

OBSERVATIONS OF  
JAPANESE AND AMERICAN EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

Japan and the United States of America both enjoy the benefits of strong educational systems. The systems differ in many ways, but both produce capable young people who perpetuate the society which provided the education for them.

The paper being presented is based on the the observations of the author and is not a paper utilizing research or the writings of those who have conducted detailed inquiries into the Japanese and American educational systems. (The booklet, MOMBUSHO, The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. Japan, 1981 has been used in several cited examples.) Six visits to Japan and current residency in Japan plus twenty-two years of experience as a school administrator in Washington State provide the basis for the observations. Supplementing the observations and the practical experience, the author has taught a class entitled Japanese Culture at the junior college level in America, with its concomitant reading about Japan, and is currently teaching at a private junior college in Japan.

The presentation is based on the premise that both Japan and America enjoy strong educational systems and that there are observable differences. The paper will discuss the major differences between the two systems with comments relating to the cultural aspect and the strong effect the culture has on the two systems of education.

Education in both Japan and America is changing. Educational

(2)

changes occur somewhat frequently in America and the Ministry of Education of Japan is currently reviewing education in Japan. Therefore, this paper is of this time and could be less applicable in the near future.

### CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL INFLUENCE ON EDUCATION

Each country in the world is formed by many forces from both within and from outside the country. Both Japan and America have been shaped by many factors and these components have helped shape the direction, status and character of education in both countries. The cultural differences, the history of each country and the expectations of each society dramatically affect the approaches used to educate the youth of Japan and America.

Japan's highly developed culture has grown over the last two thousand years shaped by both natural and created influences. As an island country, Japan has enjoyed the protection of the bodies of water surrounding the country. The bodies of water also acted as a barrier for the introduction and acquisition of ideas from other countries.

The natural barriers were strengthened when, during the Tokagawa Era, the Shogun closed Japan to nearly all outsiders which effectively limited any influence that might come from outside Japan. As a result of the closing of the country for more than 200 years, Japan became a country insulated from the events occurring elsewhere in the world during this time.

An unfortunate result of the closing of the country, which continues into the present, is a national attitude that Japan is not quite as good as other countries. During the Meiji Era, extraordinary efforts were made to overcome what was felt to be the "backwardness" of Japan. A national concentrated drive was initiated to catch up with the other

countries of the world, particularly the western nations.

The results of Japan's efforts to overcome the lack of ideas from other countries during the Tokagawa Era is nearly miraculous. A remarkable transformation has taken place in a short period of time. The history of Japan since the late 1800's has been marred by its zeal to become a leader in the world of nations as evidenced by the various wars it fought culminating with World War II. Despite these negative actions which delayed faster development, Japan is a recognized world leader today, accepting its share of the limelight and also receiving its share of the responsibility for the problems existing in the world.

Apart from the closure of the country, the Tokagawa Era has had another effect on the people of Japan. Japanese society has been tightly controlled with each person knowing his place in the society. During the military dictatorship of the Shogun, Japanese society was even more tightly controlled. Travel, businesses, marriages, surnames, and status in society were decreed by the Shogun. A person knew his place, what was expected of him and his responsibilities in society as well as the problems arising when he did not fulfill his responsibilities. The individual became submerged in society as a whole. The group concept continues to this day in Japan, but is beginning to show some signs of changing.

While Japan was insulated by nature and design, America has been an accumulative country, taking people and ideas from the other countries of the world, often in random fashion. The United States grew from the East toward the West with the original settlers coming from European countries. Later, with the great influx of immigrants in the 1800's and early 1900's, the people of many nations came to America, each bringing some of the characteristics of their mother nation.

(4)

As the early settlers moved in a westerly direction, they battled many natural elements as they attempted to create new homes in the wilderness, isolated from other people. Great sacrifices were made by the settlers in overcoming the barriers which stood in their way often calling for independent action by these individuals. Each individual was a member of the group, but actions were dictated as much by the benefit to the individual as to the group. The concept of self-reliant, independent action by the individuals became a model and method of operation for Americans that continues today.

#### THE NATIONAL ROLE IN EDUCATION

Education in Japan is a national enterprise. Controlled by the Mombusho, the Ministry of Education, the educational program of Japan is a unified approach designed to achieve the national priority of a highly educated populace. The basis for the operation of the Ministry of Education lies in the roots of Japan, its culture and its history.

