1.     Behind the guise of meritocracy so vociferously paraded today is the undeniable presence of parentocracy. The reason why I say this is because the school system is in essence meritocratic; it appraises individuals, weighs their educational merits, and distributes them across the educational hierarchy based on their merits, while students continue in their effort to accrue merits and improve their position in the educational hierarchy and society at large. However, the parentocracy lies in the unequal distribution of merits and ability to obtain merits. The direct effect of parental wealth on children is reflected in their purchase power of educational resources (school, shadow education, time allocated to studies, etc.), while the indirect effect can be seen in social and cultural capital, expectations for success, language and eloquence, ability to defer gratification and more. Both of these effects give children of wealthy parents a disproportionate advantage in accumulating educational merits, thus increasing their chances of a favorable outcome in the high stakes competitive field of school admissions. In this way, on the surface, it may seem as if society is guided by meritocracy, but the underlying governing principle is indeed parentocracy.   
 I am a witness to the parentocratic process outlined above. I spent kindergarten to middle school at a wealthy, private international school in Tokyo, and then transferred to a considerably more economically challenged, low ranking high school. The difference between the two environments was stunning. At international school, all students had an extremely wealthy family background. Families were able to afford expensive tuition, a vast variety of extracurriculars, private tutors, state of the art technology and other educational resources. Furthermore, the pedagogical style employed at the school encouraged critical thinking and valued students’ opinions, gifting students with eloquence, confidence, and high communicative abilities. On the contrary, students at my high school afforded the bare minimum (textbooks for class and writing utensils), and no one was well versed in technology and modern educational devices as the students at my middle school were. In addition, the pedagogical style employed was strictly authoritarian. Students responded passively to orders from their teachers, critical thinking and proactivity were virtually nonexistent among the student body, and students decisively lacked confidence in presenting their views or expressing themselves, the likely aftermath of parents’ and teachers’ low expectations for them and failure to value their opinion (which is characteristic of working-class families). It was no surprise that my class from middle school graduated and moved on to reputable institutions all across the globe (Duke, MIT, London School of Economics to name a few), while the majority of my high school class entered vocational schools and a few even started work immediately after graduation.

2.      My position at Waseda University is no exception to the parentocracy inherent in today's society. I come from a middle-class background, and though I am not remotely as wealthy as my counterparts at international school (I was unable to join any sports or extracurricular activities and forced frugality by my parents during my time there to keep expenses at a minimum), I am blessed with more than the average household. My parents’ wealth allowed me to attend a wealthy, academically prosperous institution, and through my time there I was able to accrue social and cultural capital and certain educational merits that played a large role in my success in college admissions. When I transferred to high school, my deftness in speaking my mind and negotiating with authority caught the attention of the faculty and created a general understanding in the school that I was “different” from the other students. Teachers had high expectations for me, and these expectations encouraged me to study and succeed in academics. My school even designed a curriculum just to prepare me for college admissions, a curriculum my fellow students did not have access to. Without all of these resources available to me, I probably would not have been able to pass the test that landed me a position at Waseda University. And my access to these resources and merits were wholly contingent on my parents’ wealth and their wish to send me to a good school.

3.     My admission into Waseda, although maybe “legitimate” in the sense that it was in line with the logic of meritocracy, was definitely not “fair.” I do possess the merits valued in university admissions, which is why I believe their selection to be “legitimate.” However, opportunities to acquire the merits valued in university admissions are closed off and only open to and accessible by a select portion of the population. Such competition cannot be deemed “fair.”   
 The question of what is fair is a normative one that opens a strew of arguments, such as whether to consider genetic/natural differences in ability or differences arising from luck as fair or not. A truly fair process of school admission, one that takes into account all variables affecting a person’s life, is impossible to achieve and therefore negotiating such a society and the definition of fairness best befitting such a society is fruitless at best.   
 However, the point of education, after all, is to overcome the accident of birth to provide all constituents of a society an equal chance at success, or at least a realistically achievable chance of success. Therefore, limiting our definition of “fair” to denote a state in which social and environmental factors influencing an individual’s educational trajectory and exposure to educational merits are controlled to the extent that all students are at least equipped with the minimum level of resources necessary to pursue education seems reasonable.   
 The present reality does not even meet the extremely limited above criteria of “fair.” The minimum level of resources necessary for one to pursue education includes a willingness to receive an education. However, at present many people give up on university education or high educational attainment because others do not expect it from them or because they have been conditioned into believing it is an impossible, futile endeavor. Individuals who suffer from a lack of will can never be admitted into high ranking universities and improve their prospects for the future, regardless of material resources accessible to them. Also, the attitude of delayed gratification which is rewarded in the school system and judged as merit is a distinctly bourgeois attitude that working-class students may not have. It is useless to try to force working-class students to study when they have never been taught how to at home. These are all social conditions still observed today that determine a child’s educational merit and hamper them from high educational attainment. As long as such conditions persist, no competition can even be considered as meeting even the most limited criteria for “fair.”