HISTORY OF THE JAPANESE LANGUAGE SCHOOL

Agnes M. Niyekawa-Howard

Eight years ago, the Hawaii Kyoiku Kai (Hawaii Japanese Education Association) celebrated the 70th anniversary of the founding of the first Japanese language school in Hawaii in 1895. The history of the Japanese language schools, which now extends to nearly 80 years, reflects the history of the Japanese in Hawaii filled with trials and tribulations. The initial period of rapid growth and expansion was followed by strong political pressures from outside aimed not only at curbing this growth but ultimately toward the elimination of these schools. An all-out effort for survival resulted in a victory for the language schools through a Supreme Court decision in 1927, but the tenuous nature of the victory was made clear by continued repressive legislation expressing the strong colonial, anti-Japanese sentiment prior to World War II. Japanese language schools, which were closed for over six years after Pearl Harbor, reopened gradually but did not gain complete freedom from the language school laws until Hawaii's statehood in 1959. Ironically, after all the battles had been won the language schools began to face a gradual but continuous decline in enrollment.

The Period of Rapid Expansion

The first group of immigrants from Japan arrived in 1866. Owing to the extreme hardships this group of 153 people experienced, they were subsequently recalled to Japan by the Japanese government. The next group of immigrants came nearly two decades later, in 1885, and were followed by 26 shiploads during the next nine years, under an agreement between the governments of Hawaii and Japan. From 1894 to 1900 immigrants arrived under private contracts with immigration companies in Japan, followed by a period of unrestricted immigration lasting until 1907. The Root-Takahira agreement, better known as the Gentlemen’s Agreement, which became effective early in 1908, brought an end to large scale immigration by permitting only former residents and the parents, wives, and children of residents to enter Hawaii. It was during this period that single men were able to bring women from Japan only by proxy marriage, leading to the large number of picture brides coming to Hawaii. With the Exclusion Act of 1924, Japanese immigration to Hawaii came to a complete halt.

Of the more than 200,000 Japanese who made their way to Hawaii between 1868 and 1924, nearly thirty percent moved to the continental United States and somewhat less than twenty percent returned to Japan. About fifty percent of the total Japanese immigration over this period remained in Hawaii.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Type of Immigration</th>
<th>No. of Immigrants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1885-1894</td>
<td>Kanyaku Imin (Government Contract Immigration)</td>
<td>29,069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894-1900</td>
<td>Shiyaku Imin (Private Contract Immigration)</td>
<td>56,579</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900-1907</td>
<td>Jiyuu Imin (Unrestricted Immigration)</td>
<td>71,281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908-1924</td>
<td>Yobiyose Imin (Immigration under the Gentlemen’s Agreement)</td>
<td>61,489</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>218,418</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*From the Japanese Consulate Records as cited by Okahata, 1971, pp. 110-112.
required them to work ten full hours a day, 26 days a month, in order to receive full pay. At the end of three years, most gave up the idea of returning home and signed up for another three years of labor.

When their stay was no longer temporary, parents began to become concerned about their children's education. Some decided to send them to English schools and many followed this example. In 1888, three years after the first group of government contract immigrants arrived, 54 Japanese children were enrolled in English schools. By 1896, when education became compulsory for children between the ages of six and fifteen in the new Republic of Hawaii (Fuchs, pp. 32-33), there were 397 Japanese among the 14,023 public school children in Hawaii (Ozawa, p. 14).

Japanese children living on the plantation and playing with Hawaiian, Chinese, and Caucasian children soon learned to communicate with them effectively by mixing words from different languages. Sentences like "Papa hanahna, house oran," meaning "Dad is working and is not home", disturbed the parents and they began to wish that their children could be taught to speak, read, and write Japanese properly. Most of the parents were themselves illiterate and had to depend on the few Japanese intellectuals available (doctors, priests, ministers) to write letters for them in order to send word back to Japan.

