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History

The greatest innovation in the world is the demand for education as a right of man; it is a disguised demand for comfort.

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UNIVERSAL compulsory education encompassing the youth of whole nations is a recent development. Schools have existed for a much longer time than school systems, and learning and teaching presumably have been part of human society since its origins. Ancient Rome and Greece had schools, as did China and India. Plato and Confucius were schoolteachers. But their schools were not part of large public bureaucracies. Only after the creation of nation states, the assumption of power by secular authorities, and the rise of industrial production did compulsory education gain acceptance in Europe. Publicly run and financed schools open to all children were then defined as necessary to the realization of many cherished social ambitions. It was a short step from that point to an education based on merit, certification, testing, and all the rest. What in 1860 was a revolutionary notion, widely resisted in the most advanced nations, within a century became an institution that is taken for granted as much as are taxes and public welfare.

Japan did not begin to establish the machinery of a modern nation state until 1868, and yet her leaders accomplished the process of institution building in a relatively short time.¹ By the turn of the cen-

1. General histories in English of Japanese education include Passin (1965), Kaigo (1968), Anderson (1975), and Kobayashi (1978).

ture, most children were enrolled in elementary schools, giving Japan the distinction of having quickly equaled the West in the spread of public education. This distinction was of dubious merit at first, however, because the rapid creation of public elementary schools, at a rate of over three thousand per year from 1870 to 1880, was not accompanied by extensive teacher training.² Fewer than 20 percent of the teachers in 1880 had any formal training in the use of the radically new textbooks and methods that the Ministry of Education hurriedly produced. The institutional apparatus of a modern system of education was established quickly, but the content of education developed slowly. In terms of devotion to education, degree of popular involvement, and importance of learning to adult success, traditional Japan was at least traditional Europe's equal. But the cultures were different. Before 1868, Japanese educational practice was very different from that in the West, and in the course of its development during the past century some of its distinctive character has remained.

A system of education can be profoundly modern in its public mandate and its embrace of an entire population, yet the echoes of legacy can be heard daily in schools and classrooms. The lower in the institution one goes, the more likely it is that one will encounter the flow of cultural continuity.

Japan's alternate seclusion from and warm embrace of foreign influence is a basic element of her cultural history, and it helps explain why her educational legacy is remarkably rich and varied. No other modern system has experienced more outside influence or undergone more radical transformations. Consider the following synopsis: 1) Before 1870, the influence of Confucian models of schooling, largely imported from China, prevailed;³ 2) with the creation of compulsory public schooling in 1872, European influence came to dominate the newly established national system; 3) frequent shifts in the use of Western nations as models led to a surprising eclecticism within the pattern of borrowing;⁴ 4) sponsored by a surging nationalism and by reaction to foreign influence, a prolonged search for a more Japanese kind of education based on tradition and Jap-

2. Kaigo (1968).

3. See J. W. Hall (1959) and Dore (1965).

4. I. P. Hall (1973) offers a lucid account of this era.

anese uniqueness began in the 1880s.⁵ This culminated in the late 1930s, with the ascension of nativism and militarism.⁶ 5) All of this was abruptly reversed in 1945, when the victorious Americans “democratized” Japanese education using the American model;⁷ 6) the Americans left in 1952, and a prolonged shaking out of and adjustment to the American-imposed system began.⁸ 7) The astounding economic growth and social change that marked the postwar period transformed education once more.⁹ As industrial output grew at a rate faster than any country had ever experienced, higher education became the ambition of most Japanese families, and the percentage of persons graduating from high school jumped from under 40 percent in 1950 to 90 percent by 1975. The five high schools considered herein have emerged from this history.

The term “traditional” can easily be misleading if it implies an undifferentiated past, and yet from history must be gleaned and condensed that which is significant to the present. Japan has a long history, and almost from the beginning of recorded events there are references to schooling and education. It should be no surprise that, over the course of twelve hundred years, numerous approaches and various types of schools emphasizing distinct educational ambitions and values have developed. The focus here will be on the three most immediate legacies: education in the Tokugawa, the prewar, and the occupation eras. None of these approaches totally replaced its predecessor as time progressed; rather, the transformations involved much mixing and accumulation. Today’s high schools mirror elements of all three legacies.

The Tokugawa Pattern

From 1600 until 1868, when Japan was opened to the West, a particular prosperous kind of feudal society developed. Throughout this

5. Dore (1964), I. P. Hall (1973), and Roden (1980).

6. See Murthy (1973) and R. K. Hall (1949, 1949a).

7. General Headquarters for the Supreme Commander, Allied Powers (hereafter, GHQ) (1948), Gayn (1948), R. K. Hall (1949), Kawai (1960), Anderson (1975), and Lee (1974).

8. Passin (1965), Nagai (1971), Duke (1973), Thurston (1973), Lee (1974), Anderson (1975), Kobayashi (1978), Kaigo (1968), and Friedman (1977).

9. Lee (1974), Yamamura and Hanley (1975), Rohlen (1977), Kobayashi (1978), and Cummings (1980).

Tokugawa period, the country was at peace. The rulers were samurai warriors turned bureaucrats. Cities prospered, and their populations of tradesmen and merchants grew. Agriculture and trade flourished, and Japanese culture experienced a rich development and diversification. Many schools—more than in any previous period—were established, some to serve the needs of the warrior class, others for the urban merchant class, and some even for farmers' children. It is estimated that by 1850, at least one-quarter of the population was literate, a sign of the extent of educational development and, incidentally, an accomplishment that put Japan on a par with the leading countries of Europe at the time.¹⁰

Governments—that is, the many separate feudal authorities (*daimyo*) that ruled sections of the country—set up *fief* (*han*) schools to educate the sons of samurai families for more effective service in their administrations. The military arts were an important part of the curriculum, but following the lead of the Tokugawa shogun's own official school, Confucian studies were the centerpiece.

Because these official schools for samurai were the most influential of the period, they must be considered in some detail.¹¹ Their basic rationale lay in the notion that education would produce virtuous and ethical administrators who by their proper conduct and example would order society and cause it to flourish. This is an idea at the very heart of Confucian thought, and it appealed strongly to the Tokugawa shogun and feudal lords seeking effective government. Confucian studies achieved a number of needed changes simultaneously. The samurai were made more civilized and skilled as administrators. The new political order was provided with an overarching ideology that supported the established order and authority. Proper behavior in the key feudal relations and between classes and within fundamental institutions was codified following Confucian prescriptions.

