation skill." (Sever 2012: 656).

In his ground-breaking research on Japan's high schools, anthropologist Thomas Rohlen also observed that some students at the elite Nada High School in Kobe had "long hair and casual dress" (Rohlen 1983: 19), something that would not have been permitted in lower ranking schools. The boys at both DHS and Nada were being prepared for life in elite professions. Their experience of secondary school was serving the same function as that of Willis's lads; it was preparing them for their future position within the class system.

Plan of the Paper

To help explain the role of middle-class boys' schools in contemporary capitalist society, this paper will take a comparative approach, but it is also interested in the historical evolution of this kind of school. Therefore we will begin with a historical overview of middle-class boys' schools in England and Japan. The paper will then move on to a more detailed study of the three schools with which I have a personal connection. Then I will discuss some of the ways in which these schools are involved in social class reproduction. The cases that will be examined include the ways in which boys are selected to enter the schools, the 'ethos' of each school, and the ways the schools help boys in the next stage of their development as middle-class young men. The concepts of social and cultural capital will be utilized to help analyze the concrete ways in which a boy's time in this kind of school can help him pursue a middle-class career and life course in adult life. Finally, there will be a discussion of the ways in which education reforms in both countries in the 1980s and 1990s have worked to the advantage of the middle classes.

II   Comparing the History of the Modern Middle Classes and Their Schools in England and Japan

The middle classes of England and Japan developed in very different ways. In England, the growth of an urban bourgeoisie went hand in hand with the growth of industry and a modern, global empire. The main institutions of government, however, remained dominated by the landed aristocracy well into the industrial era. A growing number of middle class families decided that they could not rely on the state to create suitable institutions that would provide an education for their sons or daughters, and so they had to create their own (Green

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[1]   In most of Japan the stifling heat of summer continues well beyond the start of the school term in early September. Also, school classrooms did not have air conditioning at this time.

1990). By contrast, in Japan, industrialization came later and was a key part of the Meiji oligarchs' deliberate policy of modernization. Using Western industrial nations as models, the Japanese ruling elite, post-1868, embarked on a set of policies designed in a top-down way to build a new nation and eventually an empire. Success in industrialization entailed the growth of a new middle class. However, Japanese elites were not content to leave this new class to develop in its own organic way. Family reformers and scientific experts wanted to "build a middle class in order to solidify the nation's foundations" (Jones 2010: 116). Elites started a project of social management to build a spiritually strong, anti-materialist, highly educated nationalistic social stratum (Marshall 1994).

1. Comparing the histories of middle-class schools in England and Japan

In Japan, by the time the American-led Occupation ended in 1952 a uniform secondary school system had been built. The majority of boys and girls of all social strata attended the same types of school. They attended their nearest elementary school and junior high school and then at the age of fifteen went to a senior high school that matched their academic ability and their future career path. During the same postwar period England seemed—at least for a time—to have built a similarly uniform national system, with the majority of children attending their nearest primary school and then at the age of eleven being sorted by an exam into grammar schools or secondary modern schools. Progressive idealists in both countries hoped that work-ing-class and middle-class children would attend the same schools and would be sorted into different tracks according to merit, not wealth or family name (Okada 2012). Boys and girls in both countries were taught together in most cases (although many grammar schools in England were single-sex) but they would be destined to fulfil different roles when they grew up according to the widely held gender norms of the mid-twentieth century. As both nations embarked on a road of peaceful

economic growth many of these school children would grow up to join the ranks of an expanding middle class.

However, as economic growth slowed, upward mobility became more difficult. In spite of plans in both countries for the development of more equal societies, the historical legacies of gender norms and class identi-ties turned out to be very enduring. The refusal of single-sex schools to go away—even in the state sector—is one manifestation of this. What can be learned from compar-ing schools in two nations that are very different in their history, culture and geographical location?

III   The Three Schools

The research in this paper is informed by the author's own experiences in three boys' schools in the 1970s, '80s and '90s. We will now examine each in more detail. All three names are pseudonyms.

1. Oldhall Grammar School

Oldhall Grammar School (OGS) is an independent grammar school located in a large city in the north of England. The school was founded in the sixteenth century with an original syllabus that stressed the tenets of Christianity as well as Latin grammar[2]; the lingua franca of Christian Europe at that time. Pupils were destined for university and then the Church or the legal profession. During the industrial revolution the school expanded greatly in size to accommodate the sons of the growing urban bourgeoisie, and fought off efforts by local politicians to bring it under state control. The school catered for boys from eleven years old to eigh-teen or nineteen. I attended two years of the 'Sixth Form' (i.e. the final two years of secondary school) there from 1978 to 1980. There were over 1,000 boys in the school.