It was under these circumstances that Rev. Kanda of Kohala Church arranged to have lessons given in Japanese to about thirty students. Classes were held at Halawa Public School in Kohala and taught by Hideo Kuwabara, who came as a contract laborer but who had been licensed to teach in Japan. Kuwabara, however, soon left Kohala for Honolulu. The first Japanese language school of a fairly permanent nature was opened in Kula, Maui by a Methodist minister in 1895. The third school was opened in Honolulu in 1896 by Rev. Okumura, also a Christian, with the help of Hideo Kuwabara. This school became the Hawaii Chuo Gakuin, a leading Japanese language school until the war broke out in December, 1941. In the next four years Japanese language schools were opened one after another at various plantations and by 1900 there were eleven schools with 1,500 students. All but one of these schools were operated by Christian or Buddhist churches.

With the annexation of Hawaii in 1898, children born to Japanese immigrant parents were extended recognition as American citizens. From 1900 on, Japanese language schools sprang up like mushrooms, 119 new schools opening between 1900 and 1915. The Hongwanji Mission alone operated 29 elementary and three intermediate language schools by 1915. However, not all of the language schools established over this period remained in operation.

These schools met a number of the needs of Japanese parents. First, at least in the early years, they wanted their children to be able to speak Japanese when they returned to Japan and resumed their education in Japanese there. Second, they could not fully understand the speech their children had acquired outside of their homes and they wanted their children to be able to communicate with them. Another need that the religious leaders who founded the schools saw, but which may not have been perceived by the parents themselves, was moral or ethical education. They felt that the hard-working parents did not have enough time to supervise their children's activities after public school, and could not give them sufficient training in manners, etiquette, or character building. The Japanese language school was to meet all these needs and thus to close the gap between the immigrant parents and their Hawaii-born children.

The religious leaders, particularly the Buddhist priests, had additional motives for getting involved in the establishment of Japanese language schools. The plantation workers were not very interested in religious activities as they were busy enough in their daily lives. Though these missionaries from Japan could not expect to get support from plantation workers in their religious teaching activities, they easily could in language teaching. Consequently, language teaching became a means to get parents interested in church activities. Many missionaries thus built language schools which they used as places to preach, and vice versa. The language school was not only a way to attract the parents' interest, however; it was also an essential means of livelihood for the priest.

In plantations that had two language schools of different religious denominations, fights often broke out between the schools to the disgrace of all the Japanese concerned. Under these circumstances, independent schools run by non-religious educators were particularly welcomed by the Japanese community. These schools were supported by tuition, donations and frequently by subsidy from the plantation companies. The sugar companies were then facing a labor shortage as an increasing number of Japanese were leaving the plantations...
for the mainland. In order to prevent more from leaving, the plantations tried to appease the Japanese by giving monthly subsidies to their language schools and some even paid the salary of the language teacher.

These language schools used standard textbooks from Japan issued by the Ministry of Education. Subjects taught were reading, writing, composition, and shushin (ethics), and some schools taught abacus, history and geography in addition. The schools became the center of activities and ceremonies for the Japanese population. On Japanese holidays, not only the adults but also the children, absent for the day from their public schools, would gather and spend the whole day in celebration. This led the public school authorities to question whether the Japanese language school was making loyal Japanese nationals out of “American” children. An effort towards clarification of the role of the Japanese language school in Hawaii ensued.

The Hawaii Kyoiku Kai
(Hawaii Japanese Education Association)

The indiscriminate establishment of Japanese language schools (totaling over 140 by 1910 with no less than 7,000 students), the fights and competition between them, and the question of the students’ national identity all led to the realization by Japanese community leaders that the role of the Japanese language school in Hawaii needed to be clarified and the curriculum standardized. While regional and denominational organizations were already in existence to discuss these problems, an organization to unify all the language schools in Hawaii was finally formed in 1914. This is the Hawaii Kyoiku Kai, or the Hawaii Japanese Education Association. Its first meeting in February, 1915, focused on the issue of whether or not Japanese children should be taught to be Japanese nationals. (At this time World War 1 had begun, Japan was already fighting for the Allied Forces, and the U.S. had not yet entered the war.)