The basic metaphor of the Confucian moral system is the proper family: correctly ordered by differences of function and authority, with filial piety the central virtue, the family is the model for society as a whole. Translated into the feudal arrangements of the time, this meant that loyalty and obedience of subordinate to su-

10. Ono (1979).

11. This section draws substantially on J. W. Hall (1959), Dore (1965), Passin (1965), Kaigo (1968), and I. P. Hall (1973).

perior was made the highest moral virtue. Relations throughout society were described by a rigorous application of hierarchical distinctions, and the lord-retainer relationship had both real and symbolic prominence.¹²

How was this realized in educational practice? Fief schools, by their very existence, expressed the connection between study and service to the lord and domain. Study was an important duty. Daimyo had Confucian tutors and ceremonially paid their humble respects to the reigning ideology. In the Confucian approach to education, correctly ordered conduct was emphasized as it expressed and embodied the correct relations and attitudes at the foundation of a harmonious society. Formality and hierarchy were thus stressed, and ceremonies and school etiquette were attended to in detail. At school, reading and writing were mastered in the process of memorizing the Confucian classics. Teachers lectured on the implications of the classics for proper conduct as a samurai. The crucial emphasis was thus on moral education, with the classics as guides and daily conduct in the school as the mirror. Accordingly, authority was properly strict, and elaborate sets of rules were created to help translate moral ideas into practice. Given the Confucian idea of government, moral education was vocational training for young samurai.

We are not considering a philosophy so much as an orthodoxy in speaking of the Confucian learning in these schools. Learning was the process of submitting to and mastering the wisdom of the sages. Early in the Tokugawa period, a sharp and intellectually profound debate had developed between Confucian scholars over the meaning and relative weight of the classics; heterodoxy was banned by official decree, and only one correct way of understanding the Confucian heritage was permitted. Thus, learning was not built on the assumption that knowledge awaits discovery. Truth was known and was contained in the classic tradition. Scholars still discreetly debated their interpretations, but for students there was only right or wrong in learning the meaning and significance of the classics. Debate focused on the applications of classical wisdom to specific issues of policy, but this debate was for teachers and administrators, and it was conducted across domains rather than within them. The correct attitude for students was serious humility. Respect was a key

12. On Japanese Confucianism, see esp. Maruyama (1974), Najita (1974), and Najita and Scheiner (1978).

symbol of Confucian virtue. Diligence and good attendance were recognized as often as intellectual brilliance. Independence of thought was not regularly rewarded or encouraged.

For Japan, the study of the Chinese language has been much like the study of Latin in Europe. During early periods of Japan's history, in a pattern remarkably similar to her more recent borrowing from the West, Chinese culture received great prominence, and its mastery became a source of authority. Formal schools centered largely on Chinese learning, and teaching the classics could become excessively formal and antiquarian. Teachers were often stiff, and their subjects were far from practical, yet Chinese learning remained a basic ingredient of Japanese education for a millennium. "The more difficult and agonizing a subject, the greater its mystique and authority": this adage still seems to fit the Japanese approach to formal education. With its eternal enthusiasm for form and correctness, the complex rules of Chinese composition and the vast corpus of its literature to be memorized constituted a particular challenge to mental discipline that set a pattern still in practice.

Yet reactions to the excesses of sinophilism also highlighted such "Japanese" qualities as unadorned simplicity, spontaneity of emotions, and a primordial closeness to nature.

Mornings spent with the books were generally followed by afternoons spent practicing military skills. A balance between the two was considered ideal. Fencing and other martial arts relied on action and were viewed as corrective to the pedantic tendencies of Confucian book learning. The martial arts were also seen as essentially Japanese, in contrast to scholarship, which tended to worship Chinese examples. A self-satisfied reliance on scholarly abilities, it was feared, could lead to dissoluteness of character, which physical training would remedy. The formalism and cerebral qualities of scholarship have always had their detractors in Japan, especially when foreign learning is in the ascendancy.

But Chinese and native thinking did merge in one crucial area of education: the development of individual character. Both took human nature to be inherently good and perfectible. The source of personal development was "spiritual," that is, the individual's spirit (his will and fortitude, for example) could be strengthened and made more mature (in wisdom, patience, and so on) through rigorous

training and difficult experiences.¹³ The child, weak and ignorant because of blind preoccupation with itself and its needs, could learn to become the perfected adult capable of fulfilling social obligations with selfless spontaneity, and capable of comprehending the true interdependent nature of the universe with objective clarity. Strict training would produce this spiritual maturity, a key ingredient of the ideal Confucian governor. Ultimately, spiritual development was thought to lead to mystical realms of enlightenment. Both book learning and the martial arts were understood to contribute to spiritual growth, especially when they involved hard work, challenge, and rigorous discipline. Pleasure, however natural it is for humans to seek, could not contribute to spiritual growth.

The influence of the teacher's example and guidance in this process of character building was important. Between outstanding teachers and their students, a master-disciple relationship developed that was often lifelong. Good teachers showed the way through their own conduct; and knowing from experience the path to maturity, they could calibrate the right balance between forcing their students forward and offering consolation and understanding. Because character development was so central, many saw actions as more important than words. Anecdotes about a teacher's life were often more revered than his remarks in class, and much teaching centered on the examination or discussion of concrete examples of behavior. In this manner external formalism was linked to internal mysticism.

The formal and scholarly mode of orthodox Confucian learning and the bureaucracy of the larger fief schools caused many of the more independent teachers to establish their own small private schools (*shijuku*).¹⁴ Teachers and students shared a simple, pure existence—eating, studying, training, and bathing together. Often the students were boarders in their teacher's home, sharing his entire life. The teacher was like a parent and the senior students like elder brothers, creating a discipleship with a close-knit group of followers. As in actual families, the true character of the teacher radiated throughout the life of the school.¹⁵ All experience was part of education, and the whole person was engaged in the educational pro-

13. The classic statement of this attitude in English is Nitobe (1905).

14. See Jansen (1961), Dore (1965), Bellah (1957), Passin (1965), and Kaigo (1968).

15. Jansen (1961) is particularly useful as a description of this pattern.

cess. This intimate setting for rigorous learning defines a primitive ideal that is still quite alive.

Schools for townsmen and farmers also grew rapidly in the Tokugawa period. Small, private, and focused on the practical skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic, these schools enjoyed such popularity in the cities that there and in the more prosperous regions of the country some half of all children attended them. The children were sent for practical reasons—for the added status that literacy brought and for the moral lessons offered. The virtues of persistence, equanimity, frugality, and meticulousness were emphasized as of both moral and practical worth.¹⁶

It is true that nineteenth-century Western educational values were in some respects close to the Confucian approach. Restraint, moral rectitude, and character development were of great concern to many European and American educators, and only with the secularization of education in recent times have these matters faded in significance. In this regard, Japanese and Western schooling may well have diverged rather than converged in character between 1870 and 1945, for secularization in Japan did not undermine Confucian morality as greatly as it did the Christian approach. Because Confucianism was not a religion of faith, but of governmental orthodoxy, it was not as vulnerable to the rise of science and other trends that eliminated religion from the public domain. Secularization, the victory of utilitarianism in social thought, carried the West along a new tangent at an especially swift pace.

The Prewar Pattern

In 1868, the feudal system was overthrown and a national government was established in the name of the Meiji emperor. This government set out to modernize Japanese society so it could withstand the threat of foreign imperialism. The principle of universal compulsory education was established in 1872, at a time when class distinctions were being abolished and a new nation's young leadership was forcing the entire population toward national development. Education was to produce loyal subjects capable of generating industrial and military strength.