At the time there existed the option of staying for a further term leading up to the Oxford and Cambridge ('Oxbridge') entrance exams that were held in December. In most secondary schools, students intend-ing to try to enter Oxbridge sat their exams in the

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2   Because of their focus on Latin grammar, schools of this type became known as 'grammar schools' in Great Britain and English-speaking colonies.

December *before* they sat 'A' ('advanced') level exams. Sitting these exams in the December *after* their 'A' levels (which mostly take place in June) gave Oldhall Grammar School boys a considerable advantage. Boys intending to aim for Oxbridge usually sat for their 'O' (Ordinary) level exams a year early—at the age of fifteen—so that when they went to university, they would be eighteen—the same age as the majority of first-year students. I decided against applying for Oxbridge and therefore I did not stay for a third year in the Sixth Form. The next time I came across this rather unusual system was when I watched the movie version of Alan Bennett's play *The History Boys* which follows a group of boys and their teachers as they go through this process of Oxbridge applications (Bennett 2004). The play is set in a fictional boys' independent school in Yorkshire called Cutler's Grammar School. One of the themes of the play is the way in which a selected group of students can be taught how to 'game the system' in order to write the kind of essay and carry out the sort of interview performance that will impress admissions panels in Oxbridge colleges. The play is set in the 1980s, only a short time after my experience of this kind of grammar school. Shortly thereafter, Oxford and Cambridge ended the practice of setting separate exams. Schools like OGS and Cutlers' Grammar School ended the practice of having a special third year in the sixth form designed to help boys apply to Oxbridge. This in turn lead to the ending of the practice of having some boys complete all their 'O' levels (GCSEs after 1988) at the age of fifteen.

2. Kingslane School

Kingslane School (KS) is an all-boys comprehensive school in the Southeast of England catering for boys from age twelve to eighteen. I was a teacher there from September1985 to July 1989. I taught History, Mathematics and Statistics up to age sixteen ('O' levels that were replaced by GCSE exams in 1988), and History and Politics at 'A' level. While I was there, there were about 700 boys and 50 members of the teaching staff. Today the school takes boys from the age of eleven. This is due to the phasing out of the county's middle-school programme in the 1990s.

The school is located in a small town in the English 'Home Counties'; the counties in the South-East of England that surround London. It was founded in the 1920s due to demand for a boys' school in the town. A small school for girls already existed. The school was fee-paying and there were tests to decide entry, although it is unlikely that many who could pay the fees were refused entry. The school steadily grew in size and moved to larger premises in 1939. Following the reorganization of the education system in 1944, KS and its sister girls' school became county grammar schools which meant that entry was only possible for those who passed the 'eleven-plus' exam. Under the new law, secondary education became free at the point of delivery and so school fees were abolished.

In 1971, under the next reorganization of England's school system, KS and its sister school became comprehensive schools and the 'eleven-plus' was abolished in their county. At the time I arrived at the school fourteen years later there were still some teachers who were there when the school was a grammar school. I heard from some of them the challenges the school had encountered in moving from a selective system to a comprehensive system. Boys who were less academically able had trouble fitting into a school ethos that was highly academically oriented. Some of them reacted by indulging in acts of rebellion against school rules and discipline. At first there was little or no help for boys with specific learning difficulties. The first full-time special needs teacher was not appointed until 1986.

3. Daitoshi High School

Daitoshi High School (DHS) is an all-boys prefectural senior high school located in the Kanto area of Japan, within commuting distance of Tokyo that teaches boys aged fifteen to eighteen. Under the auspices of the JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching) Programme, I was an Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) there from August 1989 until July 1992. Today it has about 1,150 boys enrolled, which is its full capacity and the same number as when I was there. The policy of the prefectural board of education prevents it from increasing the number of students in its intake. This means competition to get into the school through the competitive entrance

examination which boys take at the end of their final year of junior high school remains very high.

The present school is a successor to the middle school (*Jinjō chū gakkō,*) that was founded in 1895 as the first boys' middle school in the prefecture. Its position as the oldest state secondary school in the prefecture is one of the reasons for its present-day prestige. 28 boys graduated at the school's first graduation ceremony held in 1899. By 1917 there were 550 boys enrolled in the school. As a result of the reforms introduced under the US Occupation, the school began the school year of 1948 with its new title as a prefectural senior high school. Of course, the boys, the buildings and the teachers did not change overnight. Boys who had enrolled under the old middle-school curriculum were allowed to continue to attend the new school. The youngest of them did not graduate[3] until 1951. This continuity is one of the reasons the school maintained its single-sex status, even though the reforms of the occupation era envisioned an entirely co-educational system from Kindergarten to university. In 1952, 347 boys graduated. By 1960 this had risen to 405. It stayed at around that number into the late 1970s. It then steadily increased until by 1988, the year before my arrival, 472 boys graduated. At present there are only thirteen prefectural high schools in Japan that are boys only (including DHS). There are also 31 prefectural schools that are girls only (including the sister school to DHS located nearby). This can be contrasted with 3,469 co-educational high schools in the public sector (which covers municipal as well as prefectural schools). Thus, in today's education system only about one percent of senior high schools in Japan's public sector are single-sex, one reason for why many people are unaware that they even exist!