When the first language schools were built, one of the goals certainly was to educate children as Japanese nationals who would eventually live in and continue education in Japan. Over the years, however, the picture had changed. With annexation, the children became American citizens and many of the parents decided to make Hawaii their home. With such a change in the plans for the future, the language schools also needed to make changes. Leaders of the Japanese community who attended the first meeting of the Hawaii Kyoiku Kai tended to emphasize that children should be encouraged to become good American citizens, and should not be educated as Japanese nationals. The then Consul General Hachiro Arita, later to become Foreign Minister of Japan, took a strong stand on the position that language schools should only teach the Japanese language and should avoid subjects and topics that might create conflict in the children’s identity. It was thus decided later that year that special Japanese textbooks would be compiled for use in Hawaii which would include stories of great men and noble deeds from American as well as Japanese history. Professor Yaichi Haga of the Tokyo Imperial University was asked to compile the texts. He spent one month in Honolulu in 1916 to check his manuscript with the local Japanese educators. His texts, once published, were used by all the member schools of the Hawaii Kyoiku Kai, running into tens of thousands of copies.

At the third meeting of the Kyoiku Kai in February, 1918, as if forseeing the events to come, Koreyuki Asano, Principal of Hawaii Chugaku went one step further than the positions espoused by others. He maintained that Japanese language education should also assist Japanese language students in learning English. He suggested that each school should have at least one teacher fluent in English to serve as a liaison between the Japanese language school and the public school, as well as to facilitate communication with government authorities.

Anti-Language School Measures and Post-War Xenophobia

World War I ended on November 11, 1918. After the closure of the German language schools during the war the prevailing attitude in the nation was “one nation, one flag, one language.” It was during this period of wanting to eliminate all foreign elements that the Judd proposal appeared in the Pacific Commercial Advertiser on January 4, 1919. It proposed the licensing of all school teachers after an examination of the teacher’s knowledge of English, American history and government. Following this, two bills were introduced to the Territorial legislature in March of that year aimed at eventually abolishing all foreign language schools. Leaders of the Hawaii Kyoiku Kai and the Japanese community campaigned hard to prevent the passage of the bill. The bill passed the House, but was defeated in the Senate as a result of the forceful speeches of individuals who recognized the contribution made by the Japanese
language to the larger community.

Despite the bill’s defeat, the legislature requested an investigation of education in Hawaii under the direction of the U.S. Commissioner of Education. A team of four came to investigate the schools in Hawaii in 1919. Some of the recommendations they made regarding public schools did not please the managers of plantations, who opposed education for the laborers. The commissioners recommended greater expenditure on education, particularly an increase in high-school facilities. Most Caucasians attended private schools, hence greater expenditure on public schools meant that more of the tax money paid by Caucasian managers would go to support the education of non-Caucasian laborers, who would “only get unnecessary ideas from education” (Fuchs, pp. 270-272). On the other hand they were greatly pleased by the commissioners’ recommendation that all foreign language schools be abolished at the next legislative session. The commissioners saw the foreign language schools as un-American, if not anti-American, and as obstacles in the children’s learning of their duties and responsibilities as American citizens (Onishi, p. 19). However, they recommended that Oriental languages be included among foreign language offerings in public high schools, should there be justifiable demand (Ozawa, p. 117).

Another suggestion made by the commissioners was for homogeneous grouping by ability, which complied with the needs of middle class Caucasians who could not send their children to private schools and thus wanted segregation in public schools. In 1924, Lincoln School became an English Standard grammar school, and six years later Roosevelt High School became an English Standard high school. The English Standard school system segregated students by abilities, the result of which, at least in the initial years, was segregation according to racial lines. The percentage of Oriental students at both Roosevelt High School and Punahou School was seven percent. This system was abolished in 1947 (Fuchs, pp. 274-277).

