

**JAPAN'S
MODERN
EDUCATIONAL
SYSTEM**

*A History
of the
First Hundred Years*

PREFACE

In 1972 the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (*Monbushō*) marked the one hundredth anniversary of the proclamation of Education System Order (*Gakusei*) with its publication of *Gakusei Hyakunenshi* [*One Hundred Years of Japanese Education*].

The present work is an English edition of the *Gakusei Hyakunenshi* here published in its abridged and recompiled form under the title of *Japan's Modern Educational System*.

We sincerely hope that this English publication will prove useful to those foreign readers interested in Japanese education in general as well as to those who are studying the historical aspects of educational development in modern Japan.

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Research and Statistics Division
Minister's Secretariat
Ministry of Education, Science
and Culture

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JAPAN'S MODERN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

*A History
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RESEARCH AND STATISTICS DIVISION
Minister's Secretariat
Ministry of Education, Science and Culture
Government of Japan

CHAPTER I

EDUCATION DURING THE LATE EDO AND EARLY MEIJI PERIODS

1. Education at the End of the Shogunate

When we search for the origins of Japan's modern national education, the influence of Western education is most obvious. The speed with which the influence of Western thought penetrated into this country after the opening of the port cities and the rise of the new Civilization and Enlightenment (*Bunmeikaika*) sentiment in the early Meiji era was remarkable. Thus it seemed to many that modern education developed solely as a result of Western influence and completely independent of traditional Japanese educational ideals.

Yet on closer examination, we can recognize that the content of Japan's modern education was not one and the same with that of the West. The long historical process through the Edo (or Tokugawa) period generated a distinctively Japanese style of life and thought, which was destined to have a profound influence on the development of modern educational institutions.

Moreover, the high level of national culture and education that Japan achieved during the Edo period proved an important resource in the nation's bold effort to achieve rapid modernization. Thus it is of special importance that we examine this educational heritage.

One distinctive feature of the feudal society of the Edo period was the traditional stratification of classes into samurai, farmers, artisans and merchants with an especially strict distinction made between the samurai and the remaining strata. This fact colored the entirety of social and cultural life in the Edo period. In the area of education, distinctive schools were developed for each strata — the fief schools (*hankō* or *hangaku*) for the samurai and the *terakoya* for the commoners — and it is to these we first turn. As we shall see, toward the end of the Edo period, this dualistic educational system had already begun to crumble.

(1) Education within Samurai Families

The samurai families of the Edo period not only used education to stabilize their own position but also came to

further the cause of learning, especially through the systematized teaching of literary studies. Initially, the fief lords (*daimyō*), in order to further their own personal cultivation and, in turn, to maintain control of their fief governments, summoned Confucian scholars and military specialists (*heigaku-sha*) to conduct lectures which their chief vassals were required to attend. The fief lords also encouraged learning for the lesser vassals and urged the cultivation of literary accomplishments along with the practice of martial arts. Learning during this period, being based upon Shogunal policy, was thoroughly imbued with Confucian thought. Samurai families originally availed themselves of the services of priests in Buddhist temples for their education. But by the Edo period, this class began to employ Confucian scholars to act as preceptors in fief schools they founded in the castle towns. During the early days of the Edo period, only a few fiefs had established fief schools but from about the middle of this period onward the spread of such institutions increased rapidly, culminating in a total of some 270 schools at the end of the period.

The *Shōheizaka Gakumonjo*, alternately called the *Shōheikō*, under the direct control of the Shogunate at Edo, became the highest seat of learning in its time as well as a model for all the other fief schools. The original institution was the training center of the Confucian temple (*kōshibyō*) which had been established on a site at Ueno in Edo by a Confucian scholar of the Chu Hsi school, Hayashi Razan (1583–1657), under the auspices of the Shogunal government. Later this was relocated at Yushima, where an Athenaeum was constructed known as the Yushima Temple. This school started first as a semiprivate, semigovernmental organization under the protection of the Shogunate. It was not long, however, before the government recognized the necessity of direct control over these educational facilities and in 1797 the school was brought under the immediate supervision of the central authorities.

The school prospered from that time not only as the nucleus of education for the Shogunate but as the highest center of learning in the nation as well, a position it maintained until the decline of the Shogunate's authority and the development of Western learning. During the Edo period, this school acted as a model for other fief schools. Many fief governments established their fief schools along this model and also sent their brightest youths there for training. Many of those who completed their studies at the *Shōheizaka Gakumonjo* were engaged at fief schools as Confucian scholars. Thus besides enjoying the highest

scholastic reputation in the land, the *Shōheizaka Gakumonjo* also served as a training ground for instructors assuming positions in fief schools. In addition to the Chinese-oriented *Shōheizaka Gakumonjo*, other government institutions included the National Learning-oriented *Wagaku Kōdanjo* and the *Igakukan* which was devoted to the study of traditional Chinese medicine. Toward the end of Edo period, various centers for the study of Western learning were also established as we shall see below.

Many schools which originally had been private institutions for Chinese studies (*kangakujuku*) came under the control of the fiefs and were enlarged and reorganized to form fief schools. Their curriculum was gradually expanded — in addition to Chinese studies National Learning and other subjects were introduced and toward the end of the Edo period Western learning and medicine were also offered. At the same time, the trend toward military subjects grew more pronounced, and thus in the fief schools there arose a special relationship between literary studies and martial arts.

By the close of the Shogunate the fief schools provided a comprehensive education for the samurai class. Instruction was centered about Chinese classics. This meant studies in Confucian doctrine and the history and literature of China. Elementary classes used the Primer of Chinese Characters (*Senjimon*) for practicing calligraphy and the Brief History of Japan (*Sanjikyō*) for practice in reading. Other elementary textbooks that were frequently used included the Book of Filial Piety (*Kōkyō*), the Book of Manners (*Shōgaku*), and the Collection of Chu Hsi's Sayings. Others were the Four Books (*Shisho*): 1) Great Learning (*Daigaku*), 2) Doctrine of the Mean (*Chūyō*), 3) Confucian Analects (*Rongo*), and 4) Sayings of Mencius (*Mōshi*); and the Five Canons (*Gokyō*): 1) Book of Changes (*Ekikyō*); 2) Book of Odes (*Shikyō*); 3) Book of Annals (*Shokyō*), 4) Spring and Autumn (*Shunjū*), and 5) Record of Rites (*Raiki*).

Hayashi Nobuatsu (1644—1732), a grand son of Hayashi Razan and also a Confucian scholar of the Chu Hsi school, was appointed by the government as Rector of the *Shōheizaka Gakumonjo* (*Daigakunokami*) and from that time on the successive heads of the Hayashi family were appointed to that post until the fall of the Shogunate, making the *Shōheizaka Gakumonjo* a vehicle for the ascendance of Chu Hsi Confucianism. At the same time various other schools of Confucian thought developed during the early Edo period and quite