IV   Bourdieu's Theory of Social and Cultural Capital

The concepts of social and cultural capital developed by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) will be utilized to help analyze the concrete ways in which the way a boy spends his time in school can help him later pursue a middle-class career and life-course in later life.

Social Capital, according to Bourdieu "is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu 2006: 110). Furthermore, "the reproduction of social capital presupposes an unceasing effort of sociability" (Bourdieu 2006: 111). A child growing up in a family and community with high social capital therefore not only earns access to a potentially very useful network of social contacts, but also learns the social skills necessary to maintain and develop such a network. The kind of school the child attends will be a vital part of this process.

Cultural capital, according to Bourdieu's definition can exist in three forms: in the *embodied* state, i.e. in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the *objectified* state, in the form of cultural goods (books, instruments, machines etc.) and in the *institutionalized* state in the form of educational qualifications which are formally independent of the bearer (Bourdieu 2006: 106). Embodied cultural capital is highly significant because it is inculcated and transmitted by parents and schools during a child's primary socialization. "This process of transmission and encoding leaves physical traces *in* and *on* the body—in accent, inflection, gesture and posture, as well as styles of dress, etiquette and manners" (Friedman and Laurison 2019: 200). It is the reason why middle-class children are more comfortable dealing with the requirements of the secondary school curriculum than working class children. This theory helps explain why people can suddenly feel very uncomfortable if they find themselves in a social situation with people from a different class (without necessarily understanding the reason why). It is similar to the 'culture shock' people experience when they enter a

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3   In Japan when students complete a stage of education and leave that school the term 'graduation' (*sotsugyō*) is used. This terminology is also used in the American education system. In the school systems of the British Isles, this terminology is not used. When students reach the end of their time at a particular school they are referred to simply as 'school leavers'.

foreign social space where people are behaving according to different rules of communication and politeness compared to those they are used to.

In sociologist Stephen Ball's book on the British middle classes and education, he traces the reproduction of social inequality into the strategies that individuals follow in their daily lives (Ball 2003: 8). He gives concrete examples of the ways in which social and cultural capital can give advantages to children of middle-class families. As they grow up they learn "styles and modes of presentation; social etiquette and competence; and confidence and self-assurance" (Ball 2005: 82). At the same time, social and cultural capital combine in various ways to help their parents negotiate and interact with education professionals who are also middle-class. He writes that "Class is an identity and a lifestyle and a set of perspectives on the social world and relationships in it, marked by varying degrees of reflexivity" (Ball 2003: 6). It is an identity based on modes of being and becoming. It is relational and it is a trajectory, a path through time and space, a history of transactions. Both the family and the school are extremely important forces in forging this identity.

V Comparing the Three Schools with a Focus on Cultural Capital and Class Reproduction

1. The first step: Getting into one of these schools

In advanced capitalist nations, secondary schools play a vital role in sorting young people into tracks that will lead to their future position in the class system. The present paper does not address those private schools like Eton or Harrow which are too expensive for the majority of the population to even consider. Instead, the three schools that are the subject of this study illustrate different ways in which social class is reproduced that are less directly linked to financial resources of the parents. Getting into one of these schools is a vital first step on the road to a middle-class career. In the case of two of the schools, Oldhall Grammar School (OGS) and Daitoshi Senior High School (DHS), passing an entrance exam is required—at the age of eleven in the

case of OGS and fifteen in the case of DHS. There are also geographical limitations: boys attending DHS must reside within the prefecture; and boys attending OGS must live within a reasonable commuting distance of the school. (None of the schools considered here has facilities for boarders.) Getting admitted to Kingslane School (KS), on the other hand, requires only residence at an address in the catchment area. All three schools are overwhelmingly middle-class institutions, but the nature of this dominance is determined by different factors depending on whether the school is selective or not.