We can see that the prevailing attitude towards the Japanese in the larger community was not positive. In 1920 there were more than 125 Japanese language schools with a total enrollment of 20,196 comprising 97.7 percent of all Japanese children in attendance at public or private schools (Onishi, p. 11). In view of the fact that the Japanese made up 42 percent of the total public school enrollment, it is understandable that the influence of the Japanese language school on the children was of grave concern to the rest of the society.

A special session of the legislature was called in November, 1920 to consider the recommendations made by the Commission. The Japanese community, in an effort to prevent the complete abolishment of their language schools, had 18 leaders meet to draft a compromise proposal which was submitted to the legislature via the Honolulu Chamber of Commerce. The proposal passed the legislature and became the first law to place the language schools under the control of the Department of Public Instruction. The act, known as Act 30 of the Special Session Laws of 1920, incorporated a number of items from the two earlier bills the Japanese fought so hard against. There were provisions for the licensing of teachers based on examination in American history, government, English, and democratic ideology; for revoking the license; for school hours to be limited to a maximum of one hour a day, six hours a week and classes not to be held before or during the public school hours; and for authorizing the Department of Public Instruction to prescribe the curriculum and the textbooks.

There was to be, however, two years’ grace period after the act took effect on July 1, 1921 in which the teachers could prepare themselves for the licensing examination.

The Japanese, having drafted the bill, cooperated fully to meet the provisions of the act. A 20 session workshop was held in 1921 on American democratic ideals, government, and history to prepare the Japanese language school teachers for the first licensing examination, which was held from July 5 to July 9 in 1921. For this first test, the Department of Public Instruction allowed teachers to take the test through an interpreter. Those who passed the test in English were given a permanent license, while those who used interpreters were given a temporary license good for one year. A number of elder teachers gave up their teaching careers at this time. There were also principals with years of teaching experience who received only temporary licenses while some inexperienced beginning teachers were granted permanent licenses.

Within a year after Act 30 took effect, new regulations were signed into law that restricted attendance at foreign language school to only those children who had completed two years of public school. Some members of the Japanese community questioned the constitutionality of this new law and wanted to contest it, while others felt
TABLE 2. SCHOOL ENROLLMENT OF CHILDREN OF JAPANESE ANCESTRY*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of Japanese language schools</th>
<th>Enrollment in English schools (public and private)</th>
<th>Enrollment in Japanese language schools</th>
<th>Percent in language school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>34,626</td>
<td>26,768</td>
<td>77.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>39,290</td>
<td>33,607</td>
<td>85.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*From the files of the Department of Public Instruction as cited by Onishi, p. 11.

it best not to agitate but to cooperate with government authorities.

On December 27, 1922 the Palama Japanese Language School filed a petition for an injunction, becoming the first test case on the constitutionality of the laws restricting language schools. Soon other schools followed and by August, 1923, 87 out of 143 Japanese language schools had joined forces. While the Territorial Circuit Court judged the restriction placed on attendance to be invalid in February, the legislature passed two other bills in April, 1923 not only tightening the restriction on attendance to only those who had satisfactorily completed the first and second grade in public school, but also levying a head tax of one dollar per pupil per year on the foreign language schools.

It became rather obvious that the legislature was moving towards the elimination of all language schools. The Japanese community in its struggle for survival in this xenophobic atmosphere was divided into two in their views of the best approach to take. Kinzaburo Makino, editor of the Hawaii Hochi, led the group interested in instituting a test case to contest the constitutionality of the school control laws; Yasutaro Soga, editor of the Nippu Jiji (later the Hawaii Times), led the anti-test group. These two leaders of the Japanese community, who jointly led the plantation strike of 1909 and consequently spent 110 days in jail together, were this time leading opposing factions. While the goals were the same, working in the interest of the Japanese in Hawaii to save the Japanese language schools, they differed over the strategy for achieving these goals and fought each other bitterly through editorials in their papers.

