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A Catalyst for Culture: Early Child Development and Education in Japan

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**A CATALYST FOR CULTURE:
EARLY CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION IN JAPAN**

by

Kate Swenson

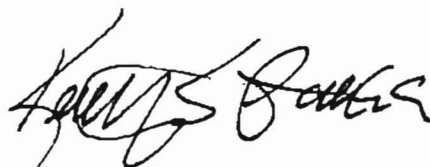
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Senior Scholars'
Program

COLBY COLLEGE
1996

APPROVED:

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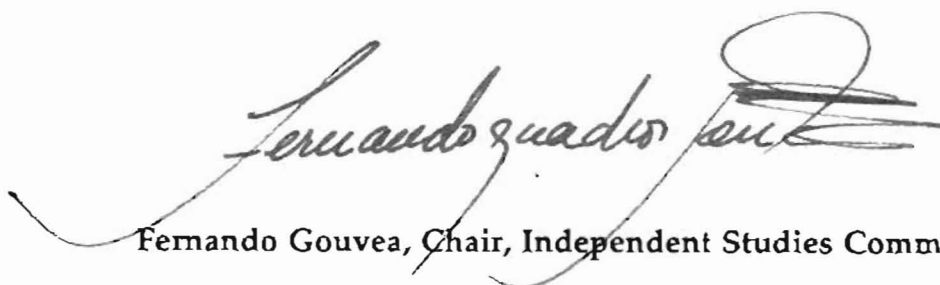
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Fernando Gouvea, Chair, Independent Studies Committee

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There were a number of individuals who provided the unending support that enabled the completion of this project. I could not have done this on my own. When I first proposed this project in the spring of 1995, I did not realize the demands such an undertaking would place on me and those around me. Due to a strong support network the project has become a reality.

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ABSTRACT

A popular Western perception of Japan is that it is an eminently homogeneous and conformist society. However, both conformity and homogeneity, recognized even by the Japanese themselves, coexist with the concept of individuality, which is valued in a manner unique to its culture. In order to come to a deeper understanding of that dynamic, it is important to comprehend the specifics of child rearing and education within Japanese society.

Based in part on the author's observational fieldwork conducted while in Japan in 1994, the thesis explicates the manner in which various core relationships exhibit the socialization of an individual that occurs within the home during a child's first few years. Furthermore, the text incorporates research in both primary and secondary historical materials. The author displays the manner in which educational issues such as the development of the Japanese education system and the dynamics of the elementary years serve to demonstrate the importance of functioning within a group. This is further clarified through an examination of elementary school texts, which also reveal underlying moral messages of profound importance in Japanese society.

The seemingly contradictory issues of becoming an individual yet performing as a member of a group are pulled together by the idea that culture provides the guidance by which an individual becomes an active member of society. In Japan, individuality and group conformity are not mutually exclusive. Within the context of Japanese society, individuality is inextricably linked to group orientation.

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INTRODUCTION

Envisioning a snapshot of Japanese life is not difficult for most foreigners. We think of the millions of nameless, faceless people crowding and bustling through the streets of Tokyo. Men wearing white collars and dark suits sit behind desks and work diligently in huge office buildings. Children wearing matching uniforms sit in perfectly aligned rows behind small desks, all studying the same material on any given day all around the country. These stereotypical images of the Japanese may hold some truths.

However, this is precisely about becoming individuals. Individuality and uniformity coexist as truths in Japan. A 1966 document titled "The Image of the Ideal Japanese" suggests that the moral and ethical qualities of the ideal Japanese start with the characteristics of an individual.¹ This entails individuality and a sense of self that is in fact unique. What, then, does this coexistence mean for Japanese society? The relationship can be better examined through early education and socialization.

Clifford Geertz clearly articulates the relationship between individual and culture in the following passage:

When seen as a set of symbolic devices for controlling behavior...culture provides the link between what men are intrinsically capable of becoming and what they actually, one by one, in fact become. Becoming human is becoming individual, and *we become individual under the guidance of cultural*

¹This will be addressed further and in greater detail in Chapter Two.

*patterns, historically created systems of meaning in terms of which we give form, order, point, and direction to our lives.*²

Although for the most part Japan is perceived as a homogeneous culture both racially and behaviorally, there are of course many exceptions. There are significant differences among Japanese people, thus the link between culture and individual is not rightly or easily generalized. According to Takie Sugiyama Lebra, who was reared and educated in Japan, the cultural and individual systems are each dependent on the social system, which in turn is dependent on each of the others. The three exist simultaneously. This is sensible because it simply suggests that the socialization involved in society not only molds the individual but is created by each individual's involvement in society. Thus culture is created through the differences in individuals, yet society and its individuals are affected by culture. Child-rearing is said to consist of cultural assumptions that are followed by most everyone. This is to help socialize the child who is to become an active individual in Japanese society. It is apparent that socialization among society's individuals is still immersed in, to use Geertz's words, "webs of significance."³ Even so, an exploration of where child-rearing fits into each system could be very helpful in better understanding the reasons behind each characteristic of modern Japan.

The following project has developed through a combination of research methods, including both primary and secondary sources and ethnographic field experience. Throughout this paper I use the Japanese name system when referring to native authors. The family name appears

² Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Free Press, 1973), p. 52. Italics mine.

³Geertz, p. 5.

first, followed by the given name. What I will be offering here is a means by which to deepen our understanding of a culture that is too often perceived in very shallow terms based on popular Western thinking.

My initial interest in studying early childhood development in Japan stemmed from my background in Japanese history and culture coupled with my study of education. In 1994 I spent seven months living in Japanese households with young children, during which time my level of awareness was sharpened and I had ample opportunity to interact with and observe the daily lives of Japanese families and early childhood development in the home. I visited schools and was involved in many child-related activities.

For two months I lived in a home with children ages seven, nine and eleven. I then spent five months with a family of four. The two children, a boy and a girl, were two and seven years old, respectively. This provided an environment in which I witnessed most everything I could imagine. It is possible that my presence as a foreign observer might have affected the family's behavior in the home. Yet in this case, since I did in some manner become a member of the family, I am not so sure that any significant alteration of behavior occurred.

I noticed large differences in behavior among families depending on the type of observation I carried out. As a pre-arranged observer in a stranger's home it was obvious to me that the actions were often cautious. I found that many of my most successful and insightful observations of behavior and the children's interaction with others were made in public social situations. However, in each of my living situations, my position in the family was established early on and advanced quickly, so I was always very involved in all of the families' normal everyday activities. They did not put on acts for me.

The methods of child rearing and education in Japan piqued my curiosity. I became interested in examining such methods since they clearly serve as a means through which individuals develop in order to function within Japanese society and its unique culture. In pursuing this interest I have been guided by such theories as those proposed by Takie Sugiyama Lebra and others. I was able to see things for myself and to get a feel for early child rearing and development in Japan, which will become apparent in my chapter on the sociological aspects of child-rearing.

I have concluded that there are many similarities among child rearing techniques in the United States and those of Japan. Even so, Japan follows distinct national goals that unavoidably influence the uniqueness of their social development.

Overview

What is to follow will further explore the development of both Japanese children and the system of education those children are exposed to today. Chapter One will examine the sociological aspects of early child development and child-rearing. This will include my own research and observation conducted while in Japan in 1994.

In order to understand the goals and techniques of Japanese education, one must understand the historical events that assisted in the developments of modern education in Japan. This began with the Meiji emperor coming to throne, and from that point in 1868 until the present numerous changes have occurred and the system has been influenced by external factors. Chapter Two will discuss the Japanese educational system as it evolved alongside Japan's modernization. The Ministry of Education holds a particular importance within this study. I will focus on its process of

development and specific changes in its role and function within Japan.

A third chapter will follow, relating child rearing to the dynamics of elementary education. In doing this I hope to show what kind of influence the Ministry of Education has on the methods of rearing and teaching. What national social beliefs, actions, and morals are the Ministry implementing within Japanese society?

Having researched the developments and reforms within the Japanese educational system, I will then use the fourth chapter to explore the specifics of moral education in schools, its reforms, and its intentions. I also hope to pinpoint, through literature, the extent of the Ministry's influence on moral teaching in the classroom. I have translated sections of Japanese elementary texts and will attempt to derive from the readings some point of focus where I can show how the Ministry is influencing the material. I will also include children's picture books that will enable me to show that modern Japan is moving beyond traditional morality. These will be used to find moralistic teachings and to get a sense for where the focus of early education and socialization is heading.

Throughout this project I have taken into account the existence of many American images of Japanese schooling and of Japanese society that often interfere with reality. As is the case for any foreigner attempting to become more learned about a particular society and an institution such as education, I confronted many logistical problems. Unfortunately I did not have the opportunity to spend as much time as I would have liked in one academic setting. This might have enabled me to broaden my awareness of the circumstantial components and criteria for judgments employed in each social, educational situation. On the other hand, my advantage lies in having been actively engaged with Japanese culture which is an opportunity

unavailable to many foreigners. I was accepted unconditionally into the families with which I lived, and thus was clearly exposed to the culture in which Japanese children grow up. For many, the preconceived notions about Japan and Japanese education create obstructions in understanding the people and the classroom philosophies, primarily because they are superficial and misconstrued. Thus many of the ideas and terms used to describe "the Japanese" or "Japanese education" must be redefined in their deeper cultural context in order to clearly augment the underlying multidimensional complexity.

Japanese culture differs greatly from that of the West, and for that reason it is senseless to make comparisons for the sake of proving one better than the other. The home and the school both play integral roles in the socialization of Japanese children, as seen by the strong mother/child relationship and the group orientation. Moreover, the home and the school represent cultural aspects that shape the lives and achievement of the Japanese children, who will become the nation's leaders.

CHAPTER ONE

EARLY DEVELOPMENT

A cluster of little Japanese children at play somehow suggests to me a grand picture gallery, a picture gallery of a nation...Each little picture...is perfect in itself; yet on closer study it will be found that the children are more than mere pictures. They tell us the truths about Japan.⁴

The Japanese use the word *shitsuke* to refer to child-rearing and early training. There have been lengthy discussions regarding the specific meaning of this word to the Japanese, and there are many different definitions given by dictionaries and scholars. Essentially it can be explained simply as the teaching of good manners, correct behavior, proper patterns of living and proper conduct of daily life, and aims toward good education.

The importance of the early developmental years for Japanese children is phenomenal. Although this is the case in most societies, Japan has a unique culture through which the way of life is cultivated beginning at a very young age. Underlying the parent/child relationship within a Japanese

⁴Joy Hendry, *Becoming Japanese: The World of a Preschool Child* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), p. 1.

family are related cultural assumptions that assist in making up the nature of the child, and will be discussed throughout this chapter.

From an American perspective, many aspects of Japanese culture appear to contradict one another, and this contradiction exists in the realm of early childhood development as well. The extent varies, but apparently all the seemingly contradictory images form, in actuality, complimentary processes necessary to complete the entirety of Japanese development. This will be clarified by means of later examples.

This chapter will portray the unique manner and related aspects of socialization in which the Japanese raise their children. I will explore the different terms and aspects that structure the early years of development, and address also the crucial relationships children experience. The focus will be on the earliest years in the home and family.

A Child's First Years

From a Western perspective, Japanese children appear to be "indulged." We see a pleasant, secure environment and witness particular interactions that we might consider to be "spoiling" a child. The continual aim is to avoid confrontation leading to bad feelings; this is an aspect of Japanese social interaction that exists throughout their lifetime. The enjoyable environment in which most children are raised is created even before birth. It is thought that the "behavior and feelings of the pregnant woman affect the child's health, character and abilities in later life."⁵ Expectations of a pregnant mother include such things as cordiality to others and avoiding stress. Neighborhood mothers are expected to assist in the well-

⁵Ibid, p. 97.

being of the pregnant woman. Once the child is brought into the world, she spends the first few months almost exclusively inside the home, enjoying constant physical contact with the mother. She is cared for promptly as each need arises.

For an outsider, to understand Japanese child-rearing is the key to understanding the culture. The Japanese themselves also stress the importance of early childhood for later life. A Japanese proverb suggests that whatever children receive in their first three years will last until they are a hundred years old.⁶ Thus the belief exists that a mother should never part from her child during its first three years. Japanese sociologist Fujita Mariko, in her article "It's All Mother's Fault," writes,

The first three years of children's lives are considered problematic in Japanese culture. Not only is it the period of character formation, but it is also a time when children's health and physical strength are considered precarious."⁷

This was illustrated by my host mother's friend who had a two year old son born on the same day as my host brother, Ken-kun. She was particularly concerned because her son was not yet speaking, nor was he toilet trained or performing any related tasks. She spent an afternoon at my house and was overwhelmed by Ken-kun's advanced abilities. Apparently she was beginning to feel despair of sorts. She was convinced that since her son was functioning at a level below the norm, there must be a problem. Not only was she concerned for the child, but she felt responsible. My host mother, Yumiko, and another friend, also a mother, spent the afternoon being

⁶In Japanese, this proverb reads *mitsugo no tamashii hyaku made*.

⁷Fujita Mariko, "It's All Mother's Fault: Childcare and the Socialization of Working Mothers in Japan," *The Journal of Japanese Studies*, 15:1 (1989), p. 74.

supportive and assuring this woman that it was still early, and that since children develop at different rates, she need not worry yet. My impression of this was that the support and the advice was sincere, although I wonder why the Japanese are often so quick to disregard the possibility of problems. Actually, this may be self explanatory. When Japanese children begin their development, the mother has the largest responsibility and impact. When developmental stages do not occur as expected, there enter numerous cultural and societal factors. The emotional well being of the mother and family are considered. Japanese child-rearing incorporates a vast number of external factors, all of which are intertwined. The importance of understanding this aspect of Japan cannot be overlooked.

Ii ko

In Japan, there is a widespread belief that children are inherently good at birth and that there is no need for discipline in order to make them fit for this world. This notion can be traced back to the Chinese philosopher Mencius (372-289 BC), who believed that all evil in humans is the result of events that corrupt the originally good nature of the child. The Japanese claim that children are "pure white," or a "white sheet," and thus may be molded or "created" by parents. The fundamental nature of a child is thought to be superior to that of adults. Many Japanese perceive the development of child to adult as a step down. As Cyril Simmons writes, "adults are inferior to the young."⁸ Parents often feel a sense of overprotectiveness, perhaps brought out by this sense of inferiority.⁹

⁸Cyril Simmons, *Growing Up and Going to School in Japan* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1990), p. 101.