16. Bellah (1957).

The shadows of Perry's black ships hung over the birth of the new school system, which was based on the two hundred fifty or so fief schools and many of the existing forty thousand commoner schools. But ambitions ran far ahead of resources, and the development of secondary and vocational schools proceeded much more slowly. By 1907 the length of compulsory education had been extended from its original four years to six years, and by 1935 all students were attending school for at least eight years. Japan had already caught up with the West in this respect.¹⁷

The extension of education within the population was inexorable, but up until World War II several major shifts of direction occurred in basic policy. During the 1870s, foreign influence was extraordinarily powerful. Foreign advisors and teachers were employed in large numbers; the new official textbooks were largely mindless translations of borrowed Western texts; and the official curriculum and pedagogy were modeled on foreign practice. Japan's leaders, admiring Western technology and learning, made a radical effort to create national strength and a modern society through universal education.¹⁸

But most Japanese teachers understood little of what they were to teach, and many parents reacted against the sudden imposition of a foreign and often incomprehensible system of education. Such ludicrous developments as elementary school pupils intoning a Japanese translation of McGuffey's reader as if it were a Buddhist sutra were not unheard of in the first years. No wonder schools were often targets of popular riots against the government in the 1870s.

Reaction to the extremes of foreign influence surfaced in the 1880s, and a search was begun to recapture valuable elements of the Tokugawa legacy.¹⁹ The content of education progressively became more nationalistic and focused on national needs. The reaction did not undo the institutional foundations laid in the 1870s, but it re-focused attention on moral issues. The Ministry of Education set out to clearly establish: 1) Japanese morality and values as equally significant to Western science and technology, and 2) Japanese social loyalties and practices as basic to the new system of education. Both

17. Passin (1965), Kaigo (1968), Kobayashi (1978), and Anderson (1975).

18. I. P. Hall (1973) is the best source in English on this period.

19. See Shively (1959), I. P. Hall (1973), Pyle (1969), and Roden (1980) for details.

were encapsulated in the Imperial Rescript of Education (1890), which became the guiding inspiration for public schools until 1945:

Our Imperial Ancestors have founded Our Empire on a basis broad and everlasting, and have deeply and firmly implanted virtue; Our subjects ever united in loyalty and filial piety have from generation to generation illustrated the beauty thereof. This is the glory of the fundamental character of Our Empire, and herein also lies the source of our education. Yet, Our subjects, be filial to your parents, affectionate to your brothers and sisters; as husbands and wives be harmonious, as friends be true; bear yourselves in modesty and moderation; extend your benevolence to all; pursue learning and cultivate arts, and thereby develop intellectual faculties and perfect moral powers; furthermore, advance public good and promote common interests; always respect the Constitution and observe the laws; should emergency arise, offer yourselves courageously to the State; and thus guard and maintain the prosperity of Our Imperial Throne coeval with heaven and earth. So shall ye not only be our good and faithful subjects but render illustrious the best traditions of your forefathers.²⁰

In essence, the Confucian teachings of the Tokugawa period, briefly abandoned, were thus emphatically reinstated as a means of anchoring the new education culturally and making it an instrument of legitimation and support for the political institutions of the state. Because the Meiji emperor was the official source of this new direction in his role as provider of moral guidance for the country, both intentions were reinforced. He was Japan's crucial link to the past and the center of all legitimacy and authority. Schools thus enshrined the state's highest values, old and new. Reverence for both Western learning and Eastern morality were combined around the ultimate concerns of ordering and strengthening the young nation.

Japan's leaders, trained in fief schools themselves, traveled abroad and discovered in France, Germany, England, and the United States which educational ideas would suit their purposes.²¹ From France they borrowed the system of centralized national authority and a strong emphasis on state-run normal schools; from Germany was drawn a system of higher education built around a few elite public universities; England provided a foreign example (in schools like Rugby) of Spartan character building through athletics and moral

20. Passin (1965) contains various other important documents in Japanese educational history.

21. I. P. Hall (1973) contains fascinating details.

discipline; and from the United States they borrowed many practical pedagogical techniques and an interest in vocational training. Student uniforms, Western art and music, science and mathematics curricula, considerations of school architecture, the use of desks and blackboards, and hundreds of other details were imported and retained. All of this was combined with an essentially Confucian outlook and a nationalistic set of goals.

Morality was put symbolically at the top of the curriculum. The essential character of teaching retained many similarities with Tokugawa practice. It was one thing to import textbooks, altogether another to import the intangibles of teacher attitudes and behavior. Initially, teachers were largely from the samurai class, and they set down a pattern of behavior that centered on devotion to duty, exemplary personal conduct, considerable independence of style, firm authority, and personal involvement with their students. They were employees of the emperor's national government and in the vanguard of the effort to modernize Japan, and their status thus remained high despite the bureaucratization of education. Teachers trained in the new subjects were considered among the most enlightened in comprehending the nature of the modern Western world. Isolation had ended abruptly for Japan, and the cadre of newly trained teachers were often viewed as shepherds guiding the population from one world to the next. Self-righteous, misguided, and pompous activities like those to which zealous missionaries are liable were also part of the image of the teacher.

The government's new normal schools sought to preserve and standardize traditional and modern ideals. By 1890, normal school training was quite demanding, and the students attracted to these schools were of high quality. The imprint of the national government's will was clear, both in the development of a standard approach to curriculum and in the intensity with which these colleges tried to develop teachers of character and moral leadership. A critical instrument in the second effort was the establishment of a military mode in the extracurricular affairs of the normal schools. Regular army officers were assigned to put into place physical education programs that included military drills, and they established rigorous discipline in the life of the schools. Army officers came to exemplify loyal patriotism for future teachers. Mori Arinori, the minister of education who sponsored this development in 1885, explained:

The things we hope to achieve by means of this training are three: first to instill—with the sense of urgency possessed by actual soldiers—those habits of obedience which are appropriate in the classroom. Secondly, as you know, soldiers are always formed into squads, each squad possessing its own leader who devotes himself, heart and mind and soul, to the welfare of his group. And thirdly, every company has its commanding officer who controls and supervises it, and who must comport himself with dignity. By the same token our students, by trading off the roles of common soldier, squad leader and commanding officer, will build up the traits of character appropriate to each of these three roles.²²

A subtle shift from Tokugawa practice, but one of great consequence, must be noted here. The modern school system was on a new scale and required extensive bureaucratic regulation. Previously, a teacher's authority had rested largely on the respect and affection of his students, but under the new system it became a matter of training and decree. Intimacy was less certain, and the respect for a largely foreign subject matter was less reliable. Mori's intentions were to rectify these problems by providing admirable teachers who knew how to create a rule-governed order, and he set in motion a trend that by the 1930s had led to the assignment of military officers not just to normal schools but to all public schools. Military attitudes and practices were thus extended from the drill fields to the classrooms and into the very heart of many schools.

