

Educational Credentialism and Elite Formation in Japan: A Long-term Perspective

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ABSTRACT

In spite of the significant restructuring of the university system in the postwar period, national universities continue to occupy the top end of the prestige hierarchy of universities in Japan. In this paper, we examine long-term trends in the educational credentials of Japanese corporate executives. We use high-quality data from the directory of corporate executives to assess whether the mechanisms of elite production has changed over time.

We find that the fraction of corporate executives graduating from private universities increased significantly, in accordance with the massive expansion of private universities in the postwar period. At the same time, our cohort-based analysis finds that private university graduates are being recruited into executive positions at a pace that exceeds its natural growth rate. Our findings weaken the view that certain prestigious universities are stable institutions to reproduce the nation's elites. The improved access to university education results in greater educational diversity and heterogeneity among the nation's elites.

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