Sociologists of education regard schools as having two main social functions: selection and socialization (Kariya 2013: 17). Schools select children through exam and testing systems and allocate them to various tracks or streams that channel them into routes that will lead to particular types of employment which in turn plays a vital role in defining their class status. In democratic societies that value the ideal of equality, this system, on paper, is designed to allocate future positions in society according to merit, not family background. Children are encouraged to feel that they have a certain amount of agency, as illustrated by the common question: "what do you want to be when you grow up?" An individual who works hard and is ambitious is supposed to be able to achieve their dream, regardless of the social position they start out in. This is not only seen as being good for the individual, but also the nation as a whole, since occupations will be filled by those qualified to do them rather than those with the 'right' family name.

Reality, of course, does not match this meritocratic ideal. This is where the second social function of schools comes in: socialization. Real, living breathing individuals are not isolated abstractions; they live within complex webs of social interactions. Jeehwan Park is right to point out that in the real world the twin functions of socialization and selection are 'entangled' (Park 2014: 190). Park's ethnographic study of junior high schools in Osaka shows the process by which "low-achieving students who come from working class families often resign themselves to the class into which they were born, without any consideration accorded to the possibility of achieving higher goals" (Park 2014: 190).

For students like these, entry to a school like DHS is about as unimaginable as a trip to the moon. Furthermore, Park found that "low achievers tended to attribute their low performance to themselves rather than to the school system and their socioeconomic backgrounds" (Park 2014: 201). If this attitude is widespread it may help to explain the relatively tranquil and conflict-free nature of class relations in Japan that is often commented on by visitors from abroad.

Both England and Japan use exams and tests of various types to sort children into different tracks which will be of vital importance in determining their future employment. Strenuous efforts are exerted to ensure the 'fairness' and 'objectivity' of these tests, but there is no way to eliminate the advantage enjoyed by children from middle-class families. There are various ways in which families can use economic capital to assist their children. One significant difference between the Japanese case and the English case is the existence in the former of a large, private shadow education industry known as *juku* which provides after-school lessons to help students prepare for the all-important entrance exams (Aspinall 2005: 208–209). I do not know how many boys that I taught at DHS made use of *juku* either to help them pass the DHS entrance exam or to help them prepare for university entrance exams, but I can estimate with great confidence that it was the majority. In my second year at DHS, as I was walking to school in the morning I happened to notice a long queue of people on the other side of the road lining up in front of a rather non-descript building. The queue was made up of pairs of mothers and sons, and the boys looked to be a bit too young to be DHS students. I asked a teacher what was going on, as I had not noticed this kind of very long queue before so close to the school grounds. I was told that almost opposite the gates of the school was a small *juku* that had a very good reputation for getting junior high school boys into DHS. It was April and the new school year was just beginning, so this *juku* like all the others was enrolling a new batch of students. Places were limited and so the mothers who lined up on the pavement in front of the *juku* before it opened were hoping to get their sons accepted. The *juku* phenomenon in Japan illustrates the effect of financial inequalities on educational opportunities. Although the fees for DHS were identical to all other senior high schools in the prefecture and were affordable to the majority of Japanese families, the cost of *juku* is clearly one that cannot be borne by all families.

During the 1970s and '80s, *juku*-like institutions in England were almost unheard of. It was not uncommon, however, for students to be helped by personal tutors (who are known as *katei kyoshi*—literally 'family teachers'—in Japan), especially in key subjects like mathematics. (I briefly earned some extra money as a tutor during my time as a trainee teacher in London helping a boy prepare for 'O' level Mathematics by visiting his house once a week.) Economic capital is significant in other ways. A larger, less-crowded house allows the middle-class child some private space to do homework in the evening and at weekends. Also, a house in the catchment area of a school like KS is considerably more expensive than a similar house in a different part of town. Thus, the advantages that accrue to middle-class children from higher economic capital compared to working class children are not insignificant. However, other forms of capital play a more significant role.

2. The School 'Ethos', Rule Following and Rule Breaking

At the micro level, each educational institution has its own culture or 'ethos'; a set of rules and norms which teachers and students alike are supposed to follow. Some of the rules, for example those related to school uniform are written down and codified, while others are unwritten. Conformity to the rules is enforced in various ways, and as children go through adolescence and begin forming identities as young adults they position themselves in relation to these rules.

Some students are proud to conform strictly to the rules and norms. Others are self-identifying rebels, like the 'lads' in Willis's study, who take pride in breaking or bending the rules at every opportunity. They take great pleasure in scoring 'small victories' against 'the system'. The class cultures and attendant practices at work here "act to transform micro differences into macro inequalities" (Bernstein 1996: 11). These different responses to school rules can be understood by using

the language of subculture. Middle class students will tend to take part in pro-school subcultures. Working class students who do not conform will join anti-school subcultures. Willis showed how this kind of anti-school subculture can help those students adapt to the culture of the factory floor during the period of school-to-work transition (Willis 1977).