Such extreme developments had not been planned, and their major causes lay outside the Ministry of Education in the general political climate. All the same, the creation of a national system of education and the introduction of a largely foreign curriculum were too much for a population to swallow within a decade or two. Meiji Japan as a whole was quite unstable because of the rapid changes taking place, and reaction to the foreign direction of cultural change was to be expected. That foreign ideas were seen as destabilizing, and that stability was sought in traditional values, was to be expected. Yet the Tokugawa educational emphases on character, duty, and social harmony were no longer as readily tempered by the humanism of student-teacher intimacy once mass education had been instituted. A manipulative bureaucracy clearly had unlimited opportunities under conditions of rising nationalism to nudge public edu-

22. *Ibid.*, p. 427.

cation toward authoritarian and militaristic practices in the name of strengthening the nation and preserving its heritage.

Today all of this is much-regretted history, of course, but the basic political issues have hardly disappeared. The ambiguity felt about the contradictions between Western and Japanese culture remains. So does the issue of the role of public education in the social order. The two issues intertwine, because in emphasizing Western (utilitarian) or Confucian ethical values, schools are in fact teaching political behavior. This is true of schools in every nation, of course, but acutely so in Japan, where the Tokugawa heritage and Western thought have been pushed close together in education. Other Japanese institutions clearly favor one or the other.

Between the broad national ambitions of compulsory education and the advanced, specialized work of universities lay the less clearly defined territory of secondary schooling. The Meiji government in 1872 proposed a plan for creating secondary or middle schools that would bridge the considerable gap between elementary and higher education. These schools were to be neither compulsory nor directed to a large segment of the populace. They were explicitly designed to offer a general preparation for entering elite universities. Thus, at their inception, Japan's secondary schools were subordinated to the goal of university entrance.²³

Numerous early shifts occurred in the details of middle school design, but it was finally settled that each prefecture would have one "ordinary" boys' middle school, and the nation would initially have five "higher" middle schools. Most graduates of the latter would step directly into the imperial universities. The ordinary middle schools were the precursors of today's high schools. They offered five years of courses and followed six years of compulsory schooling and two years of upper elementary education, making them equivalent to grades nine to fourteen.

Being few in number, the ordinary middle schools were viewed as elite institutions. This impression was reinforced by the inclination of school authorities to facilitate entry for the children of the upper classes. Because the new prefectures followed the lines of Tokugawa feudal domains, the new middle schools were readily equated with the former domain schools. At the prefectural level, the points of

23. Kaigo (1968), and I. P. Hall (1973).

continuity from Tokugawa into Meiji also included many faculty members, the expectation of public service from the best graduates, and the general close ties to government.

The five higher middle schools, equivalent to modern universities in most respects, were oriented to the national level. They were the epitome of the elite track, as only the most outstanding graduates of the ordinary middle schools gained admission. Only higher middle school graduates advanced to the imperial universities, whose graduates were virtually assured positions of national authority and prestige later in life. Naturally, the greatest competition to advance upward focused on entrance examinations to the ordinary and higher middle schools. From the beginning, entrance exams and career ambitions were closely tied together.²⁴

The curricula of the middle schools were broad and academically rigorous: they included ethics, language, Chinese classics, a first and second foreign language, agriculture, geography, history, mathematics, natural science, physics, chemistry, calligraphy, art, poetry, and physical education. Initially, foreign instructors were employed to teach some of these subjects. Lafcadio Hearn and a number of other Westerners known for their deep involvement with Japan formed their initial acquaintance with the country as teachers in these middle schools.

Vocational subjects, both technical and commercial, were added as electives by late in the century, but middle schools did not evolve in a pragmatic direction. There was no need to do so. Although most graduates of ordinary middle schools (80 percent, in fact) did not advance to universities in the nineteenth century, most nevertheless aimed at higher education. Failing entrance, they still found excellent employment. Government and business organizations sought general managerial talent from the ordinary middle schools, for their graduates represented the top 10 percent of the nation's young men.

A simple but powerful formula that has dominated Japanese secondary education ever since was thus established: the difficulty of a school's entrance exams is the crucial measure of its students' talent. Employers chose to let this criterion of school reputation, rather than an individual's grades or subjects studied, guide their selection

24. Spaulding (1967).

of personnel for managerial jobs. Entrance exams thus became the route to success. For the upper and middle classes, it was the practical way to the best jobs, whether the subjects studied ever proved practical or not. The formula has not changed in a hundred years.

Middle schools were only for boys, an assumption that came very easily to the Meiji mind. It was consistent with tradition and with the deeply rooted notion that, beyond the basis of elementary school, the educational needs of boys and girls were different. Girls were destined to be homemakers. From the very beginning, a separate form of secondary education was planned for girls of the upper class, one that did not lead to higher education. Ethics for women, etiquette, home economics, child care, sewing, and handcrafts were to be taught in addition to a general academic curriculum. The number of "girls' high schools" increased greatly after the turn of the century.

Public vocational schools joined the secondary school ranks late. Vocational subjects in the ordinary middle schools had not gained acceptance, and as the needs of Japanese industry advanced, separate vocational schools (technical, commercial, agricultural, and merchant marine) were developed in response. Vocational education was respected, but clearly it was a side track from the elite path, and one of considerably lower status.

Despite the rapid expansion of education, elitism persisted. By 1895, three distinct forms of public secondary education were in existence, yet their combined enrollment numbered under forty thousand; of this number, thirty thousand were boys attending ordinary middle schools. Furthermore, only one in five of the boys in ordinary middle schools was able to advance to a higher middle school. The path upward from the elementary level was narrow indeed.

Following completion of the six compulsory years, the majority of students followed a different track created at the turn of the century, advancing to upper elementary schools (two years), and then taking employment. On a part-time basis they would continue in "youth schools" (five years), where they received some vocational training, further basic education, and some military training. The students who received this much less intensive education were at that time largely farm children, for whom full secondary education seemed irrelevant. Youth schools were not recognized as part of secondary education. They did not offer credentials, nor did they open possibili-

ties for further advancement. All the same, it is worth noting that by 1941 most Japanese youth were actually staying in school on a part-time basis until age seventeen.

The considerable expansion of secondary school enrollments from 1900 to 1935 did not significantly alter this pattern because the population of elementary school students also grew rapidly. Boys' middle schools grew at a slower pace than girls' high schools and vocational schools. Thus, in 1935 roughly one in twenty fifteen-year-old boys was attending an ordinary middle school, and a somewhat larger proportion were in vocational schools. Similarly, about one in ten girls was able to enter a girls' high school.

Over time, university enrollments increased as the government progressively allowed private colleges to become universities. There were about nine thousand places in the five imperial universities in 1918. By 1945, the number of university students had increased to one hundred thousand and the total enrollments in all institutions of higher education had reached approximately four hundred thousand. Higher education expanded greatly, but the proportion of all youth going to universities was in fact rising slowly, because the total population was also growing rapidly.

