

Learning to Be Japanese

日本人であるために

LEARNING
TO BE
JAPANESE

*Selected Readings
on Japanese Society and Education*

Edited by
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Dedicated to
Kevin Kenji Beauchamp
and his classmates at Osawa-Dai Primary School
in Mitaka, Japan

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PREFACE

This collection of readings grew out of my own frustrations in trying to find appropriate readings for students in my classes and seminars dealing with education in Japan. I have assigned most of the articles included in this volume to my students, and they have found them to be useful.

As in any collection of readings, there are some materials that I would have liked to include, but was unable to do so because of problems of length, securing the necessary permissions, etc. Despite these problems, however, I feel that this book contains a representative sample of useful materials on the most important dimensions of Japanese education—past and present.

I would like to thank the authors and publishers who have granted permission to reproduce their work. I am sure that they share with me the hope that this volume will, in a modest way, help to encourage the study of Japanese education in the United States and in other western countries.

E. R. B.

Honolulu, Hawaii

INTRODUCTION

In the decades since the end of World War II, Japan has played an increasingly important role in the consciousness of the Western world. Her economic miracle—really not a miracle at all, but based on hard work, self-sacrifice and generous American economic assistance—has won the grudging respect of most of the world. From Mazda to Minolta and Toyota to Toshiba, her products are found in virtually every corner of the world. Less than thirty years after the war, a former Japanese prime minister was the recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, and a Japanese novelist the winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature. On a more prosaic level, Japanese restaurants are commonly found throughout most of the Western world, and one can view Japanese films and art exhibits in all but the most provincial parts of the world.

Most Americans concede that regardless of how one defines it, Japan is the first (and only) non-Western nation to achieve modernity. At least one American, futurist Herman Kahn of the Hudson Institute, predicted that the twenty-first century will be “Japan’s Century.” What many Americans do not realize, however, is that Japan’s modernity was not achieved full bloom during the period following the Pacific War (as the Japanese refer to World War II), but that its roots extend to at least the days of the Meiji Restoration (1868–1912), and

in the case of educational modernity, to the earlier Tokugawa Period (1603–1868).

Although disagreeing on the details, most social scientists and historians generally recognize the important role played by education in the process of modernization, and it is widely acknowledged that education played a particularly important role in the Japanese experience. In fact, one can cogently argue that an understanding of the Japanese educational experience is necessary for an informed view of Japan's past and, perhaps to a greater extent, her present and future.

It must be emphasized that education is not used here merely as a synonym for schooling. As Bernard Bailyn has argued in his seminal study of the historiography of American education, one should conceive of education "not only as formal pedagogy, but the entire process by which a culture transmits itself across generations."¹ The articles in this collection of readings reflect this definition and, therefore, do not deal exclusively with schools but touch upon other ways in which people learn, and have learned, to be Japanese.

The time span covered is approximately the last century, although one contribution, by Professor Ronald Dore, reaches back into the Tokugawa Period to point out the beginnings of literacy long before intrusion of the West upon Japan's consciousness. The approach is dual, historical, and sociological. Part I deals with historical data although much of that data is informed by sociological insight. Part II provides an overview of some of the more important dimensions of contemporary Japanese education and Part III summarizes some possible future directions. Each of the sections is preceded by a brief introduction. There is a selected bibliography designed to help the interested reader find more detailed information on topics of particular interest. In brief, this collection of readings has been compiled as an educational tool to assist students of Japanese history, society, politics, and education better understand her fascinating past and her important contemporary directions.

1. Bernard Bailyn. *Education in the Forming of American Society*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961, page 14.

Part I

The Roots of Contemporary Japanese Education

This section focuses on education during Japan's pre-Western Tokugawa Period (1603–1868) and the Meiji Period (1868–1912) in which Japan began her rapid development into a world power. For many years the weight of Western scholarship viewed the Tokugawa era as a kind of Eastern "Dark Ages" characterized by little or no educational activity of major significance. A major turning point in the Western view of Tokugawa education was the 1965 publication of Professor Ronald Dore's monograph, *Education in Tokugawa Japan*. Professor Dore paints a detailed and vivid picture of the extent and variety of Japanese education during the two-and-one-half centuries preceding the Meiji Restoration. He concludes that "without the traditions, the teachers, the buildings and the established attitudes of the Tokugawa period the development of the new [Meiji educational] system could never have been accomplished as fast as it was and almost without central government subsidy." It comes as a great surprise to many that the literacy rate during the late Tokugawa period was at least as high as that of contemporary England. This, then, helps to explain

how Japan was able to move into the ranks of the world's most powerful nations so quickly.

The arrival of Commodore Matthew C. Perry's "black fleet" off Japan's shores in 1853 set in motion a train of events that led her leaders to conclude that Japan would have to use Western knowledge and technology in what some scholars have described as a strategy of "defensive modernization." Japanese leaders and, to a significant extent, the Japanese masses reacted in a positive way to the Western influx in the 1870s.