The pro-test group took their case to the U.S. District Court and won, upon which the Territorial government appealed to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. On March 22, 1926 the courts ruled in favor of the language schools. The Territorial government further appealed the case to the Supreme Court in Washington, D.C, where it was declared on February 21, 1927 that the language school control laws of Hawaii were unconstitutional. The Supreme Court decision included the statement: "The Japanese parent has the right to direct his own child without unreasonable restrictions. The Constitution protects him as well as those who speak another tongue" (Okahata, 1971, p. 223).

The Supreme Court decision led to a sudden increase in the enrollment in language schools, as the comparison of figures for the year preceding and following the decision in Table 2 shows.

A comparison of Korean, Chinese and Japanese language schools in 1921, a few years after the anti-language school pressures started, and in 1931, a few years after freedom had been won, is given in Table 3.

TABLE 3. ASIAN LANGUAGE SCHOOLS IN 1921 AND 1931*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>1921</th>
<th>1931</th>
<th>Percent Increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*From Ozawa, p. 189.

As can be seen, the enrollment figures doubled for both the Chinese and Japanese language schools although this is partly due to the increase in the school age population. In terms of the proportion of public and private school children attending language schools, the percentage for Japanese was double that of Chinese (40 percent) in 1934 (Lind, p. 304f). The period 1930-31 with about 87 percent was the peak period for Japanese enrollment since 1920 when 97.7 percent was
Curriculum and Textbooks after Winning Freedom

During the period from 1922 to 1927, when the Japanese community and language schools were divided, the Hawaii Kyoiku Kai ceased to function. The schools that joined the Palama Japanese Language School in contesting the constitutionality of the laws formed the Honolulu Japanese Education Society in November 1923 in order to unite for the cause.

After the Supreme Court decision, when the Japanese language schools regained the freedom to operate, the schools from both groups met again in July 1927 and started afresh the Hawaii Kyoiku Kai with new officers. The new Kyoiku Kai adopted for the time the revised textbooks developed by the test-case group, the Honolulu Japanese Education Society, and started work on a new set of texts. The new set of Japanese language texts was to aim at developing wholesome personalities based on American ideologies in addition to teaching the Japanese language.

The textbook committee decided on the following. There was to be one volume per grade, each volume consisting of 45 to 55 lessons and 110 (Vol. 1) to 200 (Vol. 6) pages. Volume 1 would use katakana while Volume 2 would introduce hiragana. Approximately 750 kanji were to be introduced over the six year period: Volume 1 (about 40), Volume 2 (100), Volume 3 (140), Volume 4 (145), Volume 5 (150), and Volume 6 (165). This is a considerable reduction from the total of 1,348 kanji in the previous set of texts. Topics of a local and international nature were to be included. As for subject matter, each volume was to contain several lessons in shushin, or ethics. Several lessons in geography, history and science were to be included from Volume 3 up, while lessons on citizenship (civics) were to be added from Volume 4.

It seems that from 1927 on, the Kyoiku Kai was constantly involved in compiling textbooks of one kind or another. In 1928, Vol. 7 and 8 for grades seven and eight were compiled. Calligraphy workbooks for grades one through eight were also developed. However, most significant in the eyes of Japanese parents was the 1931 decision by the Kyoiku Kai to compile a separate set of textbooks just for shushin, one volume per grade. Shushin, which refers to “ethics” or “morals,” had been an important subject in the curriculum of schools in Japan. It is in shushin that Japanese children are taught Japanese values, such as filial piety, respect for elders and superiors, obligation, perseverance, frugality, loyalty to one’s group and country, courage, courtesy, etc. Parents had high expectations of the Japanese language school as a character-building institution (Onishi, p. 115). The view of the Kyoiku Kai was that since Japanese, unlike Americans, don’t send their children to Sunday schools where ethics is taught, the Japanese language school should perform the function of giving moral education. In 1928, the Kyoiku Kai had already passed the resolution to assign one hour of class time per week to shushin with care that only those values would be taught that would not create conflict in becoming a good American citizen. The shushin textbook committee, therefore, met with Japanese-American public school teachers to discuss what values should be emphasized. Within two years the Kyoiku Kai had compiled shushin texts for grades one through six. The policies followed were: 1) to aim at making good American citizens of Japanese-Americans; 2) to avoid the use of “ought” and “ought not,” following the trend that emphasized individuality; 3) to make the textbooks as cheerful as possible for the children’s sake; and 4) to avoid repeating values taught in public schools. Texts were distributed for use by December, 1932. The shushin texts for grades seven and up were completed by 1937.