The structure of education in Japan today is shaped by these historical antecedents. Education is a national enterprise with the control, direction and financial support originating primarily at the national level. The structure established during the Tokagawa Era survives today in the more open, but comparable structure of the Mombusho.

The Ministry of Education is a powerful member of the Cabinet and exercises its power on behalf of education in Japan. Decisions by the Ministry are part of the regular, well-publicized Cabinet debates. Educational committees and sub-committees enjoy national press with many issues becoming the headline news or the leading television stories.

The Mombusho is the policy maker for education in Japan. "The Mombusho establishes national standards of curricula by means of the Courses of Study, etc. for elementary, lower secondary and upper

secondary schools in order to secure an optimum national level of education based on the principle of equality of educational opportunity." (MOMBUSHO, 1981) The Ministry of Education makes decisions for much of the content of education, the materials to support the curriculum, the preparation of teachers, whether new schools will be built, the national salary schedule for teachers and most of the other administrative decisions for the operation of schools. Decisions made at the national level are distributed to the prefectural (state) levels and local levels for implementation.

Historically, culturally and operationally the United States has developed quite differently from Japan. Again, the nature of the country, the forces that shaped the country of today, and the events that shaped the culture of the country all have had an impact on education in America.

As the United States Constitution was being written, the role of the national (Federal) government and the role of the individual states were debated at length. The U.S. Constitution has been interpreted as giving the states those powers not specifically delegated to the Federal government. Authority for education is not specifically given to the Federal government and is thus interpreted as being a power given to each individual state with the control of education delegated to the state.

Control of education is a sensitive issue in the United States. Control is usually associated with the financial support of education and thus the source of the financial support is a major factor in the discussions of American education whether the discussions occur in Washington, D. C. or a state capital.

The Federal government exercises limited power in American educa-

(6)

tion and is subordinate to the individual states in many ways. With the legal interpretation that the states had the power to control education, there was extensive debate in America for decades about whether the Federal government should provide financial support for education. During the 1960's a series of laws were passed that began to provide significant funds for the support of education in local school districts. Even with this breakthrough in the funding of local education by the Federal government, funding usually was channeled through the state government to the local school district.

The role of the Federal government has been advisory and, since the 1960's, financially supportive. More recently, the Department of Education has become more regulatory. Most of the regulations are indirect as the Federal government does not have the direct authority to regulate. Instead, the Department of Education, along with several other Federal Agencies such as the Office of Civil Rights, have used the withholding of financial support as the means to achieve legislative goals or eliminate specific unacceptable practices. As an example, in the late 1970's, legislation and the subsequent regulations mandated equal treatment of men and women in the area of sports. To enforce the equal treatment requirement, any Federal funds destined for a local school district, college or university could be withheld if the equal treatment regulations were not enforced.

Federal aid to education has consisted mostly of funds to assist specifically targeted areas. Through the enactment of legislation directed at a designated problem, funds were granted for assistance in the area of science and mathematics, programs for pre-school children, programs for disadvantaged children, improvement of libraries, innovative educational programs and numerous other funding programs limit-

ed to specific areas. Congress has not enacted legislation which provides funds to states or local districts without limiting provisions.

The Department of Education has provided advice and direction for educational institutions since the early 1900's. Curriculum guides, suggested methods of teaching, and other advice were the early products from the Federal level. States accepted these offerings, but relied primarily upon the efforts of the individual state to guide the educational program of that state as products of the Office of Education were not highly regarded.

The Office of Education had a much lower status than other spheres of activity on the Federal level. It wasn't until the late 1960's that the Office of Education became part of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, a cabinet level position. In 1979, a separate Department of Education was formed and given cabinet rank. Debate continues on the necessity of a separate Department for Education; President Reagan made a campaign promise to disband the Department of Education and return it a subordinate level again. As of now, he has not succeeded in disbanding the Department of Education.

#### STATE AND LOCAL EDUCATION

Educational control at the prefectural level is essentially limited to carrying out the directives of the Mombusho, although the prefectural government can also make decisions for the local district. Cities and towns in Japan have school boards overseeing school districts whose boundaries coincide with the municipal area. The boards are composed of members appointed by the city with the permission of the mayor. The superintendent and other school officials are members of the board. The superintendency is an appointed position and the person appointed comes from the ranks of the city government. In most cases

(8)

the superintendent was an administrator in the school district, but could have been an official in the city government. It is a prestigious position and may lead to other roles in the government such as the treasurer or vice-mayor.