But what happens when middle class kids stage acts of rebellion against school rules and norms? Sociologist Peter Aggleton's study of middle class youths (conducted in a different part of England shortly after Willis's work) concluded that when there was a rejection of the dominant ethos by this group it did not translate into any meaningful challenge to existing power relations: "At most they are attempts to win a limited degree of personal autonomy within a broader acceptance of existing sets of relations" (Aggleton 1987: 138). I knew several boys at OGS who enjoyed reputations as rebels. Cigarette smoking was probably the most common act of rebellion. Boys who smoked regarded themselves as 'cool' and as more grown-up than their non-smoking peers. I remember one occasion on a very foggy day when a group of smokers stood in the centre circle of the football pitch smoking happily away secure in the knowledge that nobody could see them because of the fog. Sometimes smokers were caught and punished, but I never heard of a case in which the most extreme form of punishment—expulsion from the school—was carried out. Nobody was willing to rebel against the system to that extent. During my time at DHS I was not aware of any cases of boys being caught smoking, although smoking cigarettes enjoyed a similar cachet in Japan as something that cool kids did. In addition, obtaining cigarettes was easier and less expensive in Japan at this time due to the prevalence of cigarette vending machines in public places and lower taxes on tobacco products. If getting hold of cigarettes is not a problem in Japan, then the lack of cigarette smoking at schools like DHS may indicate a greater degree of conformity to school rules among middle-class teenage boys in Japan compared to England (Yoder 2004).

Cigarette-smoking is one way by which a boy can indicate he is a member of an anti-school subculture. This kind of youth subculture can be seen as a symbolic form of resistance (Hebdige 1979). Youth subcultures often align themselves with particular genres of music. One example of this in the late 1970s was punk rock (Savage 2005). Fans of punk often identified themselves by earrings and other body piercing as well as 'spikey' hair styles, all of which were against the rules of OGS. One boy, who was two years younger than me, stood out as somehow being able to get away with breaking the rules against spikey hair. I remember seeing him in morning assembly when most of the school were present in the same hall as standing out. He was one of the small minority of boys who left OGS at the age of sixteen. Rumors spread around the school that he had left school in order to become a 'professional musician'. He joined a local band that had already had modest success releasing singles and albums on independent record labels. His case is note-worthy because it is one of the vary rare cases in which a 'rebel' from a middle-class school took his rebellion and turned it into a career

In the England of the 1970s and 1980s, middle-class teenage boys who wanted to join youth subcultures were usually seen as lacking in authenticity compared to working-class boys. This was especially true of subcultures related to parts of British popular culture that have traditionally belonged to the working class: football and rock music[4]. This was a time when violence caused by football hooligans was a weekly phenomenon during the football season. I recorded in my diary that on one Monday morning in 1979, a friend in my form arrived in school with a black eye and some other cuts and bruises. He had been to a football match on the previous Saturday but had got on the wrong train after the match and had been set upon by the supporters of the opposing team (that had a national reputation for being especially violent). I mention this anecdote because it stands out in my memory as a very rare occasion when someone in

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[4]   At this time, almost the only way in which a working-class boy could achieve the material trappings of a middle-class lifestyle (or in rare cases an upper-class life style) without running the risk of being seen to 'betray' his friends and community was through success as a professional football player (or in the north of England Rugby League player) or rock musician.

OGS was involved in the kind of violence that was more commonly associated with working class male subcultures at that time.

In the late 1970s in England many boys and girls identified themselves as part of the subculture of punk. At this time, most middle class youths who dressed as punks and attended punk rock concerts were referred to as 'poseurs'.[5] Middle-class boys would attend the same punk concerts as working-class boys. I recorded in my diary at that time that my favorite concerts were by bands like The Jam, The Clash, Stiff Little Fingers, The Skids, Ian Dury and the Blockheads, The Stranglers and the Smirks. It would be hard for the casual observer to tell the difference between working-class teenage boys and middle-class teenage boys at these concerts. There was no class distinction when it came to the enthusiasm of the fans. However, one difference would be that when the concert was over and the boys returned home, the likelihood was higher that the middle-class boy would complete the essay that was due in the next day than the working-class boy.

Punk rock was never as popular in Japan as it was in England, although punk bands like The Blue Hearts (*za burū hātsu)* who were influenced by the Sex Pistols and the Clash were quite popular at the time I was teaching at DHS. I never saw a boy at DHS who had the distinctive punk-style spikey hair of the rebellious boy at OGS mentioned above. The teachers would have dealt with that kind of rule-infringement very quickly. But, more significantly, it is almost impossible to imagine a boy at a school like DHS *wanting* to adopt such a daring hairstyle. At DHS some students told me they had formed a band called 'Dead Akihito'. The name itself was quite an act of rebellion because it referred to the current emperor. Choosing such a name was clearly inspired by the well-known California punk band 'The Dead Kennedys'. This was one of the most daring acts of

nonconformity I witnessed at DHS. Unfortunately, the band split up when the boys graduated from school.