In a theoretical article on acculturation, Takie Lebra (1972) points out that shushin in Japanese language schools facilitated the acculturation of niseis into American society. By emphasizing values such as kindness, devotion, sacrifice, trustworthiness, cooperation, tolerance, etc., all oriented towards “others,” the language school trained niseis to be socially sensitive and accommodating. She states, “the Japanese individual is trained morally as well as psychologically to be sensitized to the place he occupies in a social setting, to perform faithfully whatever role is assigned to him, and to respond to the expectations and evaluations of others” (p. 7). Her content analysis of the 1937 edition of the shushin textbooks revealed that in more than half the cases “others” referred to “generalized others,” that is either strangers or general communities, local or national, rather than kin or particular individuals. The 1937 study by Onishi (1943) on the attitudes of Japanese in Hawaii towards the Japanese language schools also suggests that shushin was considered to be one of the most important functions of the school.
by the issei. More than 80 percent of the 60 first-
generation parents surveyed considered the
Japanese language school a strong influence for
right living and a necessary means of controlling
young people, encouraging morals and social
improvement, and developing good character.
These functions are associated with character
building, valued in Japanese society and in no way
incompatible with Americanization.

The Pre- and Post-World War II Years

The previous section on the development of
curriculum and textbooks may give the impression
that those years and the years to follow were calm
and peaceful. However, that is not the case as the
Supreme Court decision had only a temporary
effect. International events involving Japan and
local incidents such as the Ala Moana (Massie)
case stirred up the community and threatened the
status of the local Japanese. The Ala Moana case
in particular angered the Navy, and Hawaii came
under strong censure in Washington. A campaign
for statehood started as a result of the consideration
to place Hawaii under the supervision of the Navy
Department. During the statehood campaign, from
1932 on, the loyalty of the Japanese came into
question again, and again the Japanese language
school was accused of imparting to the children
Japanese values that would make them un-American.
The Hawaii Kyoiku Kai battled with the Honolulu
Advertiser in 1935 by defending the Japanese
language schools and describing the textbooks in
response to the paper’s anti-Japanese editorials.
Despite these disquieting events, the Kyoiku Kai
worked on revising the language texts and
distributed the revised version in time for the
1936-37 school year. The enrollment figure, which
had remained approximately the same for three
years, was then 41,173 (Onishi, p. 11). This was the
period in which the number of students enrolled
was the highest in the history of the Japanese
language schools, although the percentage had
decreased to 83.0 from 86.8 in 1930. At this time
exactly 50 percent of the 630 teachers were
American citizens.

As Hawaii had almost won the approval of
Congress for statehood, the Pearl Harbor attack
came and all activities of the Japanese community,
including classes at the Japanese language schools,
came to an immediate halt. Leaders of the Japanese
community, whether Buddhist or Shinto priests,
clergymen of Christian sects, businessmen,
language school principals, or commercial
fishermen, were rounded up by the FBI as being
potentially dangerous. They were eventually shipped
to the mainland where they were interned in the
so-called relocation centers. The loyalty of the
Japanese remained in question until nisei soldiers
such as the 442nd Battalion (“the Army’s Most
Decorated Unit”) and the 100th (“The Purple Heart
Battalion”) acquired national acclaim through their
heroic actions in the European theatre.

