THE STUDY OF JAPANESE EDUCATION[1]

by *John Singleton and Kazukimi Ebuchi*

Introduction

The role of education in any society is a sensitive issue. Education has political, economic, moral, and professional implications relevant to central social issues of the larger society. It is with some trepidation, therefore, that we review the behavioral science research on Japanese education and suggest some guidelines for future research.

For the purposes of this presentation, we have taken education to mean organized programs of teaching and learning, wherever they may occur, but have emphasized formal schooling. We are limiting ourselves to the institutions and organizations which have an explicit educational function.

Education is usually viewed by anthropologists as a process of cultural transmission. Schools act as agents of cultural transmission, but also have a social structure and form parts of various larger social systems. Education is sometimes seen as "an institutionalized form of socialization to adult roles" (IESS IV: 509); but schools also create new roles for children, parents, and teachers in the maintenance of their educational enterprise. We may also look at education as ritual, and schools as the major social organizations for restricting and directing the activities of school-age youth.

Research on Japanese education is viewed in cross-cultural perspective as are other areas of research discussed in this symposium. Research on Japanese society has been and will continue to be a multicultural effort. Each researcher brings to his study not only his disciplinary baggage, but also his own cultural background. Our research endeavor will not be sufficient until we can support Japanese research on foreign educational institutions and processes as well as Japanese and Western research on Japanese education.

Problems and Prospects

The general perception of both Japanese and Americans that formal school instruction is a most effective instrument in solving social problems, inculcating social values, and achieving the various academic and social purposes which teachers and parents set explicity for the school has at times been a barrier to understanding the actual functions of educational

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institutions. The great emphasis and controversy which have swirled around the idea of morals education in Japan have deluded some observers into thinking that one hour of formal morals instruction per week, a subject not covered by the important achievement examinations for entrance to higher levels of schooling, was somehow effective in its attempts to change students' behavior. Some educators from other nations are intensely interested in Japanese classroom methods for teaching mathematics now that Japanese children have been shown by an international comparison of achievement to excel in this subject (Husen 1967).

We suggest that the home, community, and peer group are probably more important factors in students' behavioral changes than the instructional methods of Japanese teachers in their classrooms. The whole structure of education as a national social institution is probably a more important influence than the limited pedagogical technology of the classroom. Intensive, holistic, ethnographic studies of education should be made in its community context and within the structures which are created for it—the schools. The study of schools and classrooms as subcultural systems needs to be carried out in a variety of Japanese settings.

> To understand the internal life of the school, it is necessary to see it in a wider social context; in this way the sociology, anthropology, and the social psychology of the school is necessarily linked to the study of the family, the neighborhood, the religious community and, ultimately, to the whole of society (IESS IV:526).

Many community studies of Japan have already touched upon educational institutions as they relate to the lives of community residents. Embree (1939) gave us an insightful look at the organization of prewar local schools and their relation to residents of Suye Mura, and Dore's social history of education (1965) takes us back to the well-established Tokugawa schools, which formed a very substantial and influential base for the "modern" school system of the Meiji era.

The two best English reports of life in Tokyo (Dore 1958; Vogel 1963) add substantially to our understanding of the influence of educational institutions upon the city dweller. Vogel's observations of the role of the mother and the family in supporting children for their examination ordeals are by no means special characteristics of the metropolitan *sarariman's* family. Vogel's description of the family gives us important clues to the reasons for student behavior and their high standards of achievement in the school.

The work of Yoshida, summarized in Siegel (1963), on youth groups in two contrasting rural communities, shows the interaction of formal and informal patterns of cultural transmission in the school and in the community. Brameld (1968) describes two poor communities, one composed of *burakumin* and the other of fishermen, in a prescriptive attempt to define

new roles and programs for the schools in these settings. One does not have to agree with his prescriptive inclinations in order to recognize the basic value of his community ethnographies in their educational context. Singleton (1967a) begins his ethnographic description with a middle school and then goes out to the communities with which the school is in intimate contact, including the administrative and professional organizations associated with schools, as well as the local community which is served by the school.