In my experience at all three schools, most boys conformed to the rules and norms most of the time. Conformity was enforced by teachers, parents and other boys. Corporal punishment was legal in England when I was a schoolboy and I saw it exercised a few times in the comprehensive school I attended. I did not see it at OGS. By the time I became a teacher it had become illegal in Great Britain, and I was informed in no uncertain terms during my orientation as a teacher at KS that if I struck one of the boys I would be in serious legal trouble and the school would not support me. I heard about cases of corporal punishment in Japan, but I never witnessed it carried out at DHS. I once witnessed a kind of physical punishment when a small group of boys were ordered to sit *seiza*[6] in the corridor for half an hour. They had been caught trying to avoid attending one of the school assemblies. The punishment was designed to inflict embarrassment on the students rather than physical pain.

One common form of punishment in England was detention—keeping boys in school after the final bell. In OGS (but not KS) this included the possibility of Saturday morning detention. Another form of punishment at KS was to order a boy to stand outside the classroom in the corridor for a few minutes. This was a useful strategy to use in order to de-escalate a situation (like a confrontation between two boys) that may have been getting out of hand. I never saw this kind of sanction used as a form of discipline in Japan.

In England, both schools had the prefect system. This is a system borrowed by state schools from the private school tradition in England. A small proportion of Sixth Form students are selected to serve as prefects. They are given a lapel badge to be worn at all times, and in both OGS and KS prefects wore academic gowns to perform

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5   The song "Part Time Punks" by the group Television Personalities released in 1978 made fun of this type of middle-class poseur or would-be punk. The lyrics include these lines: "They play their records very loud/ And pogo in the bedroom/ In front of the mirror/ But only when their mums gone out."

6   *Seiza* 正座 (literally "correct sitting") refers to a style of sitting in which one's legs are folded underneath one's thighs. It is considered to be the proper way of sitting while taking part in traditional ceremonies like the tea ceremony. By the time of my first trip to Japan in the 1980s it was clear that most young people were not accustomed to this kind of sitting, and found it painful. Most foreigners also struggled to maintain this posture for more than a minute or so.

certain functions, for example shepherding younger boys to morning assembly, and supervising the parking of cars during parents' evenings. This very English use of badges of rank to symbolize hierarchy can be contrasted to the Japanese method for ensuring older students help to keep younger students in line. In Japan, children learn the structure of obligation and hierarchical responsibility through senior-junior (*sempai-kōhai*) relationships. Ethnographic research in Japan has shown how in both primary and secondary schools it is children more than teachers who enforce conformity and obedience to rules. Clubs, which are usually subject to fairly lax supervision by adults, are essential arenas for the socialisation of young Japanese. First year members of clubs are delegated menial tasks like making the tea, cleaning-up and carrying the bags of their *sempai* (White 1994: 94–95). They understand that they have to go through this kind of initiation if they are to earn the right to move on to greater responsibilities when their time comes. Junior club members also learn the correct use of *keigo*, the polite language that is required when junior and senior members of any group in Japan converse. At DHS I was informed that boys who joined the tennis club could not play an actual game of tennis during their entire first year in the club. Instead, they would spend that year acting as ball boys, carrying out cleaning and maintenance activities and acting as supporters for the senior boys who were playing games competitively. It should be noted here that the club faced a practical problem that may have added to the necessity of these restrictions. The club was a popular club but only had access to two tennis courts. *Sempai-kōhai* relationships are a feature of all Japanese schools, not just those for the middle classes. They help students learn the correct language and behaviour they will need to navigate status differences throughout their adult lives.

3. School to University Transition and extra-curricular activities

All three schools that I experienced had similarities in their ethos. The importance of academic success was stressed in all three, but in the case of the two selective schools it was given the utmost importance; a priority that was shared by parents. In this kind of academically elite middle-class school, the decision to go to university is a 'non-decision' because it is taken for granted. To not go is inconceivable as it is part of a normal middle-class biography (Ball 2003: 65). In both Oldhall Grammar School and Daitoshi Senior High School, the section of school administration devoted to 'careers advice' or *sotsugyō shidō* was concerned solely with helping students with the university entrance process.