The contribution of Hawaii’s niseis, however, was
not limited to combat actions. Many of the nisei
soldiers who had learned Japanese by attending
Japanese language schools were given additional
training as interpreters. They served in the Pacific
theater from the Aleutians to China, Burma, India,
New Zealand and Australia. They went through
battles in Guadalcanal, Munda, Tarawa, Iwo Jima,
Leyte and Okinawa. They intercepted enemy
information, deciphered enemy codes, translated
enemy documents, wrote propaganda material to
be dropped on the enemy, and in Saipan, Guam,
the Philippines and Okinawa they did the persuading
of enemy soldiers and civilians to surrender.

General Charles Willoughby, Chief of Staff of
Intelligence is known to have said that the nisei
shortened the war in the Pacific by two years
(Okahata, 1971, p. 274).

It can be seen that the Japanese language schools
made enormous indirect contributions towards the
niseis’ success in the war, partly through the type
of education they offered and in part, as the focus
of so much controversy, by motivating the niseis
to prove their loyalty to the U.S.

Nonetheless, during the war under the slogan
“Speak American,” young and old were prevented
from using any other language. In addition, new
language school laws went into effect in 1943,
affecting Chinese and Korean language schools as
well. Act 1872 limited the enrollment in language
schools to children who were in the 4th grade or
above and whose English scores on standard tests
were above average. As a result, children who grew
up during the war years became monolingual pidgin
or English speakers whether they were of Chinese,
Korean or Japanese ancestry. Towards the end of
1946, three Chinese language schools took the issue
to court and won a decision in October, 1947 that
declared the language school control laws of 1943
unconstitutional.

The Territorial government attempted to appeal
the case to the Supreme Court but was turned
down on procedural grounds. It appeared that the
Territorial government was not ready to remove its
control over language schools despite the fact that the court decision included a statement to the effect that foreign languages are important to increase international understanding and cooperation. It was not until 1949, through a massive petition with 35,600 signatures, that the Territorial legislature finally removed all restrictions on language schools except for limiting the attendance of kindergarten, first and second-grade children to a maximum of five hours per week.

Although a few Japanese language schools began operation in 1947 despite the restrictive laws, with the newly acquired freedom an even greater number of schools reopened and the Hawaii Kyoiku Kai resumed its function. By 1948, there were 67 schools with 11,631 students. Compared with the decade immediately preceding World War II when a fairly steady enrollment of 38,000 to 40,000 was maintained, it is obvious that the war had drastically reduced the role the Japanese language schools played in the community.

After Statehood

Hawaii became the 50th state in the union on August 21, 1959. This time the fact that 36 percent of its population was comprised of people of Japanese descent was not made an issue. With statehood, the last restriction on the maximum hours for children in the second grade and below was removed and language schools were given complete freedom.

Now that there were no legal battles to fight nor causes to campaign for, the Hawaii Kyoiku Kai’s role in the community receded from the forefront. They participated in the several big celebrations of the Japanese community: the 75th Anniversary of the Arrival of Japanese Contract Immigrants in Hawaii in 1960, attended by Prince and Princess Takamatsu; the Centennial Celebration of the Japan-U.S. Treaty of Amity and Commerce also in 1960, attended by Crown Prince Akihito and Princess Michiko; the Centennial Celebration of Japanese Immigration to Hawaii in 1968, attended by Prince and Princess Hitachi; and then their own 70th Anniversary of the Founding of the Japanese Language School in 1965. Japanese speech contests were held for students of Japanese language schools at some of these festivities.

More than anything else, however, the activities of the Kyoiku Kai following statehood were oriented toward the internal matters of curriculum and textbook development. These efforts involved a series of decisions on the content, goals, and approaches of the curriculum of the Japanese language schools.

One of the most interesting curriculum issues centered about the role of shushin. Soon after the Kyoiku Kai was reactivated in the early post-war years, a decision was made to eliminate shushin from the curriculum of the Japanese language schools, based on the abolishment of shushin in post-war Japan under her new American educational system. The Japanese language was then the sole subject matter to be taught in the Japanese language schools in Hawaii. Local Japanese parents, however, were not very happy about this. True their children were learning Japanese and they were off the streets after public school, but the parents complained that the children were now hard to manage. The parents wanted the language schools to teach more than just language. The Kyoiku Kai, therefore, reversed its earlier decision in 1952 and decided to put shushin back into the curriculum and to include the inculcation of ethical values in the student as one of the major goals of the Japanese language school. They immediately commenced to develop a new set of shushin texts.

