

On Transfer Process of US Seniority Rules into Japan and Reactions of Management Associations and Labor Unions after WWII

YOSHIDA Makotoⁱ

Abstract : This paper chronologically examines the process whereby seniority rules were transferred from the US to Japan. The role of GHQ in this transfer changed over time. Initially, GHQ promoted the transfer of seniority rules in the background. Therefore, it appears that Japanese scholars or the Ministry of Labor in Japan promoted it without GHQ's influence. However, GHQ staff directly advised both parties involved in labor relations in Japan to accept these rules when the nine economic principles were issued by the US government at the end of 1948. These principles favored economic stability over the democratization of labor relations in Japan. Therefore, the staff promoted the use of seniority rules as a means of avoiding strikes against the upcoming massive dismissals. Japanese management accepted the seniority rules in two ways. The first was the criteria for dismissals or layoffs while it lasted only for a few years. The second was the ranking of their employees based on their length of service. This was intended to establish order among employees based on their seniority. The management learned from the seniority rules applied in the US that 'length of service' had value in itself, and expected the labor side to agree to the seniority rules because they were objective and did not involve arbitrary managerial evaluations. The management believed that the new democratic style of management should be based on seniority, supplemented by rational personnel appraisal. This paper suggests that this concept of the employees' hierarchy based on 'length of service' after the US style of seniority was one of the origins of 'Nenkei-Joretsu', the Japanese-style seniority system.

Keywords : Seniority Rules, Personnel Systems in Japan, Labor History in Japan

i Professor, College of Social Sciences, Ritsumeikan University