The local board selects teachers from the pool approved by the Ministry of Education. Assignment or selection to a local district is a mutual agreement for the teacher to work in that district and for the local district to employ the teacher until retirement. Teachers can be moved at will by the local Board of Education, however.

Building principals are also approved by the Ministry of Education and usually come from the ranks of teachers. Officials in the Board of Education office come from the ranks of city government or from the teaching ranks. Supervision of the administrative and teaching staff is delegated to the local superintendent and school board. It is not uncommon for members of the Board of Education to accept administrative positions such as a head teacher to initiate the progression to a higher administrative office.

Textbook selection is made locally from a list of texts approved by the Ministry of Education. The textbooks supplement the curriculum decided on nationally and are a logical adjunct to the decisions made for the curriculum. The local school board, following prescribed procedures, can ask to make changes in the curriculum or to request new buildings, but only the Prefectural Office can initiate building projects and expand the local curriculum offerings.

Education in America is essentially a local product even though the control, and often the financial support, is vested in the state. Carrying out the responsibility of education is a joint effort of the local districts and the state in most of the fifty United States. It is essential

to understand, however. there are wide differences among the fifty states as each state makes its own decisions about education in that state. Based on the cultural background of individualism and independence and the legal decisions that control of education is a right of the individual state, states are reticent to relinquish any of the control they have--particularly to the Federal government.

Local school districts are independent agencies of the state government. Each is controlled by an elected board of citizens who usually serve without pay and cannot be employees of the school district so the superintendent, principals, teachers and other employees are not allowed to serve on the school board.

Authority for the operation of the local school district is granted by the state. A framework of laws is enacted which mandates minimum standards in the local district. Since the laws are minimum, local districts are allowed to enact policies and regulations to cover those areas not specifically covered by state law. In most states, the local districts exercise a considerable amount of autonomy, in effect, providing direction of the education of the local school district.

As an independent agency, local school districts are usually associated with a city but the physical limits of city and the school district are not necessarily the same. Often, particularly in rural areas, the school district is much larger geographically than a city. In some eastern states, control of the school district is exercised by the city government, but in most of the states the school district is a separate agency with the right to enact rules and regulations and with legislated power to collect taxes.

The local school board sits in a policy making position and usually does not become involved in the administrative operations of the school

( 10 )

district although the board has both the right of final decision and the legal responsibility for the proper operation of the district. The school board hires a superintendent of schools as the chief administrative officer. The superintendent supervises principals of the individual buildings and the principals in turn supervise the teachers and other employees in the buildings.

Regular public meetings of the school board are held where the progress of the district is discussed, goals for the future are decided, decisions are made on immediate concerns and administrative decisions ratified. The superintendent has the authority to operate the district under the policies and regulations adopted by the school board. As the public leaders of the local school system, the superintendent and other school administrators respond to questions, problems or complaints from the public on a daily basis.

Local citizens are more intimately involved in education in other ways. Comments, concerns, or complaints can be brought to the board members at public board meetings. Board members are also telephoned or stopped on the street when a person has a particular problem he or she wishes to discuss. Many citizens volunteer to work in the schools. Visits to schools by parents and interested citizens are encouraged. Parent support groups, such as the PTA, are actively interested in schools and in education. Many school districts have citizen advisory groups who meet regularly with school administrators and teachers.

Personnel selection is made locally. The state establishes legal requirements for teaching and administrative staff, but the decision to employ a teacher or principal is made by the district superintendent and school board. Applicants for positions can come from any state; selection does not have to be made from a pool of teachers or principals

approved by the state.

In most states, the local district has the authority to determine the textbooks and other materials used in the instructional program of that district. Several states have mandated textbooks, but local districts have a choice of several different titles. Similarly, the local district can determine the equipment for use in the classroom and school district.

The state exercises control over the local district, but the control is in the form of standards to be met. Teachers, principals and usually superintendents must have a state approved certificate to be employed in a school district. Standards are established for the safety of buildings and transporting children safely. Minimum requirements are established in many of the curriculum areas with curriculum guides offered as suggestions for the local districts. The state has the responsibility to insure Federal funds are being used in the areas required by Federal law. The State Department of Education enforces all of the laws passed by the individual state regarding education.

Financial support is provided from several sources. Local funds are collected through a local tax with the district Board of Education determining the amount of tax to collect. Most local school districts are financially independent with the authority to levy taxes to support the district within restrictions imposed by the state legislature. The local board of directors can decide upon a legally-limited tax rate without obtaining authorization from a city, the regional government or the state. In the eastern United States, more districts are financially dependent upon the city to provide funding for schools than in the western states.

