

Japanese Education In Transition

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This is a time of transition for Japan's educational programs. The sweeping changes of the occupation period—1945-1952—were the most drastic educational reforms in her history. Initiated and guided by American educational advisors, and carried out enthusiastically by most Japanese teachers, they gave Japan a system strikingly like that of the United States. Now, a decade after the end of the occupation, significant changes are again being made.

On American advice, the Japanese accepted a single-track, 6-3-3-4 system of school structure (6 years elementary, 3 years junior high, 3 years senior high, and 4 years university), and made it universal. This replaced the pre-war ladder of 6-5-3-3 (6 years elementary, 5 years "middle," 3 years "higher," and 3 years university), made up of five separate tracks: academic, women's, technical, normal and a low-level "youth school," offering widely differing educational opportunities.

Occupation authorities persuaded the Japanese that the 6-3-3 system was superior because (a) it conformed more naturally to child growth and development, providing a separate level of schooling for early adolescents, i.e., a junior high, instead of the former five-year middle school which threw early and late adolescents together, and (b) it provided more efficiently for the vast expansion at this level of a student population whose attendance was made compulsory as a part of the

reform. Accordingly, hundreds of junior high schools were built between 1947 and 1950 at great sacrifice to the war-torn and bankrupt towns and villages. Though they started at a disadvantage, they were soon staffed and functioning adequately. Freed from the traditionalism of the former middle school, and initially outside the university examination system, these schools were able to serve the youth of the nation better by offering a special program for them. To all except the alumni of the former prestige middle schools, who were loyal to the old school-tie traditions, the new school was an improvement.

Beyond the compulsory nine years is the three-year senior high school. Also at this level a four-year part-time senior high school was established to provide educational opportunities for working youth. Each offers general education and vocational education. Many are comprehensive, although the old loyalties have tended to convert comprehensive schools to strictly vocational or college preparatory as they were in pre-reform days.

HIGHER EDUCATION REFORMS

In higher education, the former three-year, German-type of university—a proud, academically-advanced institution, characterized by narrow specialization and research, serving an elite corps of students—was converted to a four-year American-type of university open

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to all who could pass the entrance examination. Students were for the first time required to take thirty-six hours of general education for a broader humanistic background. The several overlapping higher educational institutions, normal and technical as well as imperial universities, averaging eight to a prefecture, were consolidated in the reform of 1949 into one or more "national universities" in each prefecture, roughly similar to a state university in the United States. Instead of the separate, and inferior, normal school of pre-war days—little more than a secondary school—at least one national university in each prefecture is now required to offer teacher education. Such schools of education now prepare most of the teachers for the compulsory schools. Some of the national universities which were formed by the amalgamation of old normal schools and other secondary institutions still have meager

facilities and inadequately prepared staffs and are universities in name only. The older, established universities, however, are increasing the number of chairs of education and producing recognized research. In general, teacher education has been professionalized and has gained status. Most teachers in Japan are now university-trained and officially certified.

As in the United States, graduate schools offer an M.A. degree requiring two years or more of study beyond the B.A. A five-year course beyond the B.A. leads to the Ph.D. degree, though in the older institutions few doctorates have been granted because of the resistance of the pre-war trained academics who are prejudiced in favor of the former high-status doctorate granted as an honorary degree (similar to the British Litt.D.) to a few established leaders in each field.

Japan is second only to the United States in the number of universities in proportion to the population and in the percentage of the appropriate age group in a university. In 1960 there were 245 universities, of which 72 were national, 33 local (i.e. municipal), and 140 private. Students numbered 626,421; instructors, 61,021.

To meet the demand for sub-professional technical training, some junior colleges were established in 1950, many of them former technical institutes. Long considered second-rate institutions, the junior colleges are gradually gaining acceptance as terminal institutions providing technical education for men and homemaking education for women. Women, still discouraged from going on to higher education in the older prestige universities, have found the junior college a convenient preparation for marriage. They have flocked to the 280 junior colleges and now

exceed the male enrollment, constituting 67.5% of the total of 83,457 students.

Special education, although not as advanced as in the United States, is recognized and encouraged. Each year more is done for the blind and the deaf in special classes and in special schools at the compulsory education level. The education of the mentally retarded and physically disabled has been largely neglected, though the need for meeting the problem is frequently acknowledged in the press.

A major problem of the Japanese educational system is the articulation of the various parts of the educational ladder, especially junior high, senior high, and university. At present, family and social pressure, as well as the desire to qualify for a choice job in government or a good company, cause all ambitious youth to point towards the prestige institutions at each level, the "first junior high," the "first senior high," and finally, Tokyo University, which stands at the apex of the educational pyramid.

EXAMS DOMINATE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

The examination hurdle (called "examination hell") has come almost to dominate and distort the purposes of the whole educational system. The new curriculum, forged by dedicated and creative teachers, has been cast aside in favor of cramming for the examination to the next higher level. Teachers are under pressure to produce successful examination-takers, since their reputation depends on the number of their graduates who are able to enter the better schools. Parents are under pressure to provide at considerable cost tutoring for their offspring to give them the best possible chance in the cut-throat competition each youth must face. During the last year of each

level, the sixth grade, ninth grade, twelfth grade, the regular curriculum gives way to systematic cramming. At senior high, 20-25% of the class will fail to pass the examination for their first-choice school.

While a crude type of academic guidance is offered a student, such as advising him *not* to take the examination for a certain prestige school, there is little real guidance based on modern tests. Teachers are too busy cramming students for the next entrance examination, and there are few trained counselors. Without adequate counseling, students totally unfitted for academic education drift into the college preparatory stream in secondary school, get discouraged and drop out, entering the job market occupationally unprepared. During a period of high prosperity, such as at present, all such graduates quickly find jobs, since the demand exceeds the supply. Having been subjected to a cram course aiming at higher education, which they will never reach, roughly half the secondary students, according to Professor Sumeragi, are receiving an incomplete education (1). He points out that the part-time senior high, which should be specializing in vocational education for working youth, has become an institution for those who failed to pass the examinations for the regular senior highs and is aping the academic curriculum of the latter.

The single-track program of post-war years is under attack. In answer to the demand by a rapidly-expanding industry for middle-grade technicians, the Ministry has set up a differentiated five-year technical school, composed of a three-year senior high and a two-year junior college. It will concentrate on science, mathematics, and tech-

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