Throughout the seventy-five years between its foundation and its demise, the prewar system grew in a manner that enhanced the elite status of these secondary schools and universities that had been established first. Boys' middle schools retained their superior status over vocational schools and girls' high schools. Older middle schools and universities retained prestige and attracted the best applicants. Maintaining the rankings were the entrance exams.

Competition to enter universities remained severe. Universities (public and private) had places for only one-third of all middle school graduates in 1935. Half of those who were not accepted took jobs, but the other half chose to study another year and try again. The competition to enter the top higher middle schools and then the imperial universities was particularly stiff, with less than one in six applicants accepted at the higher schools and one of two at an imperial university. But this preoccupation with higher education and entrance exams existed only among a small proportion of the total population: even in 1935, less than 3 percent of all elementary school graduates were going to a university.

Given the great rewards that followed a university degree, it was natural that considerable pressure for private secondary education would develop among the urban middle class. Wealthy parents whose children failed to enter public middle schools sought private options. The same tendency occurred at the university level. Government policy limited the growth of private universities, but by 1935 two-thirds of all university students were in private institutions, and about one-fifth of all middle school boys were in private school. Yet the prestige of private institutions, as "second best," remained lower than public middle schools and universities.

Despite an unconvincing start, the education system contained the seeds of a meritocratic order. The key was the objectivity of the entrance exam system. Soon the ordinary middle schools were admitting a larger proportion of boys who did not come from the former samurai class, boys of notable talents who had studied hard and passed the entrance exams. Gradually a greater proportion of such commoners succeeded in entering the higher middle schools and ultimately the imperial universities. The extension and standardization of elementary education also laid the foundation for a growing equal opportunity, for it meant an equal start for all children. And, at the other end of the educational system, access to the best positions in government, academia, and business were open to university graduates regardless of family background. By the turn of the century, graduates of the imperial universities were rising to positions of influence throughout society. Most were, by then, from commoner stock. The private universities, notably Keio and Waseda, also came to emphasize entrance examinations as the number of applicants surpassed the number of openings. They, too, became part of the meritocratic machinery as their graduates joined the business, media, and cultural elites.

It is interesting to speculate on the reasons for the relative ease with which this quite revolutionary development occurred. Certainly examinations are a noteworthy part of the Confucian heritage, but in ancient Japan and throughout the Tokugawa period they were less important than class, lineage, and particularistic ties. The *han* schools were not dominated by examinations or by other objective judgments of individual merit. All the same, merit was recognized and rewarded informally in the administrations of many

Tokugawa domains. The crucial historical point is that the new Meiji government was created and led largely by ranking samurai—men who had themselves risen due to merit, and who as reformers knew the frustrations and inefficiencies of allocating authority by particularistic criteria. These men cut themselves off from their own class and from *han* loyalties to support the development of an educational system that drew commoner talent into the imperial universities and into the bureaucracy. Once established, and this took thirty years, the meritocracy became self-perpetuating, each generation of leaders committed by their own careers to its basic values.

A social/cultural explanation is more speculative. There is no doubt about the centrality of personal bonds of loyalty and group membership during the Tokugawa period. Universalistic aspects of social relations hardly existed. Lord and retainer, master and apprentice, elder and junior, members of X village, followers of Y teacher, loyalists of Z lord—these were the categories of social thought. Nor did the new cultural ferment and the import of Western thinking during the Meiji era significantly alter the character of social relations or the preferences of individuals for particularistic ties. Japan, as has been noted so often, is a group-oriented society—neither individualistic nor socialistic. Such a society can choke on its own narrow particularism if it does not have well-entrenched mechanisms that counterbalance its powerful tendencies to allocate rewards and favors on the basis of personal affiliation. What can happen all too easily is that those responsible for selecting people for universities, jobs, and so forth cannot resist personal pressure from relatives, friends, and colleagues. The weight of personal obligations requires a powerful counter-mechanism.²⁵ An impersonal exam system that adjudicates the selection process is just the solution. Once established, this system in Japan created its own constituency and provided the great majority with the promise of opportunity. Probably no Meiji leader thought about matters in quite this way, but the fact remains that outside of education, particularism retained its extraordinary power, and the Meiji leadership was anxious to assure that the nation would benefit from a secure flow of talent to the top. The sacredness of exams in Japan, even today, seems proportional to the power of the particularistic forces it holds at bay.

25. I am indebted to Ronald Dore for his suggestion of this idea.

The Occupation

By the end of the war, Japan was a nation economically prostrate and socially disorganized. Defeat and then occupation would shake the very foundation of Japanese national identity. Cities lay in ruins, people were hungry, the emperor had announced the first surrender in Japan's long history, and the Americans were going to run the country. What Japan had represented during the long and very costly struggle—the proud virtues of an independent nation—was discredited by defeat and condemned by the flamboyant democracy and individualism of the victors. Values, at least official ones, were largely turned upside down during the period immediately following the signing of the peace. While the great majority of Japanese, their sense of the past and future paralyzed, simply tried to survive and avoid trouble, the basis for a new society was laid.

The Americans were sent to demilitarize and democratize Japan. Fresh from a global defeat of fascism, they were a naïvely confident group that neither questioned the superiority of the American system nor understood much about Japan. The success of this vast social engineering project using American ideals as the model probably depended on such naïvete. The scope of the occupation made the New Deal, from which many occupation authorities had come, look modest. Yet, because implementation was left to Japanese government officials, the Americans avoided many of the perplexing realities that would have impeded momentum. A new constitution, a new set of civil rights, and a new political system were established. Land reform, the end of large financial combinations (the *zaibatsu*), “emancipation” of women, unionization and organization of leftist parties, freedom of religion, and freedom of the press were among the major changes initiated within the first year. The Americans also set out to transform Japanese education, which they saw as a key to democratizing Japan.

How did the Americans view the prewar system? The political objections were stated by William J. Sebald, an assistant to MacArthur:

The former Japanese system of education, through centralized control, and with the assistance of a well-knit bureaucracy, had been used by the country's leaders as part of a policy of developing an obedient and subservient population. Schools had been transformed, primarily into agencies for indoctrination in militarism and ultranationalism. For

many years, teachers and students had drawn their inspiration from the Imperial Rescript on Education promulgated in 1890, with the result that the importance and integrity of the individual were dwarfed into significance by the growing power of the state.²⁶

American educators added other criticisms:

The Japanese system of education in its organization and curricular provisions would have been due for reform in accordance with modern theories of education even if there had not been injected into it ultra-nationalism and militarism. The system was based on a nineteenth-century pattern which was highly centralized, providing one type of education for the masses and another for the privileged few. It held that at each level of instruction there is a fixed quantum of knowledge to be absorbed, and tended to disregard differences in the ability and interests of pupils. Through prescription, textbooks, examinations and inspection, the system lessened the opportunities of teachers to exercise professional freedom. The measure of efficiency was the degree to which standardization and uniformity were secured.²⁷

And the teaching profession was not democratic:

Teachers were followers rather than leaders. They were poorly paid and received far less compensation than other government officials of comparable rank . . . As members of the national civil service, teachers were responsible to the national government in Tokyo rather than to the local community in which they served. The right of teachers to organize associations was severely limited by the government; teachers' associations were government-sponsored, subsidized, and controlled.²⁸

In essence, wherever the prewar system differed from the American ideal, it was undemocratic and unprogressive.