In addition to the basic taxing power, many local districts have the

( 12 )

right to ask the citizens to increase local taxes to help provide additional funds for the educational program. Laws vary, but some districts must have the tax program or school budget voted on each year by the public. Almost all local taxes are a tax on the property located within a school district. Some districts use other taxes, but only a very small percentage of tax revenue comes from taxes other than the property tax.

State funds are provided to all school districts through a formula enacted by the individual state. The percentage of funds the states provide varies widely. Some states provide as much as 90% of the financial support for education, but some provide as little as 20%. (Hawaii is an exception; there is only the state school district and the state provides 100% of the funds.) Local taxes provide most of the remainder of the funds necessary to run local schools with Federal funds and non-tax funds providing only a small percentage of the operational funds for local school districts.

Education as a priority varies greatly from state to state. Several states view the educational program as a benefit to the state and fund education amply. The majority of the states give education a high ranking in the state government and provide funds which constitute a large percentage of the state budget. A few states, and the number is becoming smaller each year, have funding for education as a low priority and provide minimum assistance to education to school districts within the state.

A general re-awakening of the state's role and funding for education has taken place on the state level. Significant revision of the educational statutes and funding has occurred in several states. The changes have originated from the State Legislatures or from a state-wide vote

of the voters of that state. Court cases, initiated by citizens on behalf of better education, have determined state funding was inadequate or administered unfairly. The court decisions were made on the basis that educational differences could occur due to disparities between the taxes collected locally from school district to school district. As a result, funding has become more adequate throughout the fifty states than in had been as recently as five years ago.

Education in America is a three-tiered system with each tier having unique responsibilities and authority. The authority each has gained is guarded jealously. Most of the responsibility and the authority for educating children is at the local district level governed by a locally elected board composed of citizens. States, after allowing the local districts considerable freedom in determining their own direction, recently are attempting to impose some limits on local districts. The Federal government provides funds for specific expensive programs local districts or states cannot fund and also attempts to achieve goals for society by the conditions placed on the acceptance of the funds.

The control of education in Japan generally is determined on the national level and is directed to the prefectural and local level. Education is a major commitment in Japan enjoying Cabinet status and national media attention. In America, the control of education resides mostly at the local level, with local citizens determining what the community wants for the education of their children. The state provides funding and advice as well as standards the local district must meet. At the Federal level, education does not have the status of other departments and its future as a Cabinet-level department is in doubt. Discussion of education centers on many other considerations than the commitment to providing excellent education.

## PROGRESSION THROUGH THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Each country has high expectations of the educational system for the potential benefits accruing to a well-educated man or woman. Education is the accepted route to life-long employment and the resulting security of a rewarding profession. Cultural and historical differences distinguish the expectations of society as a whole and the hopes of parents with children.

Japanese parents are conscious of the necessity of a strong education from the moment of birth. Plans begin to be made immediately for the child's education. These plans include pre-school training, teaching the child the Kana alphabets and the choice of the elementary school (entering at age six or seven); some families purchase new homes to be in the prescribed attendance area of the chosen elementary school. The preferred elementary school in turn will lead to the best junior high school which in turn will give the student the best chance to get into the best high school. Career success is determined to a large degree by the college a son or daughter attends; admission to a renowned university depends upon the high school attended and the examination scores of the applicants to the university.

There are some notable differences for the children attending school in the two countries. Elementary children take a prescribed course of study in Japan, determined by the Mombusho, while American children follow the sequence of classes determined by the local school district under the general guidelines of the State Department of Education. Many American schools make extensive efforts to enrich the educational experience, such as classes for exceptionally talented children, to expand the knowledge of the student and provide a more dynamic education for these children. Children with handicaps receive special educa-

tional programs in both countries. In America, however, it is a national law that each child, regardless of handicap, has the right to the same education as a child without the handicap.

At the junior high school level, American students select at least one course in addition to the basic program; junior high students in Japan follow the prescribed course of study. In both countries, there is either an intramural or inter-school activities program. Students live in the attendance area of their junior high and attend classes at the school nearest their home for both groups of students.