My memory of my time at OGS is that 'careers advice' for boys who did not want to go to university was non-existent. There was a boy in my form[7] who had made up his mind that he wanted to go into journalism and had decided to enroll in a local college of further education to learn shorthand and typing while trying to get an entry-level position at a local newspaper.[8] This was a perfectly rational approach to building a career in journalism for a young man at this time in the UK. However, our form tutor who oversaw and advised us in our school-to-university transition, was very unhappy that one member of his form was refusing to even apply to university. He applied quite a lot of pressure to try to force the boy to change his mind and take part in the university application process, but was ultimately unsuccessful. A recent perusal of the former student's page on LinkedIn has revealed that he has indeed enjoyed a varied career in journalism starting with a stint in a local newspaper just as he planned.

Success at exams, whether it is measured in the proportion of students each year who get 'A' grades or the proportion of students who are accepted into 'top' universities is the most visible way in which elite schools can trumpet their success and show the world that their

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7   A 'form' in England is the equivalent of a 'homeroom' in the American school system. The teacher in charge of a form is known as the 'form tutor'. The Japanese equivalent is the *tan'nin kyōshi.* The form has to meet briefly at the start of each school day and also after the lunch break so that the form tutor can 'take the register' in order to check who is present and who is absent. In Japanese secondary schools attendance is also checked at the start of each lesson throughout the day.

8   In those days there were no journalism courses at universities in the UK.

reputation is confirmed by objective data. However, the extra-curricular activities offered by the school can also play a vital role for many students, and in some cases can be even more important than success in exams for helping gain entry to elite careers. The OGS boy mentioned above who pursued a career in journalism gained very valuable experience by working on the school newspaper. Mostly, however, the useful experience gained by participation in clubs and sports at school is less about directly-transferable skills and more to do with notions of 'character', 'team work', 'endurance' and other virtues that can be nurtured by active participation.

One of the most striking features of Japanese high school life for a visitor from a Western country is the amount of time required of club members—especially sports clubs that are considered important to the identity of the school. Practice can take place every weekday with competitions taking place at weekends. In spite of the time that this takes away from exam preparation, boys at academically elite high schools like DHS also take part in this activity. Sociologist Mattias van Ommen argues that

> a process of socialization through correction mechanisms in *bukatsu* can generate a set of dispositions in the form of embodied cultural capital, which may prove to be an important asset in … the process of finding employment. This interpretation will help to understand the significance of *bukatsu* not as a simple outlet for stress-relief and enjoyment but as a careful investment by students of their time and energy that is likely to facilitate an easier transition from school to work (van Ommen 2015: 86).

Club members who engage in hard physical exertions every day are being inculcated with the kind of embodied cultural capital that Bourdieu argued was so important in confirming their class status in later life. Van Ommen specifically describes three particular dispositions that are required of a successful middle-class salaryman: conformity to the strict rules of hierarchy in the office; hard work; and loyalty to the group.

The pressure to succeed in high-stakes exams is intense in both DHS and OGS. At this juncture I have to be open about my own bias. During my time as a school boy, I generally got slightly higher grades in timed tests and exams than in regular course work. I can put that down to the pressure of exam day which in my case forced me to study harder than normal. Having said that, I am fully aware of the problems caused by the stress of exams to some young people who suffered physical symptoms like stomach ache or worse. In both England and Japan there has been significant criticism of the adverse effects of the pressure caused by these competitive tests. However, policy-making has always been in the hands of the 'winners' of the system, i.e. those who were able to navigate the exam system successfully themselves. On occasions when they have tried to reduce the importance of traditional timed tests (for example by allowing course work to be a bigger part of the student's final assessment), they have faced charges of 'dumbing down' the curriculum. In spite of these obstacles government reforms have been made in both countries aimed at reducing stress and adding more flexibility to the assessment process. The evidence so far shows that these reforms have had the unintended consequence of reinforcing the advantages enjoyed by middle class children. This will be dealt with in the next section.

VI　School Reforms in the 1980s and 1990s in England and Japan

Theories of social and cultural capital help explain middle class advantage at the micro level of the individual school. But the interests of the middle classes are also protected and promoted at the macro level of national policy-making. Here, Stephen Ball stresses the vital importance of two related propositions. First: "currently in developed societies around the world education policies are primarily aimed at satisfying the concerns and interests of the middle class." This is largely due to the second factor which is that "the middle class is active in various ways in influencing and effecting education policies in their own interests." (Ball 2003: 25). Education reforms in England since the 1980s have made use of the language of individual

choice, and have sought to apply the functions of the market to improve outcomes for all students. The government lead by Margaret Thatcher promoted the idea that parents and students were 'consumers' and teachers and boards of education were 'producers' of educational services. In all areas of public life, the ideology of Thatcherism promoted the theory that 'producers' should be responsive to the demands of the 'consumers', and education would be no exception. Under legislation passed in the 1980s and '90s, parents in England and Wales were given more choice about what school to send their children to and individual schools were given the choice to opt out of local education authority control. However, as Ball notes, the language of individualism disguises the fact that "the judgements and perceptions which parents use and inhabit are collective" (Ball 2003: 63). The ideology of Thatcherism may be built around the theoretical notion of the isolated individual, but the reality of middle class life is that parents will always look for a school for their children that contains mostly children from similar class backgrounds. A 'good' school is one that contains the 'right' kinds of pupils from their point of view (Ball 2003: 64). A large number of 'individual' decisions to 'choose' this school or that school, when taken in aggregate help to fix the division of society into classes.