The Americans intended to reconstruct the entire system in a reform no less revolutionary in scope than that which had established public schools eighty years before. A new and powerful authority, a pliant population, and a discredited past combined as they rarely do in history to make sweeping change possible. Unbeknownst to the American authorities, many school officials, dressed in formal mourning clothes, had already reverently burned their schools' pic-

26. GHQ (1948), p. 8.

27. *Report of the U.S. Education Mission to Japan, 1946*. Tokyo: General Headquarters, Supreme Commander, Allied Powers. Civil Information and Education Section, p. 6.

28. *Ibid.*

tures of the emperor in secret midnight ceremonies, preparing for the new era.²⁹

There were, however, serious limits to reform. Most important was the lack of physical resources. The bombings had ruined about one-third of all existing schools. Classes were being held even in streetcars and public bathhouses. Government coffers were empty, and merely finding enough money to pay teachers was difficult. Leadership and staffing were also problems. During the war, the training of new teachers had fallen behind, and many potential teachers had been drafted. Young women had entered the profession in large numbers. The Americans, furthermore, initiated a purge of right-wing teachers, causing the mass resignation of those military officers who had been assigned to school duties. A sizable number of principals and senior teachers had resigned in 1945, some in atonement for the war deaths of students whom they had taught to accept militarism, others because they saw themselves as unable to adjust to the new democratic era in education. In Hyōgo Prefecture, at least, the official purge found few other identifiable rightists to remove.³⁰

What offended the Americans in Japanese textbooks was immediately announced, and the teaching of many aspects of ethics, history, and geography was suspended while new textbooks were written.³¹ Major reform awaited the arrival in March 1946 of a study mission of education experts from the United States. Within a month the mission had studied the situation, deliberated, and written and issued its report. It was no surprise that their suggestions for sweeping change were based entirely on the American system, and especially on those policies that academic experts were urging on their colleagues in the United States.³² Their plan called for a three-year extension of compulsory education to ninth grade and the elimination of different kinds of secondary schools in favor of comprehensive high schools. A uniform 6-3-3-4 system (six elementary, three middle, three high school, and four university years) replaced the differentiated complex of prewar schools. Coeducation was rec-

29. Kobe-shi Kyōiku-shi Henshū linkai (1966).

30. Ibid.

31. This account depends heavily on Kawai (1960), Passin (1965), and Anderson (1975), as well as GHQ (1948) and Kaigo (1975).

32. Kawai (1960).

commended for all levels, and an expansion of opportunities for higher education was urged. The regulatory control of private education was criticized. The report also condemned the centralized nature of administration and called for greater community and teacher initiative. The formation of school boards and parent-teacher organizations was suggested. Social studies, which had not received much attention in the prewar system, was encouraged as fundamental to the training of a well-informed, independent citizenry. Vocational subjects were promoted and the narrow preparation for university entrance roundly condemned. The report even raised the issue of the Japanese language, suggesting that the roman alphabet replace the thousands of Chinese characters as the official system of writing.

The most central theme of all, however, was individualism. In contrast to the authoritarian dominance of a standard curriculum, the differing developmental needs of individual personalities was set forth as the major theme of the new education. The refrains were those so familiar to American ears:

A system of education should be so organized as to encourage the fullest development of which each individual—boy or girl, man or woman—is capable as an intelligent, responsible and cooperating member of society . . . Freedom of inquiry, rather than exclusive memorization of factual knowledge for examination purposes, should be emphasized.³³

Further:

Education shall aim at the full development of personality, striving for the rearing of the people, sound in mind and body, who shall love truth and justice, esteem individual value, respect labour, and have a deep sense of responsibility, and be imbued with an independent spirit, as builders of a peaceful state and society.³⁴

"Citizens, not subjects," was the goal. Teachers were to exercise their "professional freedom" to tailor their teaching to foster the growth of independent, productive community members. The goal of equal opportunity pointed to a system of mass education, one in which abilities were not tracked and the sexes were not separated; and the ideals of individualism and democracy required a

33. *Report of the U.S. Education Mission to Japan, 1946*, p. 18.

34. Japan's Fundamental Law of Education, 1947, GHQ (1948), p. 109.

flexibility and independence at the classroom level that was equally challenging.

The Japanese were to decide their own future educational system, intoned the Americans. In keeping with the American preference for grass roots development, the Japanese were to adjust policies locally as implementation progressed. The Americans assigned young officers, one to each prefecture, to supervise the progress but not to actually administer the system, and these men bounced around the countryside in their jeeps supervising reform in schools and communities without in fact directing action. In Kobe, I heard stories of principals in middle schools ordering their students to begin square dancing upon the approach of an American jeep.

The concrete problems of creating enough new classrooms to realize the goal of compulsory education through ninth grade were tackled by local Japanese officials. Elementary and middle school classes often shared the same buildings; even temples were commandeered, and a capital financing campaign that depended heavily on "voluntary contributions" from parents and leading citizens was undertaken. By early 1950, enough classrooms had been created to substantiate the new compulsory education law, but a by-product of this effort was a continuing acute shortage of facilities for the secondary level.

Other structural changes met a similar mixed fate. Almost all institutions of higher education were allowed to call themselves universities after 1947, and the number of universities jumped from forty-nine in 1942 to 245 in 1955.³⁵ Enrollment levels did not rise much in the national universities, but private universities expanded rapidly. As a result, the university student population began to mushroom, growing by 450 percent between 1950 and 1970. The opportunities for higher education were expanded by the reforms, but not without a price: in those private universities that grew most rapidly, student-teacher ratios, institutional facilities, and the level of instruction deteriorated significantly, and the gap in quality between the elite national universities and most private universities increased.³⁶ The move to mass higher education not only preserved

35. A thorough treatment of the statistical changes in postwar education is offered by Lee (1974).

36. Mombushō (1976).

but actually enhanced and elaborated the hierarchical structure of higher education.³⁷ University entrance exams remained critical to career success; the major difference after reform was that more and more young Japanese were drawn into the competition.

National universities were finally opened to women, and female enrollments in these top schools slowly rose, but never approached parity with male levels. Progress toward full equality of participation for women in higher education has not fulfilled American expectations. The occupation did, however, end all legal and structural barriers faced by women, and today as many high school girls as boys are preparing for higher education.