⁹This overprotectiveness has been targeted as a possible contributor to the recent juvenile delinquency that has developed in schools. Although the

The ideal toward which all mothering is aimed is represented by *ii ko*, a concept enveloping a large number of characteristics but literally translated as "good child." Inherent good is merely the basis for *ii ko*. The description of an *ii ko* is composed of valued traits such as the following: mild and gentle (*otonashi*), obedient (*sunao*), bright-eyed (*akaru*), energetic (*genki*), prompt (*haki*), and smart (*oriko*). Becoming the good child requires the development of certain characteristics and a mixture of patience and indulgence: persistence (*gambaru*), endurance (*gaman suru*), the ability to reflect on one's weaknesses (*hansei suru*), the acceptance of dependence and the expectation of indulgence (*ameru and amayakasu*).¹⁰

The Japanese word *gambaru* is a most critical criterion of *ii ko*. *Gambaru* and *gambaru* are words used to describe hard work and persistence, or doing one's best.¹¹ The term *gambaru*, meaning "Push on! Persevere!" is constantly used by teachers, classmates, parents, and friends. This is one small fragment of the unique Japanese work ethic, which corresponds to the socialization of the society. Through a mixture of indulgence and patience, the mother or teacher seeks to develop the child's understanding. A dichotomy exists in the make-up of *ii ko*. In order for the achievement of personal and group goals to be possible, a child must be gentle and cooperative, yet persistent and enduring.

issue of delinquency is a bit of a diversion in terms of subject matter, in this case it is interesting to note that recent changes in behavior are being attributed to early childhood development as well, coupled, I am sure, with the many changes in the world.

¹⁰Simmons, p. 103.

¹¹*Gambaru* is the dictionary form of the verb meaning "to persist." *gambaru* is an imperative form, used as a command most often as a wish of luck or perseverance.

Amae

The Japanese place a significant emphasis on the fact that each individual aims to achieve the goals of the group. Japanese mothers emphasize the child's natural ability to perform tasks, where, in comparison, American mothers see their own role as more important in the success of their child. The Japanese mother feels that her child possesses the potential for great success. She puts forth great effort and commitment in caring for the child, who in turn is motivated to perform at high levels of achievement. The Japanese believe that success is a result of a child's relationship with a devoted mother, a relationship which is created through *amae*.

There is no literal translation for the word *amae*. It is a Japanese psychological concept that has been introduced to the outside world by Freudian psychiatrist Takeo Doi through his book *The Anatomy of Dependence*. Doi defines *amae* as "the desire to be passively loved" or the expression of the wish to be dependent, to be taken care of unconditionally.¹² *Amae* has the same root as the word *amai*, which means "sweet." Doi combines this with the fact that *amae* is the noun form of the verb *amaeru*, which means "to depend and presume upon another's benevolence."¹³ It begins with dependence for gratification from the mother and develops into a psychic dependence for warmth and approval from the group. Although there is no single English word meaning *amae*, Doi believes that people from English speaking countries understand its psychology just the same. Edwin

¹²Takeo L. Doi, *The Anatomy of Dependence* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1973), p. 7.

¹³Takeo L. Doi, "Amae: A Key Concept for Understanding Japanese Personality Structure," in Takie Sugiyama Lebra and William P. Lebra, eds., *Japanese Culture and Behavior: Selected Readings* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986), pp. 121-129.

Reischauer, an American interpreter of Japanese culture who was raised in Japan in the 1920's, explains:

The child develops an expectation of understanding indulgence from the mother but also an acceptance of her authority, and in time this attitude becomes expanded into an acceptance of the surrounding social milieu and a need for an authority of dependence upon this broader social approval. In this way, the Japanese child moves with surprising ease from the permissiveness of his earlier years to the acceptance of strict parental and school authority in which he belongs or of society as a whole.¹⁴

Amae is considered a common underlying factor of Japanese success. When Japanese children are convinced that they are "loved," they can better acknowledge their occupancy of a secure and respected role in the group to which they belong. With this feeling of love, they are able to "operate with a degree of dedication and single-minded efficiency uncommon to Westerners."¹⁵ *Amae* persists throughout the lifetimes of the Japanese, and is most often present in other relationships such as father/child and husband/wife. Merry White, a Japanese scholar, cites the case of Sadaharu Oh, a legendary baseball player who ascribed his success on the field to the link between love and success in Japan. He said: "*Amae* warms the heart but it also enables you to work twice as hard, to overcome the siren songs of laziness."¹⁶ Child-rearing concepts and practices related to *amae* support two types of valued goals: those that affect children's relationships with their social environment, which is their source of

¹⁴Edwin O. Reischauer, *The Japanese Today* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 144.

¹⁵Robert C. Christopher, *The Japanese Mind* (New York: Fawcette Columbine, 1983), p. 70.

¹⁶Merry White, *The Japanese Educational Challenge: A Commitment to Children* (New York: Free Press, 1987), p. 22.

satisfaction and incentive; and those goals which, within the specific social environment of the school, affect the child's academic performance.¹⁷

Mother/Child Relationship

In Japan, interpersonal relationships on all levels are the basis for success in child-rearing. Even so, child-rearing is almost completely the mother's responsibility. Thus the relationship between mother and child is the "central human relationship in Japanese culture."¹⁸ This relationship bridges the gap between the goals of self-fulfillment and the goals of social integration. It "embodies Japanese ideas of nurturance and indulgence and is also fully consistent with the standards applied by larger social units."¹⁹ In other words, encouragement exists in terms of individual qualities and abilities, as long as the good child becomes the good social child whose contributions will maintain harmony in society.

Body language plays an important role in forming the child's relationships. The success of Japanese mothering is measured in one respect by the closeness of her relationship with her child, both physically and psychologically. The closeness provides the mother with the opportunity to develop an "intuitive understanding of her child's character, behavior, and feelings—an understanding that she uses to shape the child's development."²⁰

¹⁷Ibid., p. 23.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 27. For the Japanese, a mother's primary goal is to be the best mother possible. That includes care-giving to the fullest extent and gaining the child's dependence. The mother is also responsible for preparing the child for social situations, so that the child will act appropriately.

²⁰Ibid., p. 95.

Mothers sense what children need and desire, often indulging those desires unintentionally. They also send signals to children through body language and encourage the children to read them, teaching them to be aware of the effects their actions may have on others. One of White's students wrote the following to describe his relationship with his mother:

I am
like the clay
always being molded
into different shapes
by two firm hands²¹

This poem shows the relationship from the perspective of the child. He sees that his mother is the controlling factor in his development, but does not necessarily object. This point of view substantiates the previously mentioned "white sheet" theory.

The closeness and dependence that starts at birth is part of the concept of *amae* which, as stated earlier, is carried on throughout the lifetime of the Japanese. Through the mother/child relationship, the wish for indulgence can be completely granted. As Lebra writes in her book *Japanese Patterns of Behavior*, "The mother can *amayakasu*, while the child can *amaeru*, in the most intimate manner, without much inhibition."²² Lebra describes this as one of the four types of dependency present in this mother/child relationship. She claims that through such a relationship, there are four types of dependency that are clearly demonstrated. She writes,

First, the mother has power over the child, the latter being totally dependent on her for security, protection, and survival.
Second, the mother is an overall caretaker for the child,

²¹Ibid., p. 95.

²²Takie Sugiyama Lebra, *Japanese Patterns of Behavior* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1976), p. 58.

responsible for his feeding, toilet control, clothing, and health. The child is dependent on the mother's attendance. Third, the wish for indulgence is fully gratified in the mother-child relationship. The mother can *amayakasu*, while the child can *amaeru*, in the most intimate manner, without much inhibition. Finally, her whole life being devoted to the welfare of the child, the mother symbolizes the ultimate in empathy and sacrifice, on which the helpless child depends.²³

American children are expected to struggle to acquire independence as they mature. Japanese children, however, do not renounce their attachment to their mothers.

Bedtime is an example worth noting because it shows the dependence as well as the longevity of the mother/child relationship. The concern of suffocation of a young baby is taken seriously, so until a child grows a little, she sleeps next to, instead of in, the futon with her mother and father. The baby is usually lulled to sleep by her mother, and should she wake up at any point throughout the night, her mother will pick her up once again. Anxiety for a baby is to be avoided whenever possible.

As children grow, they move into the futons with the parents. My observation and research regarding usual bedtime routines for young children has yielded interesting results. First, the younger the child, the later she tends to stay up. Parents rarely set fixed bedtimes, and allow the children to fall asleep in front of the television, from where they transfer the children to the futons when they are ready for bed themselves. In the home where I lived, the oldest, Ayaka, was in first grade. When it got to be ten o'clock, her mother began nagging her about getting to bed. "You won't be able to get up in the morning," she often said. "What time do your friends go to bed? Early, right?" I even heard the threat, "Your father will be very angry if you are still up when he gets

²³ Ibid., p. 58.

home." Usually it was an incessant "Ayaka, get to sleep. It's already well past ten." Most often all of this chatter had no affect on Ayaka, but only caused a second issue to surface. She did not feel comfortable upstairs by herself. She was too "scared and lonely" to sleep on the second floor alone. Yet if she stayed downstairs in front of the television, she would not fall asleep until very late. She never once was denied the option to stay downstairs, thus almost without exception she stayed in front of the television until her parents carried her upstairs. On the other hand, if her father was home, he often would lie upstairs in the futon with her until she fell asleep.

By staying downstairs with the family in front of the television, Ayaka was continuing her sleeping habits from her early years. Most nights she ended up falling asleep either lying next to, or in the lap of, one of her parents. It is common practice for a caretaker to lie down beside a child until she falls asleep. Ken-kun was a perfect example. He never once was told to go to sleep. When it was 11:30 and he was still running around, Yumiko, who was often exhausted, laughed and said, "He's really energetic tonight, isn't he?" *Amae* clearly existed in this relationship, since the dependency and expectancy of indulgence occurred in all situations, especially this bedtime example. Ken-kun often crawled into his mother's lap, where he was warmly welcomed. There were times when he asked Yumiko to rub his back. If she stopped after a while he whined until she began again and rubbed him until he fell asleep. Sometimes he wanted her to simply lie next to him. One night just before eleven o'clock he suggested to Yumiko, "Let's go to sleep." What that implied was "why don't you lie next to me, Mom, because I need to *amaeru* in order to fall asleep." Ken-kun's father came home shortly after they settled onto the floor, so Yumiko, in her usual Japanese fashion, got up to fix him dinner. Ken-kun began to cry, saying that they should sleep, and since Yumiko's attempt at

persuading him otherwise was unsuccessful, she lay next to him once more until he slept. To a Western observer, this situation portrays a very spoiled child. However, it is a wonderful example of the extremes to which Japanese mothers go.

Another aspect of the mother/child relationship is the importance of home training and the mother's goals for her child. The goals are usually both parents' expectations for the child's education and occupational attainment. A mother in this important role is known as *kyoikumama*, which literally translated means "education mom." The education mom sets her children's academic success above everything else in life. A comparative study that was designed to identify family variables associated with school readiness in both Japan and the United States explains the socialization processes involved with maternal teaching styles. The project began in 1972, and was conducted in Japan by Hiroshi Azuma of the University of Tokyo and by Robert Hess in the United States. The project consisted of interviews, tests and observed interactions of home teaching between mother and child.²⁴ The primary component of this study was a block-sorting task, in which the mother was asked to teach the child how to sort the blocks.

During the teaching task, Japanese mothers were much less likely to ask for verbal responses in their attempts to help the child solve the problem. American mothers showed a tendency to encourage verbal assertiveness from their children. Japanese mothers also were more likely to elaborate instructions in response to incorrect, partially correct, or even correct answers by the child,

²⁴For a more detailed discussion, see Robert Hess, "Family Influences on School Readiness and Achievement In Japan and the United States: An Overview of Longitudinal Study," in Harold Stevenson, *Child Development and Education in Japan* (New York: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1986), pp. 148-163.

opposing the tendency of American mothers to repeat the instruction in nearly the same form as the original request when the child made an error or offered a partially correct answer. Japanese mothers used fewer commands than did the Americans. As suggested by Hatano Giyoo, Japanese mothers tend to stress procedural aspects of the task rather than the conceptual grasp of the specific principles of the task.²⁵

It appears that for the Japanese mother, getting the child to understand the appropriate procedure was the first goal. She then would expect that the child could, by repeating the correct form, infer the correct principle of the task. The following statement clearly exemplifies this:

Japanese have always seemed to lean more toward intuition rather than toward reason, to subtlety and sensitivity in expression rather than to clarity of analysis, to pragmatism rather than to theory, and to organization skills rather than to great intellectual concepts.²⁶

As Hess suggests, "The maternal behavior we observed during the children's preschool years is correlated not only with school readiness, but with school-relevant performance several years later."²⁷

With my host family I observed many occasions in which Ayaka, while doing her homework, received help from her mother. Instead of giving answers, Yumiko gave explanations. In math problems, she used items to help Ayaka visualize addition and subtraction. She showed Ayaka stroke order in writing characters and asked her to rewrite them. My impression was that Ayaka relied too much on her mother's assistance and did not always put all of

²⁵Stevenson, p. 154.

²⁶Reischauer (1988), p. 200.

²⁷Stevenson, p. 163.

her effort into her work. Ayaka got very upset once when, at ten o'clock, Yumiko made her do her work. At this point she was too tired, and ended up in tears. According to Yumiko, since Ayaka had neglected to do the work when asked to earlier, she would learn to so as she is told in this manner.

Ken-kun was still too young for anything academic, but Yumiko began urging him to perform small tasks for himself, such as putting on his shoes or finding a missing toy. He often got frustrated, but in the end it was the only way he would learn, according to Yumiko. Yumiko, as encouraging as possible, was saddened by this. She realized that it would not be long before he would have to do most everything on his own, all the while decreasing his need for her. Already, at two, he was using the toilet by himself. Although the relationship that exists between Yumiko and Ken-kun will always entail *amae*, Yumiko knew that her children would grow up quickly and that everything she did to raise them, and her methods of interactions and caring, would make the difference in terms of the children's later lives.

Father/Child Relationship

Although the mother/child relationship is most crucial in family socialization, other family members also play very significant roles in the training of young children. In the past, and even in some cases today, Japanese fathers have generally played a minimal role in the care and development of the child at home. However, in recent years the father has become increasingly more involved. It is true that many Japanese fathers, especially those in urban areas working for large companies, spend very long hours away from home. Even so, I believe that the younger generation father is becoming more family-oriented. A clear example of this is one that I remember reading in a newspaper article. The article described the way of life in Japan and the social changes that

the country is going through. The depiction of one businessman who began questioning the longhand tradition of going drinking with fellow employees after work was very powerful. He could not understand why people would rather stay out late and spend money instead of going home and spending time with their families. This man chose to remove himself from that routine and return home to see his family. Nothing was ever said, but he was quickly abandoned by the other men and cast out of the circle. I spoke to many men who felt the same way about spending as much time as possible with their families. This is a trend I found mostly in men under age forty who have young children.

The father of the household in which I spent those five months, Keiichi, got home at about eleven o'clock four nights a week. He came home before dinner on Wednesdays and had the weekends free. As soon as he walked through the door, the atmosphere changed; the children clung to him in every way. At the dinner table, they poured his beer and crawled all over him, which he appeared to enjoy. They bathed with him, and then played until they tired and snuggled with him in front of the television, where they slept until he was ready for bed himself. I spent a fair amount of time with many of my host family's friends, all of whom had children under eight and had similar family relationships and goals. The younger child, especially when tired, showed preference for the father. The physical contact and nurturing between father and child was almost as common as with the mother. Clearly a form of *amae* is present in the father/child relationship as well. Keiichi always held one child's hand, or carried the child when he or she tired of walking. Even while eating, he would willingly have Ken-kun squirming in his lap, and would neglect his own meal until Ken-kun decided to move.