The situation is entirely different at the senior high school level. The examination process is the major determinant of where a student goes to high school in Japan. The student attends the high school selected and the one he or she qualifies for as a result of the junior high examination. In high school, the student is allowed to make some elective choices, but most of the program is determined by the type of high school the student attends. High school programs are rigorous in Japan. The work is difficult, the days are long and the students are expected to make exceptional efforts to prepare themselves for the examination for entrance into a college. Married students are allowed to attend high school legally, but there are numerous subtle and not-so-subtle hurdles they must pass before gaining entrance. Students are not allowed to drive while in high school and smoking is against the rules at all high schools.

American high schools, on the other hand, are less rigorous. Students follow a basic curriculum of a comprehensive program and select as many as 40% of the classes they take. High schools have a vocational education program or access to such a program through regional cooperative ventures; larger cities have specialized vocational-technical high

schools. Students are expected to do more writing, think independently and raise questions in their classes; Japanese students are not encouraged to be different than the group and are looked on with suspicion if they are individualistic.

To enable students to finish high school in America, married students may attend classes with minor restrictions. Some high schools in metropolitan areas provide nurseries for the children of students. Numerous students own a car and drive to school and a large percentage of high school students work at a part-time job while in high school, often to provide gas for their car.

Acquiring a high school diploma is important in both countries; in each case the students must take required classes and acquire a specified number of credits to graduate. If a passing grade is obtained in the basic classes and the proper number of credits are acquired, the student receives a diploma.

The most significant difference is the examination system. In Japan, examinations are given at the end of the junior high school and during the last year of high school. Entrance to the ranked senior high schools depends on the scores obtained on the prefectural examination ; grades and activities of the junior high school are not considered to any great degree. Junior high students who do well can select the high school of their choice, but those who do poorly have limited options. The student performing poorly on the junior high test can take it again, select a high school with a lower ranking, attend a private high school or drop out of school.

The senior high school examination repeats the junior high examination. Entrance to the prestigious universities or colleges is almost totally dependent on the scores of the examinations. With the established

progression of moving from a better high school to a prestigious university and on to a good company, the career of students is basically determined when the junior high examination results are posted. Called "examination hell", numerous problems are created by the tremendous pressure brought to bear on students, including a high rate of teenage suicides. Another facet of the examination system is the existence of numerous, profitable remedial schools at the elementary, junior high and senior high levels tutoring students to help them maintain the expected pace. The Mombusho is currently making a major effort to alleviate the inherent problems of the examination system.

Not all Japanese families are determined to follow such a rigorous program for their children, but many assume the responsibility for guiding and assisting their children through the various levels of the educational process. These parents are not only fulfilling their duty to their children, as they see it, but they are also providing the child with a living legacy.

American parents share the same concern for the education of their children as the Japanese do. Although it is a generalization, most American families do not concentrate as rigorously on the education of their children as their Japanese counterparts. In large degree this is due to the differences in the educational system and the attitude of Americans who believe the student should learn to pursue his or her education independently.

Mothers often begin teaching their children the letters of the English alphabet, read stories to them and prepare them for entrance to school in other ways. In America, based on custom and the law, children usually enter kindergarten at age five and attend the elementary school nearest their home. In turn, the child attends the junior high school and

senior high school in the attendance area nearest the home. The examination process used in Japan is not used in America; children progress to the next level when the previous level is satisfactorily completed.

Satisfactory performance at the high school level is necessary for entrance to college. In addition, several nationally recognized tests are required by most universities and colleges. The composite picture of the high school performance including grades and outside activities as well as the results of the tests are considered by the college. Some colleges also conduct a personal interview with each student. Based on the interpretation by the college of all this information, the student will be admitted to the college program.

The selection of the college by the parents and the student is usually based on several factors. The prestige of the university, the career the student is considering and the cost of attending are all concerns which are taken into consideration. In America, attending a specific university will assist the student in obtaining his career goal, but that isn't the dominating factor of success as it is in Japan.

Graduating from Tokyo University, for example, nearly guarantees career success in Japan; on the other hand, graduating from Harvard University assists in attracting attention and obtaining interviews for positions, but employment and success in beginning a career is dependent on other factors than the Harvard name. The Harvard name provides a known quantity to potential employers, but consideration is given to high school work, personality traits, college work experiences and a significant reliance on activities outside the classroom both in high school and college. Excelling in sports is a positive factor in considering a new employee for a position in many companies.

Junior college education differs widely between the two countries. In

America, students choose to enroll in junior colleges for numerous reasons including being able to live more cheaply at home, lower tuition costs, becoming accustomed to college level work, and the opportunity to consider several career choices before making a final decision. An integral part of the educational system, most junior colleges in America are publicly supported; in Japan, nearly 84% of the junior colleges are privately operated. (MOMBUSHO: 1981) Often called community colleges, many classes are made available to adults who want to improve their education. Junior college programs for the first two years are comparable to the programs at four year colleges so many, but not all, of the students continue on to a four year institution.