The Americans also attempted to rearrange the political control of education.³⁸ The central authority of the national Ministry of Education was pinpointed as the source of prewar political problems. Regimentation and nationalistic indoctrination were attributed to the ministry's dominance. The Americans wanted decision-making power shifted to local school boards. As a result, laws were passed that set aside the ministry's authority to write textbooks, and teachers were encouraged to select or create their own. Normal schools, reestablished as university departments of education, were encouraged to formulate democratic approaches to schooling. School boards, teachers, officials, and professors of education began earnestly—and, some recall, endlessly—discussing the issue of democratizing teaching and school administration. Accustomed as they were to highly detailed and professional direction from the authorities in Tokyo, localities typically found their new independence disconcerting. Ironically, initiative in creating grass roots democracy remained largely with the Ministry of Education and the Americans in Tokyo.

A new political force also entered the scene. Teachers' unions, encouraged by American policy and led largely by committed leftists, grew in membership and power at a rapid rate.³⁹ It is undoubtedly true that before the war many teachers had resented official policies, but rarely did they organize to protest. Those few that did were of a leftist persuasion, and many of them were jailed or lost their jobs.

37. Nagai (1971).

38. Brett (1954), Hidaka (1956), Kawai (1960), Steiner (1965), and Duke (1973).

39. Duke (1973) offers a valuable history of the teachers' union movement in Japan.

After the war, they were the first to seize the organizational opportunity. American educational policy was close to their initial aims, and unionization was being encouraged. To young teachers, their union embodied many of the new ideals for an independent, progressive education. Even most older teachers saw unionization as the wave of the future. In an atmosphere of radical change, the great majority of teachers joined one of the several unions that rose in Tokyo and spread across the nation.

Although there seems to have been little contact between the new unions and the American authorities, the actions of one group reinforced the other until around 1950. Both sought to weaken central authority. The unions had little immediate power, but once well organized and consolidated, they assumed an increasingly active role in the politics of education. Unlike American unions, they were totally outside the governmental framework, and as public employees' unions their right to strike was not even recognized. Once the occupation had ended, the largest and dominant union, the Japan Teachers Union, assumed a posture of staunch opposition to the Ministry of Education. When the Americans departed in 1952, Japanese education was politically polarized. At issue was the control of schools and the continuation of the occupation-sponsored reforms. The polarization was also highly charged ideologically, as the union leadership was strongly leftist and the government firmly conservative.

As the ministry and the union began to clash over numerous issues, it became clear that control of public education was to be a major issue in postwar Japanese politics. The issues of traditional versus foreign ethics, of order versus freedom, of school and teacher independence versus administrative authority became entangled with political ideologies and the general power struggle between the ruling conservative party and the leftist opposition. Even the most minute detail of school administration was a potential cause for political conflict.

The occupation's reforms were least effective at the high school level. The ideal was derived, of course, from the comprehensive public high school as it had developed in rural and suburban America. Its three organizing principles—1) coeducation, 2) a mix of college preparatory, vocational, and general education tracks, and 3) universal admission based on local residence—expressed the spirit of

American democracy. All three were foreign to Japan at the time of the occupation.

The American model for the conduct of high school education is one so familiar that we take it for granted. It rests on the notion of the school as a microcosm of the small community: high schools are properly rooted in whole communities and should reflect their diversity. Thus residence and only residence, not ability or vocational goals or any other segregating criteria, should determine admission. This establishes a foundation for equality of educational opportunity. We know all too well that there are great problems with this approach when the pattern of residence is not that of a small (relatively homogeneous) community, but that knowledge is not part of the ideal. In theory, a mixing of students of all ability levels will nurture an egalitarian spirit of community and mutual respect.

The second basic principle of American high school education is choice. This follows logically from the fact of student diversity, from the ideals of freedom and individualism, and even from the tradition of local school autonomy. We assume that schools, teachers, and students are different, want to be different, and should be different. We therefore build in choice at every opportunity. The comprehensive school has many curricular offerings. Arguments for larger high schools were made on the grounds of greater diversity of courses. Electives multiply as far as budgets permit. Teachers select their own textbooks. The faculty plans the curriculum, the schedules, and most requirements. State requirements are typically limited to civics, driver education, and physical education. Graduation requirements, until recently, have been statements of the minimum, as are the new state competency tests. In all cases, we try to preserve choice despite the demand for standards. Of course, being Americans, we typically complain that not enough choice is provided, that high schools are too bureaucratic, and that they produce mindless conformity. Indeed, along with all forms of mass processing, our schools do have these inclinations. The point is that our cultural and educational heritage has made choice a central value and has put it in an adversarial position to many critical considerations of organizational efficiency and educational standards. Each step up the school ladder brings greater choice, for it is our hallmark of adulthood and citizenship.

A corollary is the notion of personality. The educational ideals of

the occupation included emphasis on adjusting education to differences of personality, tailoring programs and teaching to individuals. Americans eschew school uniforms, favor individualized study programs, and in a myriad of other ways encourage individual expression. The goal was and is to foster the development of distinct personalities and talents, and at no point in the educational process is this more important than in high school. In America at least, students are understood to be both rapidly gaining independence from parents and family and searching for their own identities. Clearly, our cultural preoccupation with individualism underlies this emphasis. The Americans encountered a very different situation in Japan, a society that elevates the group and the nation as the moral priorities of education.

Yet citizenship was also a crucial ingredient of the American proposals. In the American model, high schools teach the attitudes and behavior that make for strong grass roots democracy. Civics courses are a start, but student government, classroom discussions of current events, and teacher encouragement of student self-expression (even criticism of authority) are pedagogically important. Student clubs and extracurricular activities are valued for education in self-governance and initiative. In high school, students should have the chance to play at being citizens of democracy. The high school, in effect, should be a microcosm of the ideal small town in its political processes as in its sociological composition. Citizenship in Japanese prewar education had meant loyalty and duty.

Indeed, the American model was a radical departure from the educational goals, ideals, and practices of previous Japanese secondary education. The Japanese not only heard about the American approach, they were encouraged to visit schools in the United States; and in fact, they became quite familiar with our institutions firsthand. The influence of such exposure is not easy to assess. Clearly, many American practices seemed impressive to the visitors in the light of democratic ideals, but often what worked in America struck them as impractical for Japan. American parents were not preoccupied with university entrance exams. There was no tradition of a highly structured national curriculum established by a Ministry of Education. The American teachers' tolerance for variety, uncertainty, and disorder was clearly greater. And American students, perhaps because of a different upbringing or elementary education, were

far more independent and outspoken than their Japanese counterparts. Such comparisons are behind the general reluctance of Japanese school officials to adopt in toto the American model. One high school in Kobe, for example, offered comprehensive (academic and vocational) curricula under the same roof. It still exists, but the experiment was unsuccessful because the two types of students and the two faculties could not resolve their status and other differences.