Sibling Relationships

An older sibling unavoidably participates in the socialization of the younger child. The status held by the elder brother or sister is greatly emphasized, as can be seen simply through the way in which he or she is addressed. Expressed from the point of view of the youngest family member, kinship terms are applied by all members of the family. Thus to everyone in a family, the oldest daughter or son is referred to as *onesan* (eldest sister) or *onisan* (eldest brother). This tends to create an element of hierarchy within the sibling relationship. When a new baby is born, a role of superiority is outlined for the older child, who tends to take great pride. As Japanese scholar Joy Hendry suggests, using this as a ploy to avoid jealousy seems to be very effective. In my home in Japan this was precisely demonstrated through certain situations. For example, when the children argued, as they often did at the dinner table, the result most often was in favor of the two year old. Both children got upset, but Ayaka, who was seven, was asked, "Are you the older sister or not?" It was apparent that she felt shame as well as frustration since she gave in to the argument. Suggesting that she was not accepting her proper role as an elder sibling forced her to change her behavior immediately, to once again recover her pride. Status is balanced by sometimes being on the losing end of a conflict. Being older has positive and negative aspects, as does being younger.

The different levels and usage of language that exist throughout every relationship in Japan also distinguishes the hierarchy of the sibling relationship. Hendry cites the following as an example.

Older children 'do things for' a younger child (*nani o shite ageru*), whereas this phrase is discouraged if used by a younger child to an older one. For example, in the case of the verb to play, the older child does the younger child the favor of playing

with it (*asonde ageru*), but in the reverse situation, where it wanted to play with a still older child, it would have to make the suggestion in the form of a request which implies a degree of deference (*asonde kureru*).²⁸

During the early years of speaking, children are not expected to fully understand nor use this polite type of language, but such situations encourage early practice of simple respectful language. The presence of grandparents also assists in the practice of such language.

Grandparent/Child Relationship

Although in recent years the nuclear family has become quite common in Japan, it is not unusual to see households of continuing families. Many children grow up with a set of grandparents in the house, with whom they usually develop very close relationships. If they do not live within the same house, close family members often live in the same neighborhood or nearby towns, and visit frequently. Grandparents in particular play an important part in the child's early rearing. If geography does not allow for frequent contact, children often spend their long school breaks at their grandparents' home. The family I lived with in Gifu Prefecture had built a smaller house next door to the large, traditional house in which my host father grew up. The grandparents ate dinner with us and the children often bathed with the grandmother. The family I lived with in Osaka visited one set of grandparents in Kyoto (about an hour commute) at least once a month. The other set of grandparents lived farther north, and the week around the New Year was spent at their home in Kanazawa.

²⁸Hendry, p. 56.

There is sometimes discrepancy between the ideas that a mother and grandmother hold when it comes to child rearing. In the West, I would say that mothers tend to lean toward their own instincts, whereas the Japanese mother strongly considers memories from her own childhood and advice received from her mother. My host father in Osaka once told me that each household in Japan operates with a different set of rules and that some are stricter than others, most often depending on how their parents treated them. However, mothers claim occasionally that grandmothers are too lenient and do too much for the children. It is also said that grandparents stifle children's adventurousness by too often emphasizing the dangers surrounding them.

The Neighborhood

Because young children spend almost all of their time with family members until they begin socializing outside of the home, there is a great amount of emphasis placed on learned behavior—that which the children often copy as life goes on around them, especially since children are made the center of the home and the family's life. Thus a common theme among all parties involved in a child's upbringing is the encouragement of exemplary behavior for the benefit of the child. Specifically of note are such things as proper speech, the exhibition of caring, and the demonstration of safety.

While children's relationships with their mothers hold utmost importance in their socialization, and family relationships hold great significance in children's lives, other external relationships are important for them as well. White describes the difference as follows:

A mother is proud of a child who shows that he is dependent on her, but she also understands that this capacity will help him meet the expectations of the world outside the family. The distinction between *uchi* (inside, home) and *soto* (outside) is an

important part of the socialization of a child. Every group to which the child will belong as he grows up will resemble the original *uchi* of the family to some degree, having its own denominators and expectations of membership.²⁹

Neighborhoods all over Japan, although differing in location, structure, and so forth, play similar roles in the family and community life. The neighborhood serves as many things, the most important perhaps being the first socialization a child may have. For very young children, neighborhood play is often the first social activity outside the home, an important stage in which children learn social skills. Neighborhood children most often inevitably become a child's first friends. The parents are generally friendly, cooperative, and helpful to one another. Mothers in particular often spend long periods of time chatting outside and sometimes look after each other's children when needed.

The ability to avoid conflict is considered a restraint that a child must learn, along with the notion of prizing interpersonal harmony. The neighborhood provides an atmosphere in which these goals can be further developed. Mothers sometimes spend time outdoors with the children when they first begin to play in the neighborhood. This usually only lasts a short while, and as in my case, the two year old ventured outside on his own. There he played happily with the older children, evoking little worry from his mother, although she felt most comfortable when Ayaka was outside as well. The young children are very well accepted into the group by the older children. In an attempt to develop and maintain interpersonal harmony, "older children are taught to be kind and yielding, younger children to be compliant."³⁰

²⁹White, p. 26.

³⁰Lebra, p. 149.

Older children are encouraged to set examples for the younger children as well. They tend to enjoy this responsibility and sometimes take the role quite seriously. Thus in the neighborhood setting a mother feels comfortable that the older children are providing examples of proper behavior for young children. I have witnessed this type of relationship in my own neighborhood, where the seven year old girls very much enjoyed playing the role model for the two year old. These relationships may very well last for a long while. Neighborhood play no doubt complements the parents' examples for a child's early stages of experience in the world outside the home.

Discipline and Manners

The previously discussed project by Azuma and Hess revealed some interesting cultural differences in the mothers' handling of encounters calling for discipline and control. The mothers were presented with six hypothetical situations and asked to respond as if they were attempting to alter the behavior of the child. The Japanese mothers tended to rely on appeals to feelings, while American mothers appealed to authority.³¹ The Japanese technique may be, as Stevenson suggests, "more effective in getting their children to comply with maternal expectations" in that it leads to the internalization of adult norms and expectations when the children are very young.³² Since the majority of Japanese husbands spend relatively little time at home, the mother takes control of

³¹Stevenson, p. 156. The four categories of responses are as follows: (1) appeals to *authority*, where the reasons for complying is the mother's authority or power (ex. "I told you not to do that"); (2) appeals to *rules*, where the reason is an impersonal rule (ex. "Walls are not for drawing; paper is for drawing"); (3) appeals to *feelings* (ex. "How do you think I will feel if you don't eat the vegetables I cooked for you?"); and (4) appeals to *consequences* (other than punishment) (ex. "If you eat your vegetables, you'll be strong and healthy").

³²*Ibid.*, p. 157.

almost every aspect of the household. A recent survey showed that forty-one percent of the men polled left the education and disciplining of their children entirely to their wives.³³ From this result we can assume that the other fifty nine percent of the men are those who are taking interest in their family life. It is safe to assume that those men are very much involved in the disciplining of their children, at least when they are at home.

In hopes that children will more easily assimilate the values of their parents, dependence on the mother is strongly encouraged. As seen above, the baby is rarely separated from her mother. A Japanese mother will carry the baby, sleep with the baby, and bathe with the baby; in many cases the baby will be left with no one else during its first three years. Jerome Kagan talks about dependence on others and undifferentiated self as not being "ascribed universally to young children."³⁴ He continues,

The Japanese, who prize close interdependence between child and adult, regard the infant as having a small component of autonomy that is part of the baby's unique nature. Japanese mothers, who believe they must tempt the infant into a dependent role, rush to soothe a crying infant, respond quietly to the baby's excited babbling, and sleep with the young child at night in order to encourage the mutual bonding necessary for adult life.

This constant contact between mother and child may be the reason that there is not a large need for punishment in the upbringing of Japanese children. The widespread belief in Japan that a child's life should be free from tension and frustration leads child care to be "oriented toward the appeasement of the child's emotions."³⁵ Such appeasement is most often seen through the extensive

³³Christopher, p. 66.

³⁴Jerome Kagan, *The Nature of the Child* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1984), p. 29.

³⁵Lebra, p. 142.

physical contact existing between parent and child. White, who has spent time researching in Japan, writes of the "positive tone that suffuses all the interactions with children." She continues, "rarely does one hear threats, warnings of pronouncements, not to speak of character denunciations; nor do teachers or parents confront children directly...mothers cajole and persuade through love, not war."³⁶ The walls of a Japanese house are thin and the houses extremely close together, yet arguing and yelling is almost never heard from other homes in the neighborhoods. There are of course people who punish by means of negative sanctions, although it is relatively rare. Maintaining a pleasant disposition is something a mother takes very seriously, thus she will always set good examples for her children. My sense is that Japanese mothers, even in the most frustrating situations with their children, almost never have even a desire to physically harm them. This differs from many Western societies, and is perhaps a result of socialization, which may create for Japanese mothers an unconscious check of their own actions. A screaming child in a supermarket would never be scolded by means of a hand.

The use of rewards is also fairly infrequent, since many parents report that they wish that their children would behave well for their own sake (intrinsic) rather than because of compelling outside forces (extrinsic). Having read this, I was surprised when for the first time I witnessed Yumiko bribing Ken-kun into eating his rice by offering ice cream. This is both a threat and a bribe, but not a common occurrence. On the other hand, it does seem that children get anything they want when it comes to gum and small toys. Hendry cites another writer, George DeVos, who "points out that excessive scolding is linked to unsuccessful results, and that children are thought to develop

³⁶White, p. 109.

negative attitudes or become soured if they are punished with severity."

Hendry continues with the following:

[DeVos] notes that mothers are constantly self-conscious about the possible influence of their behavior on future development and avoid direct influence and refuse direct refusal of demands by ignoring them or distracting a child from them. It is often better to give in to a child who insists on some action the mother has tried to discourage rather than create bad feeling by refusing it outright.³⁷

This very concept was illustrated day after day in my host family's home, specifically around bedtime, which was very ambiguous in itself. As explained in the previous bedtime examples, it was usual practice for Japanese children to fall asleep in front of the television. Although it may be suggested that they actually get in the futon so that they sleep well, it is not a forced issue. If a child cries and expects her mother to cuddle her, the mother will most often give up all else to do so. If a child wants to ride in the front seat of the car, the mother often sits in the back. It is the mother's yielding for her children that demonstrates the mild manner in which children are raised.

Discipline can also take on a different emphasis in the early childhood years. Japanese households tend to stress conventional manners and etiquette in disciplining the pre-school child. Conventional greetings are taught as an integral aspect of the everyday life both inside and outside the home. This does not differ much from the West, in that children are taught to say "Good-bye," "Good morning" and "Good night," "Thank you," and "I am sorry" when appropriate. In Japan, emphasis is placed on the "stylized expressions of appreciation for food, to be said before and after every meal."³⁸ The terms for "I

³⁷Hendry, p. 116.

³⁸Lebra, p. 148.

am leaving" and "I'm back" are also important and learned in time. The response "*Hai!*" is expected to be used in response to any request, meaning "yes, I will do that," or "yes, I am listening." When children do not respond they are scolded until they give the proper response.

I have read that emphasis is also placed on learning to bow, although I did not witness any enforced practice of this in the home. However, while waiting to cross the street one day, I had the opportunity to watch pre-school children board the small pink school bus that picked them up every morning. I was amazed to see a four-way bowing routine occur—the mother bowed to the teacher, the teacher bowed to the mother, the children bowed first to the teacher and then turned and bowed to the mother. Finally, the bus driver bowed in his seat. For the Japanese, bowing is an integral part of their everyday, so it becomes an acquired skill from early on. The fact that it was being taught to four year-old children as they boarded a school bus was an interesting surprise to me.

Behavioral modesty plays its biggest role for girls. When not seated properly, a young girl will most often be scolded. In my house this was a common occurrence at the dinner table. "Ayaka! Your legs!" This was all it took and immediately she was seated properly again. Co-sleeping and co-bathing also serve as devices for teaching control of the body. As Lebra writes,

A little girl learns how to be modest while nude in the bath, and how to place her legs while sleeping. If her sleeping posture is too unrestrained, with the legs wide apart, she will be teased by the family, saying, "You slept like the character of *dia* [with both arms and legs spread apart]." The importance of the ritual control of behavior is thus instilled in a preschool child.³⁹

Not only does this activity demonstrate the importance of behavior control, but the element of shame that is often referred to in the Japanese

³⁹Ibid., p. 148.

culture is present as well. The parallel that can be drawn here is that by making a child feel ashamed of her actions, she will then exercise self-discipline and correct her actions on her own. My host mother provided me with a great example to demonstrate this idea of shame and its relation to self-discipline. Apparently one day Ayaka was playing with three friends in the house, when somehow bedtime came up. The friends said that they usually fall asleep around eight o'clock. When asked what time she went to bed, Ayaka hung her head and avoided the question. She was very rarely asleep at all before ten o'clock. I got home at nine that night and was amazed by how quiet the house was. Ayaka had been asleep for a while and was upstairs, which was extremely unusual. This only happened that one night but was a pure example of the shame she had felt, knowing that as a first grader she should be asleep well before then.

Use of Repetition in Language

Yet another element of strong emphasis in the training of a child, both in Japan and in the West, is that of repetition. Mothers are generally encouraged to be consistent in the behavior patterns of daily protocol. Repetition enters the realm of most activities within the home, including toilet training, meal time, dressing and undressing, bathing, and above all else, language.

In terms of passing language along to children, repetition is the key. A series of baby words exists, and they are used and repeated time after time until the babies pick them up and begin using them on their own. Adults will point to an object and repeat its name in baby talk. Apparently there are people in Japan who dislike the use of baby talk but will always join in on repetition of phrases so that children hear it from others besides their parents. Baby talk includes many words that are no more than repeated sounds, and I heard them

used often by children even up through elementary school. The Japanese hear a dog's bark as "uan, uan," which Westerners hear as "woof." A cat, instead of "meow," says "nian." Thus, the words in baby talk for dog and cat, respectively, are *uanuan* and *niannian*. I heard even a twelve year old say this. The two most common words that I was exposed to were *bubu* and *tete*. *Bubu* refers to a car, both real and toy. This was often a source of excitement in my house, since both children loved going out for a ride. In urban Japan, families almost never drive their cars except for on weekends, usually for a family outing.

Tete means hand, which makes perfect sense because the Japanese word for hand is simply *te*. The context in which I heard this term numerous times each day became a large point of interest for me, and was directed to the two year old: "*Tete hantai!*" The translation of this phrase is "other hand." It was obvious to me that the child was naturally left handed, but the parents urged him use his right hand with everything he did. The first time I witnessed this, Ken-kun had a stick in his hand and, as if it were a bat, was swinging at a ball. At that point I did not understand what was being said, but from the pause, the switch, and the weakened power of the swing, I could gather what was going on. That night at the dinner table I heard the same phrase and watched what happened. Indeed Ken-kun held his spoon (he rarely used chopsticks then) in his left hand, and was told to switch to his right. I was shocked, but also too timid to ask about it. I was not sure how to phrase my question. After a few weeks of seeing the same thing go on meal after meal, I finally asked why it was wrong for him to use his left hand. Yumiko answered by explaining that it was not necessarily wrong, but that in the future it may affect the way people perceive him. There have been companies in the past that would not hire left-handed people on the basis that being left-handed is a form of handicap. I was completely shocked by this. Our conversation was followed up many times, and

the most reasonable and final explanation I was given referred to the fact that everything in the world is developed for the average right-handed person. Thus their goal was to make life easier for Ken-kun by using this early stage to develop the use of his right hand.