The early Meiji fascination with Western technology, which some may describe as a fetish, took two forms: the sending of selected students abroad for study, and the importing of skilled foreign employees (*yatoi*) to Japan to teach the Japanese the secrets of Western power and success. Several thousand of these *yatoi* worked in all kinds of jobs, from agriculture to geology and from education to shipbuilding. Professor Edward Beauchamp offers a colorful case study of one of the earliest of these *yatoi* to arrive in Japan, William Elliot Griffis of Philadelphia. Griffis, an ambitious and talented young man, was later the author of numerous books and articles on Japan, the most noteworthy of which was *The Mikado's Empire* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1876) which went through twelve editions by 1912. Professor Beauchamp outlines Griffis' experiences—educational and personal—during his ten-month sojourn in the interior castle town of Fukui, as well as his impact on the Japanese with whom he came into contact.

It is clear that the Western educational impact on Japan during the early Meiji period was substantial, in part because a solid intellectual groundwork had been laid during the earlier Tokugawa era, and in part because the Meiji oligarchs recognized that Japan needed to acquire Western science and technology in order to protect herself from possible colonization. In an excellent case study, "Inoue Kawashi, 1843–1895, and the Formation of Modern Japan," Father Joseph Pittau describes how during "the late seventies and early eighties . . . the tempo of change slowed down, and the Meiji leaders set themselves the task of consolidating the new system . . . [and] strove to establish not just a

modern state along western lines but a modern *Japanese* state.”

Education is a tool used, to a greater or lesser degree, by all modern governments to further their ideological and political goals. It appears that as a general rule, the more extreme a government’s ideological position, the greater the degree of control that it exerts over the educational system and the greater the ideological content of that system. Certainly the Japan of the period leading to World War II fits this model.

Professor Wilbur Fridell’s article deals with some of the roots of this phenomenon in his study of ethics textbooks used in the late Meiji period. He analyzes the contents of these textbooks, designed to inculcate correct ethical values into the youth of the Imperial Japanese Empire, through various editions and concludes that the 1910 edition marks a watershed. This edition, he argues, not only clearly reflected the principles of the Meiji Constitution (1889) and the Imperial Rescript on Education (1890), but also “set a tone, and developed certain basic themes, which greatly influenced later revisions.” Thus, when Japanese militarists and ultranationalists took over the reigns of government in the 1930s, their “leaders had only to expand on the foundation laid.”

As we are being increasingly reminded today, not all education takes place in the schoolroom. Professor Richard Smethurst offers persuasive evidence of this in his contribution on “The Army, Youth, and Women,” in which he describes the “military education networks” established in prewar Japan to complement and supplement the public schools in fostering attitudes and values deemed appropriate to Japanese society. His story is a fascinating account of little known organizations such as those of reservists, youth, and women, all of which played an important role in socialization for nationalism prior to Japan’s 1937 invasion of China. Professor Smethurst demonstrates how this network systematically shaped an obedient rural population to support the policy of the militarists. It is an excellent example of what educators today call nonformal education.

The army was also active in socializing its troops to wil-

lingly accept the imperatives of the task at hand. In her contribution, Professor Tsurumi Kazuko provides a detailed account of what she vividly describes as “Socialization for Death.” Enlivened by excerpts from diaries of soldiers and marines who experienced the process, Professor Tsurumi enables us to better understand the determined resistance, often verging on fanaticism, of Japanese troops in the Pacific War.

One of the most striking lacunae in the study of Japanese education is the period of the American Occupation. For many years the only materials available were either official government documents or personal accounts of various phases of the Occupation written by participants. A hopeful sign that this gap will soon be narrowed can be seen in the beginnings of a trickle of articles and bibliographical materials on generalized aspects of the Occupation. When scholars begin to seriously examine the political and economic consequences of the period, the study of its educational consequences cannot be far behind.

The American Occupation (1945–1952) was one of history’s most serious attempts at large-scale social engineering. Its supporters saw it as an idealistic attempt by the United States to transform Japan from an aggressive militaristic power into a peace-loving member of the international community. Critics, on the other hand, charged that it was nothing more than an opportunistic attempt to reshape a defeated and devastated Japan into an anti-Communist satellite of American imperialism.

Probably the single best short study of the educational dimensions of the Occupation is the thoughtful essay of Professor Victor Kobayashi, “Japan Under American Occupation.” Professor Kobayashi, a specialist on Japanese education, traces the major educational changes which occurred during this period, and describes how these reforms attempted to make operational the twin concepts of democratization and demilitarization. Regardless of American motives in Japan, the result has clearly been an American dominance of Japanese educational practices since 1945, or, as Kobayashi remarks, “There are amazing similarities between the present curricula of Japan and the U.S.”