There is no question that throughout the postwar period a goal of Japanese secondary educational policy has been the extension of equal opportunity. But just after the war the situation was far from favorable for establishment of the American high school pattern. The most critical problem was the insufficiency of high school classrooms. The old ordinary middle schools had been relatively few in number, and even stretched to their seams after the war they had room for less than half of the ninth-grade graduates. In the reformed 6-3-3-4 system, the new compulsory middle schools (grades seven to nine) took priority over the high schools in the allocation of space. The meager financial resources available had to be devoted to the task of completing enough classrooms to support the compulsory system. It is estimated that over one-quarter of all schools had to be rebuilt in 1945 just to restore Japanese education to prewar conditions.⁴⁰

The construction of new high schools and the expansion of existing ones began in earnest only in the mid-fifties. Yet, by 1975 nearly every Japanese was able to advance to high school. This great achievement, however, came after a pattern of high school organization that was quite contrary to the American model had been established in Japan's cities. In the late forties and early fifties the high school shortage was acute, and it was certain to remain so for quite some time. Local governments in charge of such decisions responded by retaining entrance exams as the most appropriate means of allocating the scarce space in public high schools. With private schools also retaining their entrance exams, the postwar high school system did not move toward the American pattern of attendance based on residence. Rather, whole cities and prefectures (or large divisions within them) became school districts containing numerous vertically ranked high schools. Officially there has never been any

40. Kobe-shi Kyōiku-shi Henshū Inkaï (1966).

ranking; but in fact, the hierarchy of preference, academic excellence, and prestige of the prewar system remains unaltered.

Under the American directive to reopen schools and operate normally as soon as possible, local officials had no option initially except to stay with the prewar faculties and programs. When the American plan for comprehensive high schools was suggested, the old divisions (boys' academic, girls', and vocational) still remained. Integrating the sexes into coeducational high school was not difficult. All it required was opening all entrance exams to boys and girls. Few teachers had to change jobs. Throughout most of Japan, girls' public high schools disappeared from the map.

Integrating vocational and university-oriented academic programs was more difficult. School faculties adamantly resisted the idea of dispersion, and the costs and confusion of reequipping schools to handle vocational subjects seemed forbidding. Alumni protested the threatened ending of school (especially elite) traditions. And everyone worried that the subsequent turmoil in secondary education would put the local students at a disadvantage in preparing for university entrance exams.

As a result, with some exceptions (mostly in rural areas), comprehensive high schools American-style were not created. Rather, the hierarchical order in each locality was reinforced by the retention of the academic-vocational distinction; and the orientation of high school education continued to be primarily to university or job preparation rather than to the experience of citizenship in an engineered social context. Japanese high schools did not become representative of social diversity. Rather, they continued to reflect the stratification and segregation of academic ability.

The opportunity for thorough reform came and went roughly between 1946 and 1950. After that, only the goal of universal high school education was vigorously pursued. More and more students were poured into the existing structure of high schools. New schools (academic or vocational, but not comprehensive) were also built, and applicants assigned them to a rung on the existing school status ladder. Invariably, the new schools ended up at the bottom. They were untried, with no track record. To Japanese students and parents, with their aversion to risk, being new meant being undesirable. As high school enrollments reached near universal levels, officials could congratulate themselves on having achieved equality of educa-

tional opportunity through the twelfth grade; but this claim only measured the most surface kind of equality.

More crucial, however, was the rapid growth in university openings. High school students doing university preparatory work expanded proportionally. In the prewar period about 10 percent of Japan's youth were studying for higher education, laboring over subjects like English and physics. Today over 50 percent attend academic high schools and are cramming for entrance exams. The change has been particularly notable for secondary-school-age girls, who not only began attending coeducational high schools after the war, but who, for the first time, were able to compete for university places on an equal footing with boys. The proportion of females attending academic high schools is now the same as for males.

What did the extension of high school attendance to nearly the entire population of youth aged seventeen, eighteen, and nineteen mean in the light of Japanese educational history? First, what had once been a rare honor and privilege became commonplace. A high school education at present carries little distinction. One has to go to a university, a good one at that, to accomplish anything. It is unfortunate but true that increasing attendance has the effect of diminishing the social worth of education at any level. Second, the postwar popularity of higher education established the college preparatory model of high schooling as dominant. Thus, the intense and heavily academic curriculum and style of the prewar elite secondary schools became the pattern for a high school education that extended down through the middle class and into the working class. Ironically, this trend was developing momentum at a time when the occupation's theme of democratizing education was still quite influential. The magnetism of university prestige attracted parents and students to the traditional elite model of secondary schooling.

The American proposals for comprehensive high schools attended by a diversity of students and focused on citizenship and expressive activities never captured the popular imagination. Just as average Japanese, now that they can afford it, seek the most prestigious French labels when buying clothes, so they have demanded academic high schools for their children. The American comprehensive high school is still talked about in educational circles, but it would take an extraordinary social revolution before social and cultural conditions would favor it as the answer to Japan's educational problems.

Summary

There is a temptation when reviewing the present in light of the past to use such labels as modern or traditional and thereby to bifurcate institutional reality simplistically. In 1875, the new state-run and Western-influenced system certainly stood in stark contrast to the previous Confucian-based system of fief and commoner schools. But during the intervening hundred years the original dichotomy was transformed 1) as traditional elements were revived, 2) as borrowing continued from evolving Western systems, 3) as education became a larger and more integral part of society, and 4) as Japan became industrialized and urbanized. At times official policy led the way; at other times the dynamic came from society. Postwar changes, once the occupation's reforms were in place, have been largely the result of social change.

Three distinct traditions of secondary education in Japan have been identified here: the Confucian, the prewar elite, and the American. All three contribute to the character of contemporary high school education, yet what has developed since 1945 is not dominated strictly by any one of these models. The Confucian emphasis on familial order and morality contrasts with both the pragmatic intentions of elite secondary schooling and the American emphasis on individualism and democracy. The Confucian ideal remains particularly influential in the realm of interpersonal relations, where it provides standards (rarely met) for teacher and student conduct within the school context. The school by this perspective is a family-like community, and teachers and their students have familial roles to play. The prewar legacy of rigorous preparation for university remains most influential in the academic realm. Hard work and efficiency in meeting competition is its guiding inspiration. The rewards and punishments that are its ultimate concern stem from the hierarchical facts of life so much appreciated in Japan. But the ultranationalist aspect of the prewar approach that legitimated hard study as preparation for national service has largely disappeared. Now exam preparation appears quite egoistic.

The American model remains the source of political rhetoric and the guiding principle for reform of high school education. The extracurricular side of school affairs gains legitimacy as part of democratic education. When the teachers' union pushes against authority

and the weight of entrance exams, it often uses the American model. To the Japanese, American high schools are less oppressively serious, uniform, and competitive, and as such they represent a dream of individual freedom. Of course, having seen the problems of our high schools or having heard stories about them, most Japanese teachers see that reality does not match the dream. They know that to institute diversity and choice in high schools is to challenge both the Confucian emphasis on social order and the principles of efficient preparation inherent in the prewar legacy. These issues are more sharply drawn in education than in any other Japanese institution, because time has compounded rather than simplified the value choices involved.

The overwhelming facts that face high schools today are that nearly all young Japanese are enrolled and that the majority of them intend to go on to college. If history has provided a set of contrasting ideals and legacies, contemporary Japanese society has come to constitute an environment for education that establishes entrance examinations as the key to understanding its dynamic.