Work on new language texts had an earlier start as the need was felt as soon as the Hawaii Kyoiku Kai resumed its role in post-war Hawaii. Because of the urgency, the set of twelve volumes for the six elementary grades was completed in three years, and the set of six for the next three grades in the following three years. By the time they had completed the whole series in 1954, the need for a more carefully developed set of texts was strongly felt. Adopting the audiolingual emphasis of the time, the textbook committee decided that Volume 1 would have only pictures at the beginning and introduce hiragana gradually. The total number of kanji over the six year period would be further reduced from the previous text. They were to put greater emphasis on conversation and on topics of interest to the children. One controversial policy adopted was that of kana spelling and pronunciation correspondence for the elementary grade texts. The aim was to make it easier for the English speaking children in Hawaii to write what they hear and say, especially since they come to the language school tired after a full day of classes in public schools. The new kana spelling system did away with the traditional way of writing the postpositions wa and e as ha and he, although wo was retained in writing the postposition o. They
started in 1955 and completed the set of 18 volumes for nine grades in 1963.

In the meantime, an increasing number of public high schools were offering Japanese. The spelling system used there was the traditional one no longer in use in Japan. When the textbook committee of the Hawaii Kyoiku Kai began work on Volume 1 of the intermediate series for the Japanese language schools, it was decided that the spelling system currently in use in Japan would be used. The result was that the spelling system for the six elementary grades was different from that for the three intermediate grades, and neither of them was the same as the system used in the public schools.

The incorporation of Asian languages into the public high school course offerings led, in 1963, to the institution of “credit, by examination,” which meant that graduates of the Japanese language schools could receive high school credit on passing the test. The introduction of such an examination, administered by the Department of Education, brought to the fore the problem of kana spelling. The Hawaii Kyoiku Kai decided to compile a new set of texts again, based on the new kana spelling system currently in use in Japan, which had been used for grades seven through nine in the previous set. The Kyoiku Kai contracted Professor Kugimoto of the Tokyo University of Foreign Languages, then visiting professor in Japanese at the University of Hawaii, to compile the text. His lack of familiarity with the local children’s background (the fact that they do not live in a Japanese speaking environment and therefore have to learn Japanese as a foreign language, for example) and his death before completing the work delayed the progress of the text. Ms. Atoda, who had assisted Professor Kugimoto, was asked to take over the task. Texts for the elementary school were completed in 1972 and those for the intermediate school level are expected to be finished in a couple of years.

Conclusion

In examining the long history of the Japanese language schools, one cannot but be impressed by the significant role they played in the history of Hawaii. The contributions they made are so numerous that it is almost frightening to imagine how different things might have been for the local Japanese had there not been the guiding force of the Hawaii Kyoiku Kai.

People of Japanese ancestry today no longer form a distinguishable, unified group, but have become part of the total English speaking community. Consequently, to attend a Japanese language school does not seem to have a high priority for many of the monolingual, English-speaking parents and children of Japanese descent. The Japanese language school enrollment has dwindled down to about 7,000, which is 54 percent of that of 1964, the peak year after World War II.

The Hawaii Kyoiku Kai, however, continues its efforts. Its most recent accomplishment is the voluminous work on the history of the Japanese language schools compiled by Rev. Gizo Ozawa to commemorate the Centennial of the Japanese Immigration to Hawaii, which served as the major source of information for this article.

The increase in international contact, especially with regard to Japan, would suggest that the need for English-Japanese bilinguals will only become stronger. For this reason, the Japanese language schools must redirect their efforts toward this new challenge and continue to serve as a valuable resource to the community.

References


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