Our Western perspective makes a complete understanding of the above ideas very difficult. Yet clearly it is through various relationships and Japanese concepts that a child develops socially. Lebra cites the perception of Ruth Benedict, author of *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*. According to Lebra, Benedict characterized the typical lifestyle of a Japanese as "a great shallow U-curve with maximum freedom and indulgence allowed to babies and to the old." As Lebra further interprets from Benedict she writes, "Maturity and adulthood represent the peak of obligation and responsibility, leaving little freedom to the individual. This U-curve is exactly reversed in the case of the American, who enjoys utmost freedom in the prime of his life."⁴⁰

Having examined the socialization process through which Japanese children develop, the focus shifts now to examining the education system. In order to do so effectively we must start with an understanding of the origins of the present day system. The following chapter will guide us through its development.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 142.

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF JAPAN'S EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

What is an education system, after all, if not a ritualization of the word; if not a qualification of some fixing of roles for speakers; if not a distribution and an appropriation of discourse, with all its learning and its powers?

—Michel Foucault, "The Discourse on Language"

After examining the sociological aspects of early child development, it is important to shift to the educational system in order to follow the development of Japan's individuals. In order to understand the influence of today's educational system, we must first understand its process of development. The following will provide a chronological overview of the changes in the Japanese educational system since 1868.

1868-1890

1868 began the reign of emperor Meiji and the Meiji Restoration. Young leaders of the new state vigorously established the Charter Oath, which encompassed five articles suggesting the move toward modernization.⁴¹ Modernization was to be the most important objective, as seen most deliberately through Article 5: *Wisdom and knowledge shall be sought throughout the world for the purpose of promoting the welfare of the*

⁴¹Also referred to as the Five Article Oath.

empire.⁴² With the rise of the Meiji period came a new system of education that held no ties to the aristocratic elite or Buddhism. This new system was developed by means of reforms in the field of education that were necessary in order to bring change in the attitudes of the Japanese toward modernization. A famous slogan combining both the old and new of Japan and stating its aim was "Eastern ethics and Western science."⁴³ This slogan was made famous by a samurai and Confucian scholar, Sakuma Shozan, who became interested in Western science as a result of being thrown into a situation in which he faced the "threat of Western naval power in Japanese waters."⁴⁴

In these few words Sakuma summed up his faith in the compatibility of the Oriental (mainly Confucian) ethical heritage with the new technical knowledge of the West...[His simple formula] satisfied at least two of the basic conditions for Japan's survival in the modern world: the need for developing military power sufficient to hold off the West, while at the same time preserving that unity of national purpose and action which, under the circumstances, could only spring from common and well-established traditions. Thus the formula proved workable enough to serve a whole generation of modernization program of unparalleled magnitude in the late nineteenth century.⁴⁵

The strive for modernization required basic and permanent changes in the attitudes of the Japanese. Thus educational reforms were of primary importance. In 1867, court noble Tomimi Iwakura (1825-83), who would hold

⁴²Edward R. Beauchamp, and James M. Vardaman, Jr., *Japanese Education Since 1945* (Armonk NY: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1994), p. 76. [Imperial Rescript on Reconstruction. January 1, 1946].

⁴³W. Scott Morton, *Japan: Its History and Culture* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1994), p. 150.

⁴⁴Tsunoda Ryusaku, *Sources of Japanese Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), p. 97.

⁴⁵*Ibid*, p. 100.

an important post in the Meiji government in the next few years, recommended that an emphasis be placed on the importance of popular enlightenment as a basis for a strong nation. He suggested the establishment of elementary and secondary schools throughout the nation. Takayoshi Kido backed Tomimi by recommending general education on the grounds that without an enlightened population the country would not be able to compete with other nations. In 1869, Hirobumi Ito suggested the establishment of universal common schools through which new knowledge of the world could reach every person in Japan.

The abolition of the clan system and the organization of the prefectural government (*haihanchiken*) was completed in 1871, and with that came the formation of the Ministry of Education, which was intended to develop a national education plan. The Ministry of Education was modeled on the rigid French system at first, but was quickly influenced by more liberal notions from the United States.

Education reform began with Meiji and continued through World War II. In its first stage, before the foundation of the new government was firm, conservative *kokugaku* restorationists and Confucianists took the initiative in educational policy making. These groups opened schools which lasted barely a year, for they were too conservative to meet the newly developing educational needs. Their place was taken by a group known as Occidentalists, a group that was active in the first decade of the regime when Westernization of education was at its height. The Occidentalists studied and translated Western texts and other references to be used in Japanese schools.

In establishing a system of universal education, the Meiji government relied heavily on Western models such as institutions, practices, and textbooks. Traditional Japanese educational ideas leaning toward morals and

ethics were increasingly neglected. Most textbooks were either Western books in translation or books written about the West. Educators such as Fukuzawa Yukichi aimed to implement Western morality into the curriculum, that being "rational, utilitarian morality."⁴⁶ Believers in Confucian moral education pushed the educational policy makers to bring *shushin* (moral education) into the curriculum as a core subject.

During the 1880s the supremacy of the state was emphasized due to German, Confucian, and nationalistic influences. An individual's free development was not of concern, and instead the good of the nation as a whole became of utmost value for education. The entire developmental period was overseen by strong leadership from the central government, which planned and regulated each policy and detail ensuring that the goal of education would promote national strength. Mori Arinori, Minister of Education from 1885 to 1889, believed that by tightening governmental control of the schools he would be able to stress "the importance of educating the students to serve the state, not their own interests."⁴⁷ By 1890, an Imperial Rescript on Education was issued which emphasized harmony and loyalty. The Rescript was based on both Confucian virtues and militaristic, ultra nationalistic principles.

The slogan "Western techniques and Eastern morals" took effect after the end of the period of overwhelming Westernization. Kobayashi Tetsuya explains:

The traditional *kokugaku* and Confucian school came back to the scene of national politics in education. The Occidentalists

⁴⁶Hane Mikiso, *Peasants, Rebels, & Outcasts: The Underside of Modern Japan* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982). p. 55.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p. 57.

themselves began to take more the line of nationalistic thought. The Westernization of education was allowed to proceed only within the limits of methods, school organization, etc. The "moral" aims of education were cautiously prescribed and interpreted through the traditional national philosophy, the most elaborated expression of which is to be found in the Imperial Rescript on Education of 1890.⁴⁸

The Rescript of 1890 clearly defined the objectives of education in terms of nationalist-Confucianist values. The strength of the nation was emphasized alongside the Confucian moral concepts of filial piety, obedience, and loyalty, both to family and to the emperor, all of which made up the sacred national moral doctrine until the end of World War II.

1890-1945

Japan had been run under the 1889 Meiji Constitution of the Greater Empire of Japan until the nation came under United States occupation in August of 1945. One aim of the Meiji Constitution was to establish the absolute authority of the emperor and his government. This notion of absolute power from the emperor is what worked as the basis of education up until World War II. Tactics based on this assumption were employed in building the nation. Students were trained to be loyal to the emperor and the State, and they were to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to carry out their patriotic civil and economic activities. Thus it was considered that the emperor and his government were to oversee education. According to Kobayashi, with the formulation of the Meiji Constitution this idea was taken for granted. Thus, as Kobayashi wrote,

⁴⁸Kobayashi Tetsuya, *Society, Schools, and Progress in Japan* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1976), p. 29.

Even without mentioning it specifically in the Constitution, national education was exclusively under the Imperial prerogative, by means of which the Emperor carried out his traditional function of enlightening the people by his divine virtue and benevolence.⁴⁹

Hereafter, all educational regulations never passed through the Diet but were rather accepted by the nation and issued in the emperor's name. Four Imperial Rescripts related to the education of Japan were publicized during the Meiji period. The first of these rescripts, the Imperial Rescript on Education, was issued in 1890 and considered the most important of the four. The philosophy of Japan's national education was most profoundly influenced by this particular Imperial Rescript of 1890. Because the emperor's responsibility for setting the goals and principles of education were taken for granted in the Meiji Constitution, the Rescript was issued as a supplement that would ensure his responsibility. According to W. Scott Morton, "the schools thus became a means of official indoctrination ready to the hand of future governments."⁵⁰

Kokutai, or national policy, was to be the framework within which national education was to be founded. The Rescript on Education began with the following:

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.⁵¹

⁴⁹*Ibid*, p. 52.

⁵⁰Morton, p. 154.

⁵¹Beauchamp, p. 37. [Imperial Rescript on Education (*Kyoiku Chokugo*). October 30, 1890].

Included in the Rescript was the mention of various moral virtues. Some were representative of strong Confucian beliefs such as those involving the paternal and hierarchical relationships within society. Other moral virtues were related to social ethics and national life. Filial piety, submissiveness, obedience, patriotism, and public duty were all included as items that became the focus of moral instruction. This was known in the national schools as *shushin*. With the 1879 revision of the Education Act of 1872, *shushin* became a core subject. *Shushin* can be described as "education in perfecting one's moral character," and was part of Japan's curriculum until World War II.⁵² Not only did the Imperial Rescript on Education outline these moral virtues, it also fostered a nationalistic principle of education in Japan. The Rescript defined the principle of national education which Kobayashi describes as "to teach the loyal subjects their patriotic duties to guarantee the everlasting continuance of national policy or *kokutai*."⁵³

In 1908 the required number of years for school attendance was six. This was the first time there was enforced attendance. During 1911 the government claimed that the enrollment for boys was 98.8 percent and 97.5 percent for girls.⁵⁴ Despite this enrollment rate, attendance still lagged at 89 percent. It appeared to be the poor families, both urban and rural, whose children were not attending school regularly. All of the surveys conducted in the early twentieth century showed extremely low literacy rates and small numbers of those who had attended or completed all six compulsory years.

⁵²Hane, p. 55.

⁵³Kobayashi, p. 53.

⁵⁴Hane, p. 51.

The demands of farming for some living in rural Japan serve as one explanation for this poor school attendance. Many families farmed to survive and kept their children home to help on the farm and to care for the babies. A reporter touring the poverty-stricken mountain villages in the north in the early 1930s noted:

Many school children are dressed in dirty rags and have babies strapped to their backs during class. When one baby starts to wail, others follow suit. Then some of the children tending the babies begin to cry in frustration. So the years of compulsory education end up being merely a *pro forma* affair.⁵⁵

Adults seemed to have been aware of the hardship that was created for their children in terms of attending school and helping at home, although this was a moral virtue children were taught to endure. A rural school teacher observed:

Children are often told, "People who don't endure hardships when they are young will have a hard time when they grow up." But the adults, when they were children, were not lazy loafers. And yet they are still undergoing hard times....The youngsters seem to be aware of this.⁵⁶

Up until 1941, with its goal clearly centered on the ultimate industrial society, Japan considered its goal to be to standardize its people. Humans were being trained as capital for mass production. This effort reached its pinnacle in 1941, when the National Schools Ordinance was implemented. Education scholar Sakaiya Taichi describes this ordinance as being a direct translation of the Nazis' Volksschule.⁵⁷ The Nazi methods were admired by

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 52.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 52.

⁵⁷Sakaiya Taichi, *What Is Japan?* (New York: Kodansha International, 1993), p. 253.

Japan's reform bureaucracy, which faithfully translated them to their own. At this point building new facilities for private education was prohibited, and all primary grade education became public. The new system also determined that students would attend schools in their specified districts. The aim of such a system was to suppress any distinctiveness in the student populations, allowing for no individuality. Standardized education and state-stipulated curriculum provided instruction in inverse proportion: the less one knew about a subject the more one studied it. School rules enforced clothes, hair, and even posture. This was essentially the final method of control used to create complete conformity, outlawing any expression of those last vestiges of student individuality. Wartime Japanese bureaucracy aimed for a totalitarian system. Following the war this system was pursued further, the goal being equal education for all.

In the 1940s, militarism and nationalism were concepts that reinforced the centralization of power over education. The emperor had full authority, which was derived from the myths of the holy imperial ancestors, Izanagi and Izanami.⁵⁸ Symbolizing this authority were the three sacred treasures: the jewel, the mirror, and the sword. All Japanese families were regarded as the offspring of these gods, except for the imperial family. The divine mission entrusted by a long, unbroken line of emperors made the imperial family superior. The emperor did not represent, nor was he a servant of, the state or the people. He *was* the state, and the nation had no identity considered apart from him.⁵⁹ Thus education of those days aimed to make people regard personal sacrifice and suffering for the national cause as a duty

⁵⁸See Appendix A, *Kojiki*.

⁵⁹Class notes, "Anthropology of Japan, " Kansai Gaidai, Fall 1994.

and an honor. The Japanese individual responsibility was to guard and maintain the throne and to serve the emperor and the state.

1945-Present

During World War II the emperor lost all his political authority and Japan was occupied by United States forces. The Constitution of 1946 established Japan as a democratic nation. The articles of the constitution explicate the duties and rights of the people. Reference to education can be found in at least ten of the articles of the constitution, presenting the concept that education is no longer a gift from the emperor but is an innate right for every person that the state must guarantee. Thus it is the people who should define the objectives and characteristics of education. The United States sent an Educational Mission to Japan, a group consisting of twenty distinguished American educators that studied the Japanese educational system for thirty days and advised Japan on technical matters.⁶⁰ At their first meeting in March of 1946, the acting Japanese Minister of Education, Abe Yoshishige, supported this idea of democratic education by stating the following in his address:

It is my conviction that democracy is to be the basis of...education since education is the foundation...I hold this conviction not simply because this was the principle of the universe and is based upon the essential nature of human beings. A right democracy should naturally be founded upon the right sense of the relationship between the individual and society....⁶¹

Profound changes have occurred since World War II. In March of 1947, a Fundamental Law of Education was passed by the National Diet which was

⁶⁰Beauchamp, p. 77. [Committee of Japanese Educators. January 9, 1946].

⁶¹Ibid., p. 82. [Bases for Educational Reconstruction. March 8, 1946].

to serve as a basis for national education in Japan under the New Constitution. Making up this Fundamental Law of Education is a preamble and eleven articles. The preamble states that the aim of the Fundamental Law is to clarify the aims and principles of education for the new Japan as corresponds to the spirit of the constitution.⁶²

The first two articles of the Fundamental Law of Education are meant to liberate the aims and content of education. This principle was further spelled out by the Course of Study published by the Ministry of Education and the School Education Law of 1947 put out by the Diet.

The School Education Law stated the following objectives of elementary education:

- (1) to cultivate right understanding, the spirit of co-operation and independence in connection with relationships between human beings on the basis of children's experience in social life both inside and outside the school;
- (2) to develop a proper understanding of the actual conditions and traditions both of children's native communities and of the country, and further to cultivate the spirit of international co-operation;
- (3) to cultivate basic understanding and skill of food, clothing, housing, industries, etc., needed in everyday life;
- (4) to cultivate the ability to understand and use correctly words and expressions of the Japanese language needed in everyday life;
- (5) to cultivate the ability to understand and manage correctly mathematical relations needed in everyday life;
- (6) to cultivate the ability to observe and dispose of natural phenomena met with in everyday life in a scientific manner;

⁶²Ibid., p. 109. [The Fundamental Law of Education (*Kyoiku Kihon Ho*). March 31, 1947].