The importance of international cooperation between social scientists and educators in further research on Japanese education has been shown by such research as the recent international study of achievement in mathematics mentioned above (Husen 1967). In this study, researchers from twelve countries constructed and carried out comparable studies of learning achievement in mathematics and its correlated educational and social factors. The definition and evaluation of mathematics achievement on a multinational scale proved to be a difficult task, but the researchers found it even more difficult to develop comparable multinational measures of school organization, curriculum and instructional methods, and social factors. The basic purpose of the research project was "to compare outcomes in different educational *systems,*" but the researchers tried to avoid any implication that they were referees in an international competition. Nevertheless, their final recommendation at the end of a two-volume report was to propose an intensive case study of Japanese education because of the consistent success of Japanese students as judged by the measures of mathematical achievement developed. As this international group realized, "special attention would have to be directed to incentives used in instruction, the relation between learning at school and at home, and to what extent the parents are supporting the school" (Husen 1967 II: 309).

Japanese Research on Education
    Japanese research on education by the social sciences has developed in several areas during the 1960's. Much thought has been given to the interrelationships of educational institutions and society in social, economic, and political contexts. Local community studies, examinations of teaching-learning processes in the school, and investigations of the roles of teachers and students are also well-represented in the recent publications.
    1) The study of the influence of social class on education was one of the primary areas of interest in the early days of educational sociology in Japan. More recent studies have concerned education as a major determinant in social mobility and its effect on the existing class system. Aso (1968) analyzed the Japanese *Who's Who* and described change which has occurred since the Meiji era in the role played by higher education in the formation of Japanese elites. Shimbori (1964b, 1968) suggested some sociological

implications of academic careers and cliques in the promotion and maintenance of social status.

2) A growing number of educational sociologists have become interested in investigating the relationships between education and economic growth. Shimizu (1961) and Kagoyama et al (1964) have taken the lead in this area. Shimizu (1968) has pointed out the role of higher education as an economic investment.

3) The empirical study of relationships between educational institutions and political process on both national and local levels seems important but only a few studies of this subject have appeared so far. Yano and his associates (1961) have investigated the relationships between community power structure and local educational organizations. Systematic studies of the PTA organizations are needed since they reflect the structural characteristics of a local community setting.

4) Many Japanese educational sociologists and anthropologists have been interested in the relationships of community life to education. In the early days educators were greatly influenced by a "community approach to education" which stressed the school's contribution to community life. In more recent years, some investigators have been concerned with problems of structural change in the local community and its impact upon education, while others are involved in local-regional development and educational planning.

5) In view of the long-standing concern for formal morals education, it seems rather strange that there are very few behavioral studies of this subject (see Aoi 1963 and Ebuchi 1962 for such studies). Since this topic constitutes one of the characteristic aspects of Japanese educational culture, we recommend further systematic studies of children's moral behavior, morals education in the school, and its relation to other features of education.

6) More understandable in the Japanese context has been the slighting of the subject of education for and about minority groups in Japanese society. Although there have been many publications on *dowa* (assimilation) education, they are more philosophical than sociological. More empirical investigations of education for minority groups—*burakumin*, Ainu, and Koreans living in Japan—would be appropriate.

English Language Research on Japanese Education

Recent research literature written in English that concerns the role of education in Japan has several emphases.

1) The role of education in political attitudes, change, and development in Japan is explored in two recent books. Dore (1965) suggests that during the Tokugawa period, fief schools for samurai children were important in laying the groundwork for later modernization through their implicit and

unintended promotion of an achievement-oriented status system even though the schools were explicitly directed to the maintenance of a hereditary system of ascriptive status. Passin (1965) considered both the Tokugawa and modern eras. Passin believes that despite the continuing emphasis on political orthodoxy, many graduates of the high schools and colleges oppose the official views.

2) *Shiken jigoku* (examination hell) is a dramatic feature of the relation between the educational system and social mobility in Japan. Vogel (1962) described the effects of this system upon children preparing for the examination ordeal and the responsibilities and tensions involved for the mother and other family members.

Shimizu (1963) describes how the examination system affects secondary education by turning the better high schools into cram schools, thus providing selective benefits for the middle classes. The upper class children escape the ordeal through private educational tracks whereas the lower class children do not enter the competition for lack of the money necessary for higher education. Kobayashi (1963) points out the increasing pressures surrounding entrance examinations as *ronin* students persist in taking entrance exams year after year.

3) Two articles suggest that urban and rural responses to education in Japan are different. Singleton (1967b) showed that in one middle school district urban children have higher rates of success in advancing from compulsory middle school to high prestige high schools in spite of similar levels of desire for high school education among rural children. Lewis and Haller (1964) found differences in the evaluations of occupational prestige hierarchies made by urban and rural male middle school students.