A similar process aimed at giving more choice to individuals can be seen in Japan in roughly the same period. This represents a break with the traditional approach to education in Japan which placed a greater emphasis on cooperative and group based learning compared to the paradigm of individual-based learning in England (Okano 2020: 5). The 1999 Course of Study revisions introduced a range of far-reaching reforms designed to develop in children and young people *ikiru chikara* which has been translated as the 'power to live' or 'zest for life' (Okada and Bamkin 2022). The aim was to develop more independence and creativity among children without losing sight of the values of cooperation and empathy (Cave 2016: 20). The reforms embraced the slogan of *yutori kyoiku* a term which has been paraphrased in English as 'a more relaxed education style' (Kariya 2013: 112). The plan was to cut the compulsory content of the curriculum by 30% and

introduce a new period of 'integrated studies' (*sogo-teki na gakushu*) into the timetable that would allow individual schools and teachers to design their own classes (Nitta 2008). The gradual phasing out of lessons on Saturdays was continued, and by 2002 no state schools had regular class on the weekends. These reforms were a direct response to long-standing criticisms levelled at secondary schools in Japan that alleged there had been an excessive amount of stress placed on children, and that curriculum planning was too 'top-down'. It was also hoped that the ending of Saturday school would mean families would now be able to spend more quality-time together on the weekends.

According to the research of Kariya Takehiko, these reforms had the unintended consequence of increasing the influence of social class on scholastic achievement at the secondary level. This is because children in middle-class homes (measured by parents' occupations) put in more learning time outside school (Kariya 2001). The reduction of class time during school thus contributed to increases in social divisions. "Seen in these larger contexts, pursuit of 'individual selection' and 'individual responsibility' by students carries pronounced political implications" (Kariya 2013: 129). As soon as the ending of Saturday school was announced, well-known *juku* chains started to advertise that they would offer new courses every Saturday morning. These reforms "are proving to be just as strongly correlated to class divisions and may very well prove to be even more so over time, than the older notion of academic achievement and occupational training." (Kariya 2010: 111). The theories of social and cultural capital developed by Bourdieu and others help us to understand how education reforms that have as their focus 'individual choice' and 'individual responsibility' will inevitably have consequences that benefit children from middle-class homes at the expense of those from a working-class background.

VII   Conclusions

Due partly to institutional inertia and path-dependence, a small number of single-sex schools in England and Japan that were founded before World War II have been able to retain their single-sex status through a

period in which co-education became the norm. Due to a quirk of fate, I happened to spend part of my childhood and part of my teaching career at three of these schools: two in England and one in Japan. In all three schools an emphasis on 'tradition', 'history' as well as 'academic ethos' made the schools very appealing to middle class families. But, far more important than these rather intangible qualities was the proven track record of getting boys into good universities and from there into good middle-class careers. By exploring some of the features of these schools I have endeavored to show how the rules, norms and cultures of these schools help to explain how social and cultural capital can be acquired by boys that give them advantages in their adult lives and help explain their ability to go forward in their middle-class life courses. By focusing on schools that are affordable to the majority of the population, the analysis carried out in this paper removes ability-to-pay, i.e. economic capital, from the equation that connects the class position of a child's family to the future class position that individual will occupy. I argue that the concepts of social and cultural capital are far more important in explaining this kind of class reproduction.

I have also shown how well-intentioned reforms over the past 40 years in both England and Japan have actually reduced social mobility between classes. Thanks to the reserves of cultural and social capital they are able to draw on, the middle classes are adept at making the most of the opportunities of advantage that these policies present to them. Starting from the early 1990s, education reforms in Japan were designed to introduce more competition and market mechanisms to a system that had been previously far more centralized and uniform than its English equivalent. In both nations, changes in the school systems have been accompanied by transformations of patterns of employment driven by global economic forces. Although we have not had the space to discuss this in the present paper, it should be noted that during this time, there has been clear progress in efforts to reduce discrimination based on gender, race and sexuality—especially in England. However, specific reforms in secondary education considered above—many of which have been labeled as progressive—have actually contributed to widening inequality based on social class. Middle-class boys continue to get mainly middle-class jobs.

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