(7) to cultivate habits needed for a sound, safe, and happy life and to effect a harmonious development of mind and body;

(8) to cultivate basic understanding and skill in music, fine arts, literature, etc., which make life bright and rich.⁶³

New school curricula and teaching methods were described in detail in the Course of Study, which also pursued a description of the aims and objectives of new education in terms of educational practices in school. Emphasized by the Course of Study was free development of the individual, as well as the social aspect of individual development. The subject of Social Studies, differing from what Social Studies means to a student today, was adopted in order to train the child in the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for becoming a good citizen. Because it is through various experiences and contact with other members of society that a child develops personality, as Kobayashi writes, "becoming a good citizen was regarded almost as synonymous with becoming a man."⁶⁴ As Edwin Reischauer noted, changes that came after the Occupation in the mid 1940s resulted in a "new breed of young Japanese, more direct, casual and undisciplined than their prewar predecessors, but at the same time more independent, spontaneous and lively."⁶⁵

During 1948 and 1949, a new pattern of educational administration was established. The control of education became that of the people, and local boards were elected. The Ministry of Education took the position of a fundamental body for advice and assistance, its function specifically stated as

⁶²Ibid., p. 101. [School Education Law (*Gakko Kyoiku Ho*). March 29, 1947].

⁶⁴Kobayashi, p. 76.

⁶⁵Edwin O. Reischauer, *Japan: The Story of a Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974) p. 233.

to establish "conditions required for the pursuit of the aims of education."⁶⁶ This continued until 1956, when new laws replaced those from the late 1940s and gave the Ministry of Education control over the local boards.

The powers of the Ministry of Education are defined by laws. The Ministry's functions, according to the laws, are made up of five specifics. First, the Ministry researches and plans for the promotion of education both in and out of school, higher learning, and culture. Second, the Ministry sets up standards regarding the physical conditions, personnel, organization, and content in the schools at all levels and other educational institutions. A third function of the Ministry of Education is that it guides and advises local boards of education, authorities, universities and other educational, cultural, and scientific institutions. The Ministry's fourth function is to provide financial assistance for teacher's salaries and the cost of educational materials for teaching science and technical materials. Approval of matters such as which textbooks will be used, who will be appointed superintendents or other chief officers, and which universities and other scientific and cultural institutions will be established is left to the Ministry to control. Finally, state universities, junior and technical colleges, and specialized high schools are established and maintained by the Ministry of Education.⁶⁷

Further major reforms occurred with the Occupation Forces following the war. Japan regained its independence in 1952, and naturally there have been even more laws implemented since then. Many older laws were revised, and the creation of new laws faced opposition and criticism as the Fundamental Law of Education remained the basis for educational principles.

⁶⁶Beauchamp, p. 109. [Fundamental Law of Education (*Kyoiku Kihon Ho*). March 31, 1947].

⁶⁷Kobayashi, pp. 71-72.

In post-war Japan, the particularistic, nationalistic philosophy of the past was abandoned. Quickly this became an issue of criticism, as Japan entered into, in the view of some, moral chaos. Although post-war Japan was to become a democratic nation, many were pushing to re-establish national identity and patriotism. The Minister of Education at this time, Yoshida Shigeru, requested a revision of elementary and secondary school curricula that would improve social studies, including geography, history and moral education. The revision was not carried out until 1958, when the new Minister stated that its purpose was "to bring up a nation worthy of true respect and trust in the international community." Thus moral instruction was allotted at least one hour per week.

As for nationalism, Japan's aim for education now required an improvement in teaching national history and geography. Science and mathematics also became a concern for the improved curriculum, and a utilitarian approach was adopted as well, in order for Japan to meet the needs of the new era.

With its political independence after 1952, Japan recovered and continued to grow economically throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Japan became an industrialized society and felt it important to revise higher education. In 1966, a document titled "The Image of the Ideal Japanese" was issued, and was meant to "provide a philosophical background for the proposed reform of upper secondary education by clarifying the moral and ethical qualities of the ideal Japanese."⁶⁸ The characteristics of the ideal Japanese appear in the document as follows:

⁶⁸Ibid, p. 3.

1. *As an individual*
 - A. To be free.
 - B. To develop individuality.
 - C. To respect oneself.
 - D. To be strong-minded.
 - E. To be reverent.
2. *As a family man*
 - A. [To make] the home as a place of love.
 - B. The home as a place of rest.
 - C. The home as a place of education.
3. *As a member of society*
 - A. Respect for work.
 - B. Contribute to the social welfare.
 - C. Creativity.
 - D. Respect the social norm.
4. *As a national of Japan*
 - A. [To possess] proper patriotism.
 - B. Respect for symbols [of the State].
 - C. Development of Japanese character.⁶⁹

This "Image" is an interesting list of qualities in that the first thirteen are not exclusively Japanese. Certainly the last section encompasses Japan's respect and affection for the emperor and can be interpreted based on this fact. The government was reforming education toward its utilitarian and nationalist goals, and naturally faced both criticism and support from the rest of Japanese society. This "Ideal Image" was developed in order to Japanize the otherwise universalistic principles of the Fundamental Law of Education. This rationalization was made by Kosaka Masaaki, a distinguished philosopher and the Chairman of the Central Council which drafted the statement.⁷⁰

⁶⁹Beauchamp, p. 164. [The Image of the Ideal Japanese (*Kitai Sareru Ningenzo*). December 15, 1966].

⁷⁰Kobayashi, p. 64.

In July of 1967, the Minister of Education, Konnoki Toshihiro, delivered a formal "request for advice" (*shimon*) to the Central Council on Education.⁷¹ Some felt that the Occupation reforms had gone too far in "tampering with the Japanese education system." The *shimon* suggested, in fine print, that the content and structure of the education system should be examined from the following three perspectives:

1. The need for school education to meet the demands of society and the nation and provide equality of opportunity.
2. The need for education to be responsive to the stages of human development and the various abilities and aptitudes of individuals.
3. The need for an effective and proper allocation of responsibility for education.

The Central Council on Education thus deliberated over the *shimon* for the next four years, and what developed became the basis for the reform process that would begin in 1971.

Fourteen councils have comprised the Ministry of Education since 1971. Among these councils, the overall policy questions have been confronted, as well as curriculum, science and technical education, health and physical education, teacher training, social education, university chartering, textbook authorization, Japanese language, and selection of persons for cultural honors, among others.⁷² These councils provide a large number of differing opinions in terms of policy making.

Although the Ministry of Education has encountered numerous changes in focus throughout the past century, it continues to persist as a

⁷¹Leonard J. Schoppa, *Education Reform in Japan* (New York: Routledge, Chapman, and Hall, Inc., 1991), p. 172.

⁷²Kobayashi, p. 75.

virtual determinant of the framework of education in Japan's school. In many ways the Ministry of Education continues to dictate, for the most part, what is taught. The Ministry may or may not direct its general goals toward the social development of children. I will proceed to look further into this by explicating the types of lessons encouraged by the Ministry of Education based on the New Constitution in the following two chapters. It is important to examine how and if the Ministry's goals are taught by teachers around the country.

CHAPTER THREE

EARLY EDUCATION

The first step toward a preparation for the educational training of children should be to ascertain the nature of the mind, its condition in childhood, its natural modes of development, and the processes best adapted to secure a proper discipline of their faculties. When this is understood, it will be an easy matter to adapt instruction to them.

—N.A. Calkins, *Primary Object Lessons*

The teacher as an educator must know *what* the different mental powers are, the *order* of their development, and *how* they are called into right activity. He must know the *different kinds* of knowledge, the *order* of their acquisition, and the *methods* of acquisition.

The Principles of education are derived from the study of the mind. The methods of teaching and training are determined by these principles.

—Albert G. Boyden

Japan is well renowned for its outstanding academic achievement. It is common knowledge that on the whole Japanese students exhibit among the highest levels of academic achievement worldwide, particularly in the area of science and mathematics. Why is this so? I believe that by examining both the basics as well as the specifics of Japanese classrooms and the socialization of Japanese children within that realm, one may better determine the roots of such success.

The development and socialization of children in the early years occurs both in the home and in the school. This developmental process plays a large role in the success of the Japanese in academics, as well as in the relative success of Japanese society. In order to determine the influence of this developmental process on such success, this chapter will explore the early years of education and its relation to society in Japan. I will investigate the numerous stages of Japanese education, focusing on the pre-elementary and elementary years. A stereotypical image most foreigners have of Japan's schools is that of a melting pot of conformity or a military-like setting. Teachers are often considered tyrants who make students memorize the same things, learn the same facts, wear the same clothes, and prepare for the same exams—essentially creating conformity by forcing students to learn to be like one another. I am not convinced that this is true. There are certainly complexities that exist within classrooms that are far more subtle in demonstrating the truths behind Japanese education. Moral dimensions of education play a role equivalent to that of academics themselves. Japanese teachers assume fundamental responsibility for moral education, which is provided throughout all the educational activities of the school.

Although I believe that there exists more individuality in Japan than most Western observers perceive, there is certainly something to be said for the uniformity of the nation. There is a set of shared values that floats throughout Japan, through urban and rural, public and private education. One must ask where these values come from within the similarities and differences of educational backgrounds.

While in Japan I visited a small number of elementary schools and one junior high, although I did no extensive fieldwork in classrooms on my own. My recent research has been supplemented by interviews with Japanese

students, all of whom grew up in the Tokyo area.⁷³ Many interesting contrasts arose during this process. The following is an attempt to examine education in Japan as accurately as possible, reflecting on its relationship to society where feasible.

Pre-elementary Education

Pre-elementary education is not compulsory but is favored by most parents in Japan. At present most children attend preschools (*hochien*) and/or kindergartens (*yochien*) prior to entering elementary education. Over ninety percent of children attend these institutions, which provide a smoother transition from the undisciplined, indulgent child-rearing of the home to the group oriented elementary school classroom.⁷⁴

A distinction between the preschool and kindergarten does not exist in Japan as it does in America. The programs for the three through five year old children are combined as one unit, reflecting the belief that all of these children "remain in the age of innocence."⁷⁵ The concept of group need and responsibilities is important to the Japanese. This is introduced to children during pre-elementary education through large classes with one teacher, which is a contrast with the rather self-centered experience of the home. The

⁷³All of the students I interviewed asked that I withhold their full names, so each will appear as a first name only.

⁷⁴Robert Leestma, *Japanese Education Today* (Washington DC: United States Department of Education, 1987). p. 41.

⁷⁵Harold Stevenson, James W. Stigler, *The Learning Gap* (New York: Summit Books, 1987), p. 77. This idea of "innocence" deserves recognition. It could be seen as reciprocity, where children of this age are considered a blank sheet, with potential to be folded in any way.

teachers are not mother-substitutes. The classroom is not regimented or controlled, and therefore absolute order is obviously not the goal.

Official guidelines surround pre-elementary education in Japan, stressing the importance of developing the health of children, both physical and mental, and giving them the experience of language, music and crafts. Consequently, according to Simmons, "children are encouraged to express themselves freely but correctly in speech, to sing and play simple musical instruments and to work at paper-folding (*origami*)."⁷⁶ Kazumi, a first year Japanese student at Colby College, cites origami as her most vivid memory of kindergarten since it was much more fun than the initial steps of learning to write.⁷⁷

Despite the contrasts, there are ways in which preschool is like the child's home. Catherine Lewis describes a warm and nurturing, play-oriented atmosphere, in which teachers devote themselves to the social and behavioral development of the children.⁷⁸ These schools share with the home methods of socialization because they have similar construction. This helps facilitate the child's sense of *kejime*, the ability to act appropriately wherever they are.⁷⁹ Classrooms are used as multi-purpose rooms, as are rooms in the home. The Japanese concept for this is *ryoritsu*, which means coexistence and compatibility. Generally classes are large and noisy, in which the children run around and there are many unsupervised activities. Lively

⁷⁶Simmons, p. 60.

⁷⁷Personal Communication. May 1995.

⁷⁸Catherine C. Lewis, "Cooperation and Control in Japanese Nursery Schools," *Comparative Education Review* 28:1, (February, 1984), p. 103.

⁷⁹Sano Toshiyuki, "Methods of Social Control and Socialization in Japanese Day-Care Centers," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 15:1 (1989), p. 129.

and boisterous activity is encouraged, and those who opt not to join are considered strange and may be ostracized by both teacher and students.

It is typical for the children to immerse themselves in projects or activities during which time they exhibit long periods of concentration and require little attention from teachers. A parallel of sorts can be drawn between the Japanese approach to preschool and the Montessori approach.⁸⁰ The two allow for individual, self-directed activity, yet create an atmosphere similar to the nurturing and care found in the home. White claims that what is considered important in preschool is not drastically different from what is valued at home. "But," she writes, "the context is quite different: instead of learning through the mother's pervasive, engaged, and constant attention, the child at school learns through more impersonal, though still engaged, direction."⁸¹ Mothers often tend to push cognitive development, whereas preschools discourage cognition and concentrate on social development. Despite this difference in focus, the two are not mutually exclusive. Instead they complement one another. Because cognitive and social development occur simultaneously, a child undoubtedly learns to integrate both into her daily life. Together, both make up the basis for the pre-school years.

The child's first lesson in pre-school is that she is merely one among many. She is regarded as equal to all of her classmates, since everyone is relatively the same age and all are entitled to receive the same attention from the teacher. Through interaction and group orientation, children learn that

⁸⁰The Montessori approach is an alternative approach to early childhood education that has a unique methodology behind it. For further reference, see Margaret Howard Loeffler's *Montessori in Contemporary American Culture* (1992).

⁸¹White, p. 103.

there are rewards for being attentive and sensitive to those around them. Children learn to value the concept of getting along with others. Important lessons that arise in preschool are group oriented: integrating oneself into the life of the group as well as showing emotional sensitivity for others. Learning the "right" way to perform tasks is also important. Japanese children are taught to do things by means of small, individual, significant steps. When helping my two year old host brother with things such as putting on his shoes, I often worried that I was not allowing him to attempt enough on his own. I found that I offered too much assistance instead of letting him struggle with the execution of a task on his own. I was also concerned that I was showing him a method different from the "right" way, that being the Japanese way or the mother's method of choice.

By recognizing and applauding the execution of each particular step, the child experiences clear accomplishment. As an example, White states the typical goals of Sakuranbo Nursery School in Saitama-ken: to raise children full of sensitivities, competence, physical strength, sympathy with friends, and the capacity to respond well in various environments.⁸² Although each school has individual objectives, it is safe to say that these goals are the basis underlying the philosophies of most preschools in Japan.

Observations suggest that "Japanese preschool teachers cultivate a variety of techniques for eliciting desired behavior from children *without* exercising authoritarian control."⁸³ When children are able to attribute their obedience to external factors such as adult surveillance or a promised reward,

⁸²Ibid., p. 103.