4) The influence of education on minority group status in Japan has been little studied. Wagatsuma (1966) reviews the influence of schooling and specific educational programs, including *dowa* (assimilation) education, on *burakumin*. Cornell (1964: 299) suggests in an aside that "schooling has been a vital instrument of Japanization and assimilation" for Ainu children in the last two generations, though they still have poorer records of attendance and lower records of success in school than children of the majority group. The special educational attention that Brameld (1968) recommends for the children of *burakumin* and fishermen is also needed for Ainu children, whose education has not yet been a matter of any special concern.

5) Student movements in Japan are now part of world-wide phenomena no longer attributable to some uniquely Japanese character trait. Political analyses predominate in published studies of the *Zengakuren*, and little is known of the dynamics of the student social movement. Shimbori (1964a), for instance, describes the *Zengakuren* as a student political movement

caught between the political elite and a counter-elite, but identifying with the counter-elite.

Themes for Future Research

In future research on Japanese education, we suggest as broad topics needing consideration the connection of education to social change; education as a social institution and as a formal organization; comparative studies of cognitive style; non-"school" education; and cross-cultural studies of education, discrimination, and poverty.

1) The specific interaction of school and community at all levels from the urban neighborhood and rural buraku to the national and international levels must be studied to understand the social forces which shape the school and its formal educational program as well as to understand the effects the school has upon society.

The study of school-community interaction must include consideration of the school's role in (a) social mobility (including social stratification outside the school, social mobility through education, political recruitment, and the entrance examination system); (b) population dynamics (including demographic changes in the population, urbanization, and rural change); (c) industrialization (and its demands on the educational system for trained manpower); (d) political socialization (with emphasis on the Japanese concerns for formal morals education); (e) political power (including the respective roles of local PTA organization, school boards, and the Ministry of Education); (f) national and community integration; and (g) organized student and teacher movements (in which the social and cultural, as well as the political, meanings of the *Zengakuren* and *Nikkyoso* would be explored).

2) Education is a social institution which encompasses many formal organizations. The schools as formal organizations may be studied as sociocultural systems in themselves with a natural history of their own. They may also be studied as the society in miniature.

Youth culture and the generation gap are topics related to formal education. Teachers as well as students today often face sharp cultural discontinuities. The current university student protests, though tied to the larger political issues of the nation, are also intimately connected with established features of the educational system. The student radicalism which prevails in many of the Japanese major universities in recent times is no doubt partly a reaction against the severe entrance examination system.

3) The subject of cognitive or conceptual styles has only recently been explored in the United States and Japan. The cultural and educational implications of differences in cognitive style is quite exciting, especially as we begin to understand differences of quality rather than only speed in learning styles. Goodman (1962) has shown that differences exist in habits

of conceptualization of Japanese and American children that reflect cultural influences. One aspect of conceptualization that has not been explored intrigues us: Japanese children, in their first year of elementary school, learn to master *hiragana*, a system of phonetic writing that immediately enables them to write anything they can say and to read anything they would understand if it were read aloud. Because American children almost never learn an efficient phonetic system of writing, during their years of elementary school they are comparatively quite retarded in their ability to read and write. Makita (1968) has described the extremely low incidence of reading difficulties among Japanese children in the lower grades, but is more concerned with the form and structure of the orthographies than their instrumental value for the child. The differences in writing ability are obvious to one who has compared the sophisticated stories of first-grade Japanese children with those of their American counterparts. But beyond the differences in ability to read or write down stories, we would like to know more about the cognitive differences of American and Japanese children. Perhaps American educators, who have been impressed by the terrible task of learning that Japanese children face in mastering *kanji*, should reform English writing before exerting further efforts to get the Japanese to adopt *romaji*.

4) Insufficient attention has been paid by social scientists to the vast range of educational institutions that exist outside the formal school system. A section of the Japanese educational profession separated from school education (*gakko kyoiku*) is social education (*shakai kyoiku*), which might be better called continuing adult education. Various special schools (*kakushu gakko*) are recognized by the Ministry of Education and include brides' schools (*hanayome gakko*) and the widely scattered but little studied English conversation schools. The examination cram schools (*yobiko*) are almost a standard feature of the regular school system, but tend to be ignored by both educators and social scientists. Training programs for new employees in large enterprises, both public and private, are highly developed educational devices which deserve attention for their important role in adult socialization, especially in inducing identification with the firm and its objectives. Systems of apprenticeship still flourish in small enterprises. The implications of traditional educational patterns in educational institutions which offer training in the traditional arts have been almost completely overlooked by social scientists seeking to understand contemporary Japanese education. These traditional socialization patterns apply not only to the traditional arts but even penetrate such fields of western art as classical music. The development of Japanese language schools in overseas Japanese communities also shows the persistence of formal education as a Japanese cultural trait.

