

Transformation of Transferred Seniority Rules after 1950 in Japan

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Abstract : This paper examines how U.S. seniority rules were transformed during their adoption in Japan. Initially, the GHQ's Labor Section promoted these rules as a strict "last in, first out" principle based solely on length of service. Although Japanese management had some concerns, they largely accepted this view. However, after the mass discharges of 1949 in Japan, both the Japanese government and management learned that seniority in the U.S. was only one of several criteria for promotion and staff reassignment. Consequently, they began promoting a modified version of the rules that incorporated personnel appraisal. Despite strict seniority being devalued as a tool for rationalizing management, length of service became the most common criterion for promotions in Japanese companies. Management reinterpreted strict seniority not as a rational system, but as an irrational, informal ranking between employees. Ironically, this devaluation of strict seniority as a rational system led to its re-evaluation as a key management issue, as the popular Human Relations Theory of the time emphasized the importance of informal employee relationships for productivity.

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

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