⁸³Catherine C. Lewis, "From Indulgence to Internationalization: Social Control in the Early School Years," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 15:1 (1989), p. 142.

theory suggests that they are least likely to internalize rules. The design of the classroom allows for very little vigilance. Every observation that has occurred in a preschool classroom in Japan stirs the same reaction from the observer; teachers tolerate boisterous, chaotic behavior. This does not necessarily reflect negatively on the teacher because adults "positively value children's *genki* (vigor)." ⁸⁴

Minimal control exists in the way the teacher approaches discouragement from an inappropriate activity. The emphasis is on "child-initiated compliance rather than teacher-directed enforcement of rules." ⁸⁵ In other words, a teacher may give an explanation as to why the behavior is inappropriate and merely walk away to let the children assess the situation. A very common method used by children to decide who should get to do or have something that is desired by more than one is known in Japanese as *janken*. This is what is known in the United States as "rock, paper, and scissors." The widespread use of this game as a determinant is worth noting. I was surprised numerous times by the success of such a method. The outcome is indisputable and accepted by all. Again this comes around to group loyalty and the beginning development of an outward-facing sense of self. Order in the classroom, as opposed to control, is achieved through indirect means such as praise, small-group activities, and indirect, nonverbal cues.

⁸⁴Barbara Finklestein, Anne E. Imamura, and Joseph J. Tobin, *Transcending Stereotypes* (Yarmouth ME: Intercultural Press, 1991), p. 85.

⁸⁵Lewis (1989), p. 143.

A questionnaire given to parents of preschool children the mid-1980s regarding their opinion as to what are the most important things for children to learn in preschool yielded the following results:⁸⁶

Concern for others:	Japan 80%	U.S. 39%
Reading and math:	Japan 1%	U.S. 22%
Self-reliance:	Japan 44%	U.S. 73%
Good habits:	Japan 49%	U.S. 7%

It is interesting to note that opinions differ in Japan and the United States as to where the importance of preschool learning lies. American parents appear to focus much more on the self and academics, whereas Japanese parents find group identity and moral development of more importance.

Some preschools divide the classrooms into groups of four to six students in order to introduce aspects of cooperation and group orientation. The purpose of this is merely an introduction to aid in the transition leading to elementary schools, where grouping takes on a different purpose. Grouping at the preschool level has become increasingly more popular within the past ten years.⁸⁷ Kazumi remembered working in groups to act out roles. She cites a time when each student held a staff position of a train station. "I guess they were trying to teach us the ways of working in society," she explained. She worked at the fruit and vegetable stand and remembers this role playing as "a lot of fun."

The rural schools tend to concentrate on group work much more readily than do city schools. This may be because, as Hendry found in her observations, rural schools are not only smaller, but also tend to be more

⁸⁶Joseph J. Tobin, David Y. H. Wu, and Dana H. Davidson, *Preschool in Three Cultures: Japan, China, and the United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 49.

⁸⁷Personal Communication. April 1994.

relaxed because the parents are, for the most part, less well off and less ambitious.⁸⁸ Grouping in private schools tends to be non-existent, for already the goal is oriented toward "The Exam."⁸⁹ Of almost fifteen thousand preschools in Japan, approximately sixty percent are private and forty percent are public.⁹⁰

Students at all levels are required to take exams prior to entering certain schools. This is a very competitive process and begins very early for some children. Entrance exams are necessary even for admittance to many elementary schools. What is particularly absurd about these exams is that they are solely based on recognition. Many of the samples are difficult for even a Ph.D. to distinguish. An example can be found in the appendix.⁹¹

Elementary Years

At age six, nearly all Japanese children begin their nine years of compulsory education at state elementary schools called *shogakko*. This is a monumental day for most families, a day when gifts, congratulations, and a formal ceremony are in order. Every child receives the same type of backpack, called *randoseru*. Some children are presented with a desk and chair at home, and at school they are welcomed into the learning society by older students.

⁸⁸Hendry, p. 102.

⁸⁹Entrance exams are used for acceptance into all levels of schooling. "The Exam" is the pinnacle of higher education in Japan. These examinations make or break the futures of most Japanese students.

⁹⁰Finklestein, p. 82.

⁹¹See Appendix B.

For Keiko, a twenty-four-year-old Japanese student at Colby College, a most memorable aspect of her elementary years was the cleaning of the school.⁹² Every day the students clean the classrooms before being dismissed to go home. This is intended to build character. The Japanese students at Colby College all agreed that although they did not necessarily like cleaning at school, it was part of the day and they had no choice, so they grew used to it. Perhaps this teaches respect for their school environment, which is like home to the students since they spend so much time there. Based on the cleanliness of Japan on the whole, this appears to be effective. In this manner, every aspect of the Japanese elementary classroom is intended to teach something specific.

There is no tracking in Japanese elementary schools, and small classes are avoided. By Western standards, class size in Japan is considered very large. On average, one teacher will handle a class ranging from thirty-five to fifty students.⁹³ Surprising to some, children are well behaved and accomplish their work without distraction. The teacher does not play the role of an authoritarian, but delegates management power to the students. This will become apparent with a further discussion regarding the dynamics of the classroom.

One of the most notable traits of the Japanese is their loyalty to the group. Although children are introduced to the principles of group responsibilities during the pre-elementary years, the actual development of group loyalty begins for the Japanese the day they enter first grade. They do not simply enter a classroom; they enter their *kumi*. This begins the formal

⁹²Personal Communication. March 1994.

⁹³Scholars cite different average numbers within this range.

process of group training, which for the Japanese entails developing ties that bind the individual to her group in order to achieve and understand the ultimate goal, group harmony. More specifically, this process will prepare the Japanese worker for the "harmonious adjustment of employer-employee relationships characteristic of labor relations within Japanese industry."⁹⁴

Each *kumi* consists of forty to fifty students and one teacher. Essentially this is what Westerners consider a homeroom class. The chairs are typically lined in straight rows, in which the children are assigned seats for three or four months at a time. The rows generally alternate between boys and girls. However, the majority of the classrooms I visited had rows of pairs, each pair most often being a boy and a girl when possible. These paired desks were then placed in rows, and rotated every few months.

The Japanese school year runs for 230 days. The *kumi* spends about eight hours together every one of those days. This could be considered a foreshadowing of the long hours worked by many Japanese employees. Because of the time factor involved, the children naturally become closely bound to the *kumi* and their teacher. In fact, the children become, in effect, dependent on their *kumi*. Existing more comfortably within the group, the children tend to get ill at ease when confronting a situation alone.

Each child generally remains with the same *kumi* through the first two years of elementary school. It is not hard to imagine then that very close personal relationships are established among members of the group. They often do everything together throughout the day, and tend to continue the friendships throughout their lives. The Japanese students I interviewed agreed that this was their experience with their *kumi* throughout the first six

⁹⁴Benjamin Duke, *The Japanese School* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1986), p. 25.

years of school. A strong feeling of "us and them" develops among the *kumi*, reinforcing the close ties of the group. Since few children want to be excluded by their peers, they make great efforts to be accepted and remain within the group.

The *kumi* is treated as a single group. There is no break-up into homogeneous groups based on ability. Assignments focus on group uniformity rather than individuality, although there is no one prescribed manner in which the *kumi* may work together. Benjamin Duke cites the examples of calligraphy and art; each child produces the same character or scene.⁹⁵ I observed one fourth grade classroom doing just this. The entire class was making the character for flower (*hana* 花).

The *kumi* teacher, called the *tannin no sensei*, plays a unique role in each child's life. It is not unusual for the *kumi* teacher to remain with the same class for two years. That is, the third and fourth grade teacher will be different from the first and second or the fifth and sixth grade teacher. Loyalty and affection for the *tannin no sensei* is something that most often grows very strong. The teacher most often eats lunch with the *kumi* in the classroom, by choice, similar to the manner in which department managers often work at desks alongside their staffs. She is very much part of the group. This affection toward the *sensei* is seen throughout life, especially when former teachers (*onshi*) are invited to functions such as weddings. Clearly the teacher's role is not that of impersonal, harsh, authority.

The *tannin no sensei* often encourages parents to observe the class (*jugyo sankan*) before scheduled PTA meetings. When this occurs several

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 29.

times throughout the year, it substantiates a child's loyalty to the *kumi*. As Duke explains,

[The child] relates his mother, and his father on occasions when PTA meetings are held on Sundays to accommodate the many fathers who work Saturday mornings, with his teacher and his classroom. Afterward, the parents and child have a certain common knowledge of *kumi* activities for discussing school-related topics at home.⁹⁶

The teacher will also make visits to the home. This is meant to give the teacher a perspective of the child's home environment so as to better understand all aspects of the child.

Within the single unit called *kumi* exist sub-groups called *han*. Each *han* is made up of six to eight students of mixed abilities, dividing the larger group, and stays together over a prolonged period of time. This enables the students to experience how small-group processes work in pursuit of common goals. The *han* is the primary work group for activities such as instruction, academic projects, cleaning, and discipline control. Barbara Finklestein explains that teachers "attempt to foster group cohesion and a strong group spirit by avoiding overt recognition of differences in individual ability and minimizing one-against-one competition."⁹⁷

There is a leader of each small group, called the *han-cho*, who is selected by the group. An elected head of the *kumi* also exists. Each must learn to lead with due humility and without charisma, and also learn the "subtleties of Japanese leadership, which are passed down in varying degrees by the teacher and often reinforced at home."⁹⁸ The leader of the *han* or *kumi* must lead, in a sense, without leading too much. As the Japanese saying goes,

⁹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁹⁷Finklestein, p. 143.

⁹⁸Duke, p. 29.

"The nail that sticks out gets pounded down." Japanese style leadership aims at achieving harmony within the group, often through lengthy discussions leading to group consensus. This process fosters loyalty from each child as well as the development of leadership. Decision making in Japan is without a doubt a time consuming process, yet every important decision is made only after hearing the opinion of each party involved. Every child in Japan is eventually elected *han-cho* in order to come to understand the importance of group harmony and loyalty, a phenomenon she will encounter throughout her life. The fact that group activities and social consensus are heavily emphasized results in behavioral conformity. Uniformity and group orientation are often considered displays of moral character, a result of the *han* system. Moreover, the success of this system enables teachers to focus on teaching because matters of class control and organization are taken care of by the children. During my interview with Nina, a twenty-four-year-old Colby College student, she confirmed this by attributing the importance of *han* to efficiency in the classroom. She said that without *han*, the *kumi* is simply too large to maintain any sort of organization.⁹⁹

Many subject matters are covered in Japan's elementary schools. First and foremost, students are taught to read and write the Japanese language. It is interesting to note that although I will refer to this area of study as Japanese Language, it is listed in Japan as *kokugo*, literally meaning "the national language." Understandably, this proves difficult for many. Children must learn two syllabaries, each containing forty-one phonetic characters. One is called *hiragana*, and is used for Japanese words. The other is *katakana*, which is used when writing foreign words that have been adopted into the Japanese

⁹⁹Personal communication. May, 1995.

language. By the time they have finished their compulsory education, students are expected to have mastered 1,850 of the Chinese characters called *kanji*, which are pictographs that Japan has implemented into its written language. The Ministry of Education has charted the symbols from simplest to most difficult according to how they should be taught. First grade students begin learning the simplest *kanji* right away. Calligraphy brushes and ink are still used in learning to write. To quote Duke,

All first grade children under the highly standardized curriculum are initially introduced to the very simple characters such as up and down. Each week a few more are added with varying degrees of complexity for a total of 76 during grade one. The process gets underway naturally as every child slowly but inexorably becomes engulfed in the long and tedious process of learning *kokugo*.¹⁰⁰

Traditionally Japanese is read vertically, from right to left. In the classroom there are things such as science texts and math lessons that are now read in Western fashion, horizontally from left to right. The inconsistencies have been known to cause confusion. Furthermore, Japanese words cannot be separated in the text. There are no spaces between words. Thus the meaning must be identified based on context. When difficulties arise, parents are willing and eager to send their children to what is known as *juku*, or cram school. This entails class time outside of school as well as the ability to pay tuition. The two most frequently studied subjects at *juku* are arithmetic and Japanese language. Nearly one third of all sixth grade students attend *juku*.¹⁰¹

Alongside math and Japanese language, elementary students study science as a third core subject. According to Cyril Simmons, an English scholar who has researched Japanese education, the goal is that by the time

¹⁰⁰Duke, p. 62.

¹⁰¹Simmons, p. 63.

they reach the sixth grade, students should be well versed in the basic elements of scientific method and should therefore be capable of designing and carrying out simple experiments, while also documenting observations and results. White describes a science class where children work in pairs and report their findings to the entire class. Each partner then writes individual lab reports. As she comments, "Science in the Japanese elementary school is taught not through rote learning, but through experience, observation, and experiment."¹⁰²

I observed this as well. I visited two science classes of the same grade level in the same school, each studying soil. Both classes were on the same page in the textbook and discussing the same things at the beginning of class. The difference appeared in the approach. One teacher was very energetic and seemed to conduct a slightly more chaotic class than the other. This group was going to walk outside along a river, from where they would gather soil and study it. The other class was more controlled, with a quieter atmosphere, and they performed the experiment in the classroom. The teacher had brought in a bucket of soil and some recycled containers, so the students had all the supplies available to them. Both approaches, however different, are experiences that allow for observation and experiment.

Two other groups of classes exist in the elementary schools. Social Studies, Moral Education, and Homemaking make up one group, and all are intended to enhance the child's understanding of society's cultural values in a very broad sense. Music, Arts and Crafts, and Physical Education are meant to do the same thing in the narrow sense. These areas of study are what are

¹⁰²White, p. 121.

considered in the West along the lines of liberal arts. To the Japanese these assist children in understanding and developing their duties as citizens.

When children have finished their six years at the elementary level a ceremony marks the occasion. It is a graduation from the elementary school of a *jido* (child). Simmons writes,

At elementary school Japanese children are initiated early into organization and being responsible for their own learning, working amiably and productively as members of a group, as well as practicing all these qualities to sustain them as they progress up the educational ladder.¹⁰³

With that, it is expected that they are prepared to enter middle school.

Clearly the socialization that occurs for children in the home is continued as they enter school. The focus changes, however, and the dynamics and goals of the classroom differ from those of home. In the classroom the emphasis moves away from the indulged individual to the formation of the group. These aspects will be further illustrated in the following chapter, which will address the importance of moral education in Japan.

¹⁰³Simmons, p. 67.

CHAPTER FOUR

MORAL EDUCATION

Moral education in Japan is not only given attention during its scheduled time each week, but exists as a hidden curriculum within every subject taught in schools. Understanding moral education in Japan will help tie together the important areas of focus throughout child rearing and the elementary years. This chapter will explore some of the terms that create misunderstandings when interpreted from popular Western perspectives. It will also examine the specifics behind moral education and illustrate the goals of Japanese society from a moral standpoint.

Many foreigners look at Japan as a society and also its school system, well known for its success, and suggest that the Japanese live in a heterogeneous and uniform society and therefore have no individuality. What too often happens is that such terms are not examined within the context of the culture being criticized. Based on the observations of Nancy Ellen Sato,

Many preconceived notions about Japan and Japanese education are superficially correct, but when interpreted apart from the deeper cultural context and when misconstrued as monolithic truths, they serve more as screens that obscure a genuine understanding of the people and of classroom learning.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴Nancy Ellen Sato, *Ethnography of Japanese Elementary Schools: Quest for Equality* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1991), p. 8.