Studies of Japanese school socialization in all of these forms would add

distinctively to our description of Japanese culture. An exciting example of this type of study is now being conducted by a young anthropologist from the University of Pennsylvania, Tom Rohlen, who is a participant-observer in the intensive orientation program for new employees of a well-known private bank. The emphasis in this training is on moral rather than vocational indoctrination. It is especially important to note that it is a modern firm which is using this traditional device for socializing its new employees, many of whom have just come from the turmoil of college campuses.

5) Especially valuable to contemporary social science will be comparative studies of education, discrimination, and poverty in cross-cultural contexts of modern, urban, industrialized societies. We need subcultural ethnographic case studies of various poverty-stricken groups to understand better the social nature of poverty. Japan is an important place to conduct this type of study, as, indeed, some researchers have already done (Brameld 1968 and Wagatsuma 1966). The comparison of Japanese *burakumin* and American black communities in the context of poverty and in relation to the formal systems of education which may restrict or encourage social mobility is only one aspect of possible comparison. The comparative study of poor urban neighborhoods in large metropolitan settings, of economically depressed rural communities like the declining coal mining areas of Appalachia and Kyushu, and of Amerindian and Ainu communities subjected to educational programs designed for assimilation into the larger national societies would be especially productive topics for future research.

Some Models for Research Suggested by this Symposium

Ideas presented in discussion and other papers of this symposium suggest at least four models for further research.

1) *Education as an instrument of socialization.* In discussion, David Plath suggested that secondary socialization to school-related roles and, to some extent, tertiary socialization to adult roles are functions of the school and university, though schools rarely if ever furnish the total institutional context of socialization for any individual. For children of preschool age primary socialization through the family, household, and neighborhood is a process quite distinct from the socialization provided by formal schooling. To say that secondary socialization is a function of the school is not to suggest that it is the only function of the school or that the school is a functional equivalent of the family. Studies of school socialization will obviously require techniques different from those of studies of early childhood. They must focus on behavioral effects produced in students through their attendance at school and through expectations held by others of the roles of students.

2) *Education as the gatekeeper of social mobility.* The management of

diversity in Japanese society by educational institutions should be much more closely studied. The channeling of individuals into patterns of inter-generational mobility through the level of education achieved and through the particular higher schools attended has already been well documented. The processes by which decisions about individuals are made, the different ways in which the examination system relates to particular classes, groups, and communities, and the relationship of these matters to contemporary student frustrations still need to be looked at.

3) *Schools as social communities.* Schools, as individual units of Japanese society, relate to the national society. John Bennett suggests that "the legitimate heir of the community study in Japanese society is the study of the way the community microcosm is related to the macrocosm via the networks of kinship and friendship and the way the local community manages the inputs and constraints emanating from the national society and its organizations." The schools are important as local social microcosms as well as being channels for the messages and constraints of the larger society.

Vogel's suggestion that communities be studied after the model of a "central place system" is also especially relevant in a study of the schools. The different levels of education relate to each other through the intake of students, and the administration of local education relates up the line through regions and prefectures to the national administration. It is most appropriate that Vogel includes a discussion of the relevance of this model to education as a future focus of Japanese urban studies.

4) *Education as a social problem.* DeVos suggests the importance of studies related to the problems of youth. Both Ishino and Vogel have called for social relevance in further social science research on Japan; it is obvious that many of the most important contemporary social problems are directly tied to the structure of the educational system and the ways in which both schools and students relate to their society. Although higher education and its dramatic developments and crises are most on our minds, we should not overlook the real problems of the junior and senior high schools as they increase the cultural constrictions on all students who would use the schools as gateways for mobility. The fires of entrance-examination hell are not cooling down!

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH
FUKUOKA EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

NOTES

the bibliographic extracts prepared for it will be available later from the Center for International Studies, University of Pittsburgh.

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