

## Premature Job Hunting Vexing Students & Businesses

By Isao ADACHI

The rapidly deteriorating economic climate caused a succession of cancellations earlier this year of informal corporate job offers to students, a practice known as *naitei* (unofficial decision), causing a social problem. In fact, however, that's not the only major problem overshadowing students' job-hunting or corporate recruiting activities. Another problem is that students' job-hunting activities now start very early in their campus life, thus throwing them into a prolonged employment-seeking period. While the university side complains that students are missing seminar classes as a result, the corporate side wants to get hold of the best students before they are assured of employment by competing companies. In addition, Japanese universities, which have been popularized, compete for the number of jobs landed in an effort to attract students, providing another apparent reason for the early start to recruitment. The corporate and university sides are in consultation about the problem, but the road to a new employment rule is nowhere in sight.

In Japan, there is a time for students putting on what's called "recruit suits" to attend corporate recruitment briefings and meet employment officials – en masse. On their part, corporations also begin their recruitment drive en masse. It is a common sight among senior students in Japan, known as *shukatsu* (short for job-hunting activities). It's apparently not confined to Japan, however. The situation in South Korea is said to be very similar. Needless to say, fierce competition has ensued on both sides of recruitment, often leading to the corporate practice of "green harvesting" or informally assuring excellent students of employment long before the recruiting season starts. The practice has been called into question time and again.

Up until 1996, however, there was an agreement on job-seeking and recruiting activities between the university and corporate camps, putting some rules in place before they were abolished in 1997. The business community argued then that the employment agreement controlling free corporate hiring activities was not in sync with the age of economic globalization. It also emphasized that in reality, the accord was not faithfully observed. The argument is believed to reflect a rise in the role of the Internet as a means of applying for jobs and increasingly active employment activities by foreign-affiliated firms not bound by the employment agreement.

At the time when the employment agreement was still intact, employment-seeking and recruitment activities were given the go-ahead as late as around August 1, after the first semiannual semester ended, and employers were allowed to give students *naitei* or an informal notice of employment starting October 1. Both dates were set in consideration of university juniors and seniors wanting to minimize the number of specialized classes and seminars they have to miss during their job-hunting activities. The agreement may have since become more a formality than a reality, nonetheless putting a sort of brake on corporate recruitment activities. So, since the agreement was scrapped altogether, the starting dates have become earlier and earlier, so much so that today

Photo: Kyodo News



*Job-seeking students listen to an official speak at a gathering for firsthand corporate information sponsored jointly by companies offering employment opportunities.*

students visit company employees from the same school and attend employment briefings as early as the autumn of their junior year. Corporations are supposed to give students *naitei* starting October 1 in their senior year. As university officials say, however, not a small number of corporations give students in the winter of their junior year "informal *naitei*" ("unofficial informal decision"), which is less formal than an informal decision.

Many companies ostensibly wait until April 1 to give students "informal *naitei*." In reality, however, company employees from the same school interview students from around February, acting as "recruiters" to ensure their employment and at the same time to keep them from being hired by rival firms. "We have a lot of specialized study seminars in the junior and senior years, and this is a period when we feel our motivation to study summoned up," said a national university graduate who recently went through job-hunting activities. "But we have to spend about half that time trying to find a job." He meant to say a job-hunting drive that starts early also means a prolonged *shukatsu* period. The aforementioned *naitei* cancellations are said to stem in part from premature employment programs that failed to foresee a subsequent economic downturn. The uncertain economic picture can be a good reason for corporations to put off the date to issue *naitei* notices.

Concerned about the excessively early recruitment activities, Education Minister Ryu Shionoya told a House of Representatives budget committee meeting in February 2009 that he wanted to create an environment that could lead to a new agreement, indicating he would call upon all parties to establish a new rule rectifying the early recruiting practice. However, at a consultation meeting held in response to the minister's request, representatives of the business community such as Nippon Keidanren expressed their belief that "a new agreement is not going to function." The university side, aware of competition for job placement records, also considers a new agreement is not a realistic idea. It seems unlikely that the argument about job-hunting and recruiting activities matching today's needs will find an early conclusion anytime soon. **JS**

*Isao Adachi is editor, City News Desk, Jiji Press.*