Of great interest to me is that the "Basic Ministry of Education Guidelines for the Reform of Education," states that "education is for human development," or more specifically, the "development of character and various aptitudes and abilities in integrated personalities."¹⁰⁵ When this was written in 1971, officials were expecting that schools would help individuals adjust to their environments and to develop integrated personalities. This clearly opposes the Western stereotype that Japanese people never develop individuality. Conformity is a concept that many outsiders think of when describing Japan, yet the true dynamics of Japanese society are often misconstrued.

The term "equality" surfaces often when describing Japanese society, not only from a Western perspective but also within Japan itself. The efforts that go into education, such as cram schools and home tutors, are attempts to further equalize Japanese society. In the opinion of many, including Sakaiya Taichi, Japan has achieved real equality and fairness in almost every aspect of society. Because of the homogeneity of the society, the country has not been burdened by racial and ethnic discrimination, and there are no passionate conflicts due to religion. Since the language is also quite uniform, the slight variations of local dialect tend not to have negative effects on social standings, according to Sakaiya.¹⁰⁶

Discrimination in this sense may not truly exist because of differences in dialect, however my experiences have included hearing a number of insults and jokes regarding these differences. Throughout the greater Osaka

¹⁰⁵Beauchamp, pp. 216-223. [Basic Guidelines for the Reform of Education (*Kongo ni okeru Gakko Kyoiku no Sogoteki na Kakuju Seibi no tame no Kihonteki Shisaku ni tsuite*). June 11, 1971].

¹⁰⁶Sakaiya, p. 9.

area there are words and endings used in speech that differ from those used in the rest of the country. People in the mountains laughed about the Osaka dialect, referring to it as slang, and said the people were lazy to speak that way. As a student in Osaka it was difficult not to pick up some of the *Osaka-ben*, as it was called. At first I had trouble understanding some simple conversation due to unfamiliar vocabulary, but once I learned everyone thought it was great to hear a foreigner speak their slang. Within the context of Japanese society, this example shows that Japanese people do see differences between individuals, even within such a homogeneous nation.

How, then, does equality pertain to education and Japanese society? As a society priding itself on its achievements of equality, its methods within the educational system are, not surprisingly, quite controlled. Some would say that in the case of children developing and experiencing tight control over their education, equality is not necessarily the end point. This control has been said to instead create conformity, or uniformity. These terms, although interpreted with very different connotations, are all essentially describing the same concept.

Each elementary school has a Sports Day every few months. It is intended especially for the children, although it has become a full family affair. I was asked to participate in one Sports Day in the fall during the time that I was living with the family in Osaka. There was individual competition to some degree, although for the most part the events were very team-oriented. One evening I was discussing this Sports Day with my host parents. Keichi, my host father, told me an interesting fact. He said that in some schools, even though all the games are played and the races run, a winner is not always recognized. In this case everyone might run the 50 meter dash holding hands, together. I experienced this at a fifth grade summer camp I

visited as well. The goal of the games was to succeed as a group. The Japanese like to be successful as a team; they do not seem at all focused on individual success.

The word individuality is problematic because the context in which a Westerner might perceive this will differ from its meaning in Japan. People in Japan are not attempting to stand out as "different," as an "individual." Iwasu Nobumichi, professor of moral education at Reitaku University, clarifies this through the following statement:

If individuality means, for example, the tendency to express ones own ideas, feelings, or impressions openly, verbally and/or publicly as distinct from others, it may be true that the Japanese have less individuality. However, this does not mean that the Japanese have no ideas of their own, no feelings of their own, and impressions of their own. *They certainly have their own, and, therefore, the difference is what, how, and to what extent, they want to express [themselves].*¹⁰⁷

Certainly the Japanese are encouraged to think for themselves, to function as individual people, but always within the realm of the society. It is individuals that make up a group, and as a group that Japanese children and adults alike find "success." That is, being able to perform and interact well with others is a fundamental goal for Japanese people in society. It is clear that the Japanese do encourage individuality. The schools do not require many group projects, thus academically students are on their own. However, the individualization emphasized in Japan is a means toward group-orientation. This can be seen both in the school and in the home.

Throughout the process of researching Japanese education and society, I have come to understand many of the contradictory images. As mentioned above, individualization, when examined within the context of Japanese

¹⁰⁷Personal communication. April, 1996. Italics mine.

society, is actually a means to become group-oriented. Standardization, holding a negative connotation in the opinion of Westerners is, for the Japanese, a catalyst for creativity.¹⁰⁸ Within the confines of a nationally mandated curriculum, controlled by the Ministry of Education, teachers are able to use personalized teaching techniques and vary the activities of each classroom. As an example, teachers may test differently, some daily or others weekly, and use the tests for different purposes. Individual deviations do not pose threats for those who know what is meant to be standard and when that is important. Sato writes,

Granted, social and systematic pressures still act to limit the range of detours, and Japanese privately resent these constraints, but flexibility in practice and in process allows the structure to maintain itself, to remain intact, and to appear "rigid."¹⁰⁹

Early Development of Moral Education

In addition to the uniformity for which Japan's society is noted, Japan is also seen, from many perspectives, as a country with high moral standards. Rates of crime and juvenile delinquency are far lower than in most other developed countries today. The family as an institution in Japan has not broken down at anywhere near the rate that the United States is encountering. The emperor continues to hold the respect of most Japanese citizens, although he is no longer perceived as a deity.¹¹⁰ These are examples

¹⁰⁸The specifics behind these opposing ideas stem from Nancy Ellen Sato's observations through her ethnographic study published in 1991.

¹⁰⁹Sato, p. 7.

¹¹⁰Many war-generation Japanese continue to worship the emperor when he appears on television, although he no longer holds his divine position in Japanese society.

that reflect society as well as moral teachings in Japan. As of 1983, a report from the Ministry of Education published in the *Course of Study for Elementary Schools in Japan* describes the objectives of moral education as they are based on the Fundamental Law of Education and the School Education Law. It states,

Moral Education, in other words, is aimed at realizing a spirit of respect for human dignity in the actual life of family, school, and community, endeavoring to create a culture that is rich in individuality and to develop a democratic society and state, training Japanese to be capable of contributing to a peaceful international society, and cultivating their morality as the foundation thereof.¹¹¹

As early as 1887 a concern was publicized regarding moral education in the schools. In the early 1880s, moral education was given attention when Confucian works were used as textbooks and Confucian scholars gave lectures in schools. Having well outgrown early modern times, and with the emergence of modernization during Meiji Japan, Confucianism was unable to influence the country as it had in the past. Moral education was a concern for scholars, who suggested teaching religion in schools as a reform. Nishimura Shozaburo, a controversial author of editorials published in the *Education Review* in the late 1880s "distinguished between theories of morality (*dotoku-ron*) advocated by various individuals and moral education conducted in the primary school."¹¹² Mark Lincicome, a scholar of education in modern Japan, writes about Nishimura's distinctions:

The latter (moral education) had two goals: molding pupils' moral character (*dotoku no hinsei*) and leading them to an understanding of goodness (*zen*) by focusing on selected aspects

¹¹¹Beauchamp, p. 263. See Appendix C. [Moral Education, 1983].

¹¹²Mark E. Lincicome, *Principle, Praxis, and the Politics of Educational Reform in Meiji Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995), p. 173.

of human behavior that they could easily comprehend. Therefore, the argument that morality could not be taught properly except through religious instruction was false, because moral character did not depend on a particular doctrine. Rather, it developed naturally, through one's daily experiences of observing and listening. Through these experiences, behavior would be ingrained in a person unconsciously as habits. The same was true in school, where the teacher served as a crucial role model for pupils.¹¹³

A second author contributing important ideas to the *Education Review* with regard to moral education was Tanaka Tosaku. He and Nishimura together rejected a return to the moral education of the past. Lincicome cites the following excerpt from one of Tanaka's articles of 1885:

Today, moral decay and loss of virtue are spoken of in the manner of the Chinese Confucianists. While I agree with them in one sense, my aims for promoting moral education differ from followers of the Chinese Confucianists, who denounce the present and long for a return to the past, treasuring the words and deeds of Confucius, Mencius, and [the Ancients]. Though easy to say, it would be impossible to bring about, and those actually responsible for education tire of listening to their empty words.¹¹⁴

These men clearly had their own thoughts regarding moral education at this time. In October of 1890, the Imperial Rescript on Education suggested contradicting ideas. Moral education was made the foundation of the "entire primary curriculum," and the Rescript was made the foundation of moral education.¹¹⁵

¹¹³Ibid., p. 174.

¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 175.

¹¹⁵Ibid., p. 225.

Dotoku Kyoiku

In early Meiji, in addition to cultivating the moral nature as the primary goal of education, a compulsory course in ethics was introduced and continued until 1945. This was previously introduced as *shushin*. As we know, *shushin* aimed to highlight the importance of nationalism, militarism, and emperor worship. Not surprisingly, with the U.S. occupation forces in Japan after World War II, *shushin* was discontinued. The Japanese agreed not to reinstate it because they feared a return to nationalism. Some then began to claim that the increase in juvenile delinquency at the time was related to its absence. Then in 1958 a program called *dotoku kyoiku* was introduced. Although fundamentally differing from *shushin*, *dotoku kyoiku* also means moral education. In 1962 the government made this a compulsory subject, to be taught one hour per week. Members of the Teachers' Union resisted this implementation because they anticipated that the subject would be controlled by the conservative centralized education system.

The books were then modified in order to settle the controversy. The editors paid close attention to public opinion, but the books were first approved by the Ministry of Education. Older generation Japanese were disappointed because the new *dotoku kyoiku* did not include lessons on respect for the elderly as *shushin* had. At this time the decisions as to which specific texts to use in the classroom, as well as teaching methods, were left to the discretion of local school boards, administrators, and teachers.

Through such a controlled curriculum, the concepts taught each day in Japanese schools may be identical, although the textbooks may differ. Each school district selects its texts from those that have been approved by the Ministry of Education. Although the Ministry of Education can standardize the curriculum, they cannot govern the process by which the curriculum is

implemented. Thus the teacher determines how the information is translated into the hearts and minds of the students. Shishido Taku, a Japanese language assistant at Colby College, mentioned that in his experience a teacher didn't always teach all the lessons from any particular book. "When I was in elementary school," he told me, "the teacher picked out sections randomly and we learned some of them."¹¹⁶ Teachers have the freedom to pick and choose texts as well as styles, and thus they have the independence to conduct their classrooms based on their unique personalities. As Iwasa points out,

[Teachers] can use their own styles of teaching as far as they are appropriate and suitable to children's conditions...There are more standards or common ways of handling things, including teaching methods, than there are in the United States. This may appear to be restrictive for some teachers, but basically they are encouraged to be creative as far as they are acceptable.¹¹⁷

This illustrates the individualization of the teachers within a uniform curriculum. At one point all teachers were certified through the same school, and then by the Ministry of Education. This is no longer the case. At present, teachers are hired through the individual school boards and teachers' unions.

After the years of disputes over moral education in the late nineteenth century, a similar concern became widespread by 1970. This time the consideration was based on whether or not Japan's schools were offering adequate coverage of moral education. As with any such subject, ideas differ from group to group concerning the curriculum making up moral education. As noted in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development Report on Japanese Education in a 1970 review of national policies,

For some [moral education] implies discipline, a respect for national values and for heroes of the past; for others it signifies

¹¹⁶Personal communication. December 1995.

¹¹⁷Personal communication. April 1996.

the development in individuals of strength of mind and of a critical independence of national symbols; yet others see it as conformity to an antiestablishment critique of national heroes and values, and for a further group it has the traditional, liberal arts connotation of enriching oneself by becoming a skilled consumer (and even an amateur producer) of aesthetic values.

Early Readers

I did not spend enough time in classrooms to explore specific examples of what makes the different styles used to teach the very same subjects such an interesting aspect of education in Japan. Instead I have looked at elementary reading books, approved by the Ministry of Education, to explore and portray the Ministry's influence in terms of what is being taught in Japan's elementary schools. The series of books to which I refer here were approved by the Ministry of Education and thus were available to school boards in the early- to mid- 1980s. They are merely examples of what type of materials are included in the curriculum.

What is found in the early readers can be interpreted in terms of both moral and social development. The first actual story begins on page twenty of a first grade book. It is called "The Moon and the Monkeys." Of particular interest to me is the honorific manner in which the Moon (*otsukisama*) is referred to.¹¹⁸ Unable to be translated to English, the word contains both an honorific prefix and suffix, which puts the Moon in the context of a respected being. *Tsuki* is the word for moon. The *O* at the beginning gives it an honorific connotation, and the ending, *sama*, is the polite way in which to address a Mr. or Mrs.

¹¹⁸Hereafter I will refer to the moon with a capital M in order to emphasize its honored importance in the context of the story.

The monkeys begin by noticing "Oh! The Moon is falling!" The illustration shows the Moon's reflection on a body of water. "How terrible! We must help Him!" All of the monkeys jump in after the Moon. The water is cold. "The Moon isn't here!" The monkeys see the Moon above the forest. "We saved Him," they conclude. The monkeys feel a sense of accomplishment. As a group they have made the effort to work cooperatively in order to do a good deed.



あれ、おつきさまが、
もりのうえに
いる。
ぼくたちが
たすけたんだ。

The first half of this reader contains small sentence groups, character recognition exercises, and picture scenes. Of the small sentence groups, the following two portray the theory which encompasses Japanese society. "This is my desk. This is my seat." The individual is in relationship with the desk and the chair, recognizing that she has a responsibility to take care of these items. The third sentence, "This is my class" suggests that the individual acknowledges her position as a member of a group. The last sentence, "We are all friends," brings the individual into relationship with the members of the group with whom she interacts daily in a controlled and successful manner.¹¹⁹

The second example consists of two simple sentences. The first, "Everybody sings a song," shows the individual component. Each person is using her own voice, but when cooperatively put together, they form a choral group. The sentence following says just that: "By arranging our voices together, we sing."¹²⁰

Although the emphasis in the classroom is not directed toward exactly what social and moral objectives the books may suggest, the fact that the writers think in this manner and that the Ministry of Education agrees with this approach cannot be overlooked. Children not only learn how to read the characters, but they also learn social and moral behavior through comprehension of what it is they are reading.

The latter half of this particular volume contains longer pieces. Of interest is a section describing the many different types of animal tails and

¹¹⁹*Japanese Elementary School Reader*, Vol. 1, (Tokyo: Ministry of Education, 1981), p. 32.

¹²⁰*Ibid*, p. 34.

their roles. It begins by suggesting "Let's read.....The Tail's Role." An illustration is provided for each type of tail, and the students are asked what kind of tail they might suppose it is. "This is a monkey's tail. Monkeys use their tails to pick fruit. Monkeys use their tails for tasks the same way we use our hands." Showing similarities between animals and humans is, in my opinion, a type of moral lesson for children. Animals are living creatures that share the earth with us. A second example looks like the following:

This is a thick tail. What type of tail do you suppose this is?
This is the tail of a fox. When the fox is thinking of suddenly changing directions, it then strongly flicks its tail. The fox's tail has useful features similar to those of a boat's rudder.¹²¹



These examples show how different characteristics are meant for different uses. They bring nature into our everyday world. Nature is an intrinsic aspect of Japanese culture which carries a powerful moral connection, and respect for the environment is considered very serious in Japan.¹²²

One last story worth noting from this volume is about a human-sized turnip. An old man planted a turnip seed and willed it to grow into a big, sweet turnip. It did indeed grow. He tried to pull it up but could not do it on

¹²¹Ibid, p. 80.

¹²²This idea stems from mythological imagery found, for example, in the Kojiki, which elementary school children read in an adapted form.

his own, so he called for the old woman. She came and pulled the man who pulled the turnip, but still they could not get it free. The old woman called the boy. The three of them still could not get the turnip up so the boy called the dog. Then the dog called the cat, who then called a mouse. With all of them pulling as hard as they could on one another, the turnip finally came free. This story typifies the perseverance, the *gambaru*, of the Japanese. Not only that, but the positive effect of group cooperation is evident as well.



One must take into account that these stories were taken from the readers of a first grade level. The following reflects what types of stories are found in a fifth grade reader. It is not until students reach middle school that they study the specific course called *dotoku kyoiku* (moral education.)

This story is told from a child's point of view. He went hunting with a group of older men, one of whom was a good story teller. The boy's story is based on one that the hunter told.¹²³

¹²³*Japanese Elementary School Reader*, Vol. 9, (Tokyo: Ministry of Education, 1981), p. 34.

The hunter could not find any geese so he decided to use a special method—he left burrs in the field covered with bugs, so that when the birds ate the bugs the hunter could catch them.

It is not well explained in keeping with the understated manner of the Japanese language, but the reader infers that the bird will have trouble swallowing the prickly burr, making it easy for the hunter to catch.

The next day, the hunter went to the field again, where he had left many burrs, but he did not get any birds—the geese are very clever.

The next year, the old hunter used a different method: he sprinkled bait throughout the field. He uses many dirty ways to catch geese.

The theme here, it appears, is that the geese are smarter than the hunter.

He finally caught one, and the first bird became his pet.

Then a hawk attacked the wild geese, and his pet goose attacked the hawk. Most geese escaped from the hawk, but his pet goose was not able to escape. He attacked the hawk in retaliation.

The old hunter had sympathy for the geese. He thought, "I used many dirty ways to catch a goose but they really do have courage." He was impressed.

Finally, the hunter released his pet goose and said "Come back next winter and let's have a 'fair' fight."

Clearly this story is based on the old man's feelings. It lacks specific sentences saying, for instance, that he was irritated because he couldn't catch any geese. Instead the reader feels that for him. The hunter's perseverance (*gambaru*) and desire to catch a goose is apparent by how many tricks he uses to try to make it easy for himself. Fairness is also illustrated here, since the hunter acknowledges that he was wrong to "play dirty." The reader gets the feeling, too, that the hunter is excited on his way to the field, full of

anticipation. Through such a story, students learn morality as well as writing techniques, as they learn how to express feelings by means of words.

Hiroshima

Morality in Japan is almost never taught through blatantly direct methods. It has in fact been, for the most part, muted. Lessons of morality exist in nearly every subject matter, but they are often very subtle. Prior to World War II, when nationalism was a primary goal for education, texts contained pictures of the emperor and taught children to value their nation almost more than their own lives. Today this is obviously not the case. Morality is geared more toward the development of well-behaved individuals with the ability to work together and thus create a coherent society.

Japan has taken its muted morality a step beyond that which may be considered traditional. Moving away from text books, picture books give an excellent example of moral teachings of children's literature. I have chosen two in particular. They illustrate not only very strong emotions and have strong connections to Americans, but they also contain great moral impact and an amazing display of strength important for Japanese children. One book is called *Hiroshima no Pika*. The other is simply *Pika Don*. *Pika* was the name given to the terrible flash of light and the terrific boom that accompanied the atomic bomb which was dropped on Hiroshima on August 6, 1946. It was a victim who attached this name to it. The horrific detail and graphic pictures found in these books are extremely disturbing for any reader. The stories focus on a few individual families in different areas of the city, although they also depict the overall devastation that overcame Hiroshima and its people. The Grandmother in the story survives the atomic bomb, but

unfortunately she loses her husband. She is the mother of one of the authors. *Pika Don* ends with the following:

Grandmother, alone now, began to paint, and she paints every day. Her paintings are bright and beautiful paintings. Even today she says, "The Flash (*pika*) is different than a landslide. If no one drops the bomb, the bomb won't fall."

As she says this, she paints another lively red flower and a graceful dove.¹²⁴



己斐町の学校は、三滝町の作業班や、ここまで逃げのびて来た人びとが、血を吐いて死ぬので、二階も下も死体の山でした。

Perhaps it is not so strange that Japanese children read books such as these. It is interesting to acknowledge that not once is the United States

¹²⁴Iri and Toshi Maruki, *Pika Don* (Tokyo: 1987), p. 69.

mentioned or a blaming finger pointed. The purpose of these books is simply to make children aware of the horror and devastation atomic bombs create, and thus are a lesson in peace.

Pika Don was the first picture book about the atomic bomb ever published. It was first published in 1950, five years after the end of World War II. These books defy the usual criteria for picture books: they are not particularly beautiful or fun. Although the illustrations are beautiful in some sense, the stories are fearful and sad, yet their message is very positive. They oppose war and discourage the use of nuclear weapons. The authors, in their closing statement, plea for the discontinuation of these weapons and nuclear power. They write, "The Planet Earth, all living things—all are in danger."¹²⁵

This is certainly not a concept and observation unique to the Japanese. Its audience, however, is what makes this interesting. For a society that wishes to keep children from being upset at all costs, these books seem out of character. However, the broader concerns for peace and national welfare seem in this case to override typical sensibilities.

It becomes clear through examining such literature and texts that Japanese students are learning not only reading and writing skills, but also the subtle messages surrounding such areas as feelings, perseverance, and loyalty to the group. What we see in the wide range of Japanese moral tales is a broad concept of morality that blends subtlety and aesthetics on one side and an awareness of the broader world on the other. These Japanese tales in themselves combine individual and group and provide us with a way of viewing the manner in which a profound sense of individuality and group consciousness are blended in a single setting.

¹²⁵Ibid, p. 73.

CONCLUSION

The interpersonal relationships and related cultural assumptions that make up the nature of a child essentially set the scene for a child's individuality. A child's development as an individual, so prominent in her early years, is a direct result of the indulgence that is present in each of her core relationships. The mother/child relationship, being the central human relationship in Japan, allows for the child to develop a sense of self. She learns that she is important as an individual, and that she matters to those around her. As she continues to grow, she will learn that she is an important member of the groups to which she belongs.

Examining history opens many doors toward understanding the development of the Japanese national goals for society, and thus helps in understanding the individuals who make up society. Once the goals of the system are clear, looking at the education system itself and the dynamics of the classroom yields a better understanding of how children learn the importance of group orientation. The fact that many of a child's first years in school are spent working in the same *kumi* is a clear prelude to what is to follow throughout her lifetime. Education provides the link between the individualization encouraged in the home and the necessity to function within the social group. Child development and socialization within the home is of utmost importance in determining the foundations on which schools themselves build in order to produce a nation of literate, loyal,

competent, and diligent people. Merry White states, "Japanese schools and Japanese parents are both fully engaged in children's social and moral conduct as well as their academic progress, and schools provide active assistance integrating their graduates into the next phase of life."¹²⁶

This becomes clear through an analysis of the subjects taught and the methods used to teach students in the classroom. Starting in middle school, students study a subject directed solely at moral education. Prior to that, moral education is present in every activity that children encounter at school. It is important that we understand the underlying messages all Japanese children receive throughout their schooling. Every activity is geared toward group success—but this can only be achieved through individual participation, cooperation, and perseverance.

Formal education is necessary not only for children to learn practical subject material, but it is also the first time a child faces the enormous emphasis in Japan on group orientation. The classroom experience combines a child's ability to function on her own with her important role as a member of the multi-layered group organization of Japanese society. Though formal schooling is a second stage in a child's development, the basis for her development begins in the home. It is here that she first becomes an individual, which forms the foundation for her potential success throughout her life.

¹²⁶White, p. 71.

APPENDIX A

KOJIKI

[B] IZANAGI AND IZANAMI ARE COMMANDED TO SOLIDIFY THE LAND. THEY CREATE ONOGORO ISLAND

At this time the heavenly deities, all with one command, said to the two deities IZANAGI-NO-MIKOTO and IZANAMI-NO-MIKOTO:

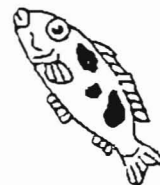
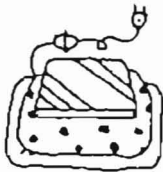
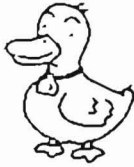
'Complete and solidify this drifting land!'

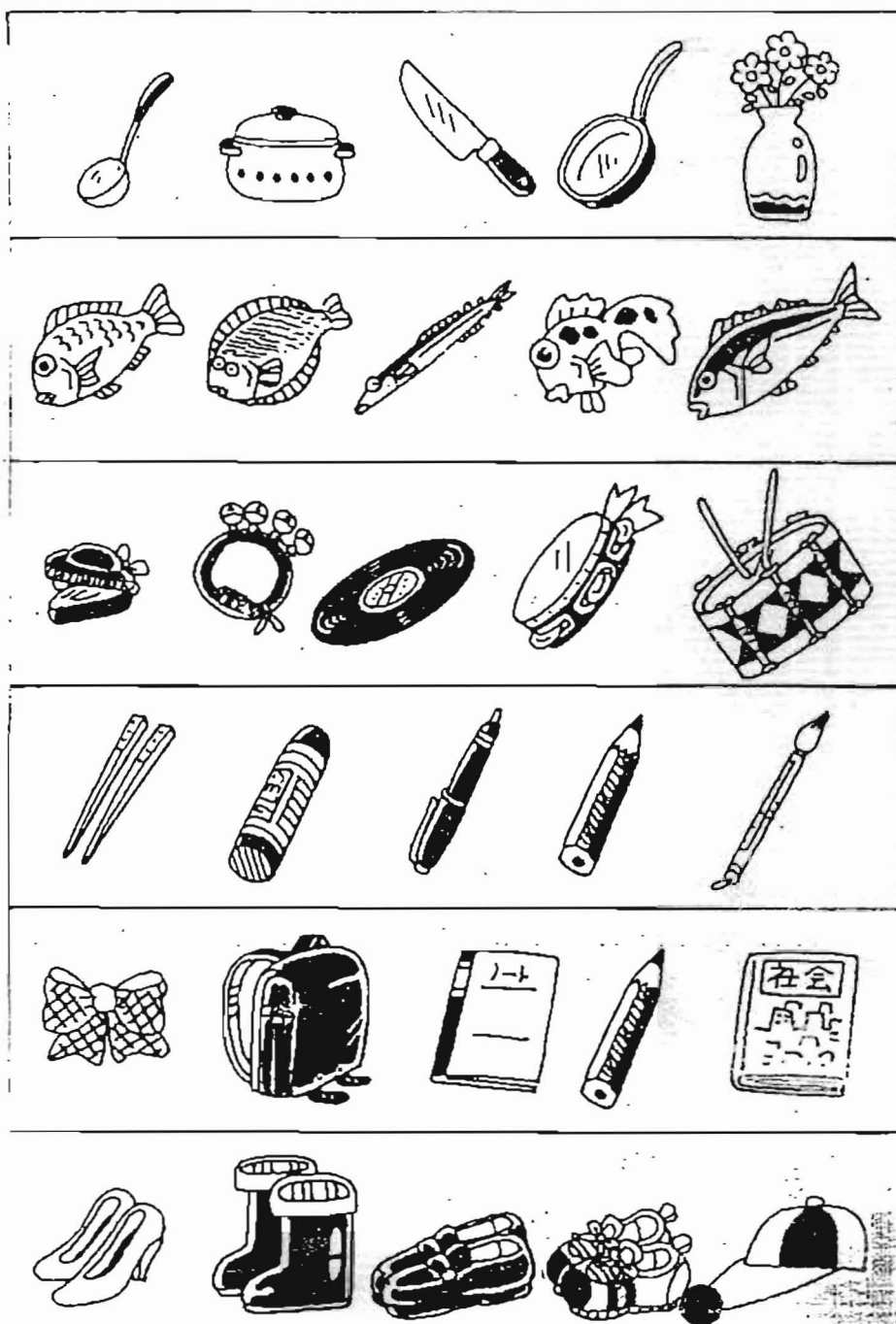
Giving them the Heavenly Jeweled Spear, they entrusted the mission to them.

Thereupon, the two deities stood on the Heavenly Floating Bridge and, lowering the jeweled spear, stirred with it. They stirred the brine with a churning-churning sound; and when they lifted up [the spear] again, the brine dripping down from the tip of the spear piled up and became an island. This was the island ONOGORO.

APPENDIX B

Choose which picture does not belong.





APPENDIX C

CONTENTS OF MORAL EDUCATION

Ministry of Education, *Course of Study for Elementary Schools in Japan* (Tokyo, 1983), pp.111-117.

1. *To hold life in high regard, to promote good health, and to maintain safety.*
2. *To observe good manners, and to live in an orderly manner.*
3. *To keep oneself neat and tidy, and to make good use of goods and money.*
4. *To act according to their own beliefs, and not be moved unreasonably by others' opinions.*
5. *To respect another's freedom as well as one's own, and to be responsible for one's own acts.*
6. *To act always cheerfully and sincerely.*
7. *To love justice and hate injustice, and to act righteously with courage.*
8. *To endure hardships and persist to the end for the accomplishment of one's right aims.*
9. *To reflect upon oneself by listening attentively to the advice of others, and to act with prudence and live an orderly life.*
10. *To love nature, and to have affection toward animals and plants with a tender heart.*
11. *To esteem beautiful and noble things, and to have a pure mind.*
12. *To know one's own characteristics, and to develop one's strong points.*
13. *To be always filled with aspiration, to aim toward higher goal, and to strive for their realization.*
14. *To think about things in a rational way, and always to have an attitude of inquiry.*
15. *To apply one's original ideas, and to cultivate actively new fields.*
16. *To be kind to everybody, and to care for the weak and the unfortunate.*
17. *To respect those who devote themselves to others, and to appreciate their work.*
18. *To trust in and to be helpful to one another.*
19. *To be fair and impartial to everybody without prejudice.*
20. *To understand others' feelings and positions, and to forgive others' faults generously.*
21. *To understand the rules and the significance of making rules by oneself, and to follow them willingly.*
22. *To assert one's rights properly, and to perform one's duties faithfully.*
23. *To appreciate the value of work, and to cooperate actively in the service of others.*
24. *To take care of public property, and to protect public morality with a full awareness of being a member of society.*
25. *To love and respect all members of one's family, and to strive to have a good home.*
26. *To love and respect people at school, and to strive to establish good school traditions.*
27. *To love the nation with pride as a Japanese, and to contribute to the development of the nation.*
28. *To have proper understanding of the love toward the people of the entire world, and to become an individual who can contribute to the welfare of mankind.*

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