Japanese junior colleges are viewed more as a chance to get some college education, but are not necessarily considered as an entry to a four year institution. About 90% of the students at Japanese junior colleges are women. The prevailing attitude is that junior college education is a sufficient amount for the women. The men who attend junior colleges were not successful in attempting to get into a four year college, but it was necessary for the family to claim attendance at the college level, even if it is a junior college.

Education is the route to career success and the benefits a successful career brings to a family. In many Japanese families it is an overwhelming goal to assist the son or daughter in every way possible to achieve the best education including selection of schools, maintaining a rigorous study program and providing tutors or special schooling in areas of academic weaknesses. Obtaining the best education is a major goal of American families, but allow events to move more naturally with the students going to the local school, encouraging, but not demanding hard academic study and letting the student achieve success

on his or her own without the dominance of the parent.

### COMMITMENT TO EDUCATION

Both the United States and Japan have a strong commitment to education, but the commitment is sometimes expedient on one hand and more of a solemn promise on the other hand. The positions taken by the two countries again reflect not only the cultural background of the two countries, but also the approaches taken toward many national problems facing each country.

In America, it would be nearly impossible to find elected officials, that is, politicians, who would not be strongly in favor of a strong educational system stressing the importance of the benefits for all children and the overwhelming value for those children who are from disadvantaged homes or who are handicapped. Individual citizens would take the same stance: education is important and should be strongly supported.

The actions are different than the words that express the thoughts or the ideas behind the words. In most instances, actions can be translated directly into the funding of education. At the Federal level, the Executive branch of the government is strongly in favor of a good, basic education for all American children regardless of family income, race, handicap or other factors.

Yet the President and his administration have recommended dismantling of the Department of Education and reducing it to a lower status. The Executive Branch of the government has recommended decreased aid for education in each budget presented to Congress during the years President Reagan has been in office. Comparatively, aid has gone up in other areas, notably National Defense, while being reduced in the areas of human services. Congress has not cooperated fully with

the President's budget requests, but certainly has not acted strongly to counteract the President's stance on aid to education.

In fairness, selecting only one area of a national budget for review presents a distorted picture. Changes in spending were a necessity to assist in the recovery of the national economy. Under the economic program of the Reagan Administration, however, it is fair to say funding for education has not had the same priority or increases as other categories of the Federal budget.

Revenues from taxes are more restricted on the state level than the Federal level. With Federal reductions, states have had to assume more responsibility for programs formerly funded by the national funds. The commitment to education by individual states has grown, not only through increased taxes and funding, but by enacting laws which give more authority to the state government which had formerly been the prerogative of the local school district. Laws mandating standards for local school districts for personnel selection, curriculum, instructional methods, safety standards, personnel relations, instructional time, and other areas have been enacted; funding is usually contingent on the satisfactory performance of the local district in each of the areas.

The local school district's commitment is shown by the interest taken in the schools by the citizens of a school district, the volunteers working in the schools, the pride shown in local schools and voting for extra taxes for the schools of the district. Most local school districts have their budgets, and the higher taxes necessary to support the budget, approved each year by local voters.

As the people who are using education, through their children, local citizens would logically have an interest in the quality of local schools. The local education district, with the combination of support and be-

nevolent neglect shown by most states, is the bulwark of the educational process in America. At each level-Federal, State and local-vocal support is given to education; most of the real action to implement the support is generated at the local level in America.

In the opinion of this writer, too much of the professed support for education on the Federal and state level is expedient. Support for education is expected and is necessary to get elected. Once elected, however, the support is mostly rhetoric; actual support translated into the funds for education is much less.

Japan has a commitment to education and the commitment is translated into action at all levels of the educational establishment. The ruling party, usually after lengthy debates, arrives at a decision for education which is enacted into law or directed to the Minister of Education for action. The decision is then effected through the beauracracy of the Mombusho, the prefectual level and to the local district. As it is a decision of the country, it is implemented by the school districts of Japan in much the same form as was intended. Acceptance of the national decisions lies both in the legal area-the laws of Japan-and in the culture of Japan. Acceptance of decisions from higher administrative levels has been the practice in Japan for hundreds of years and is an integral part of the culture.

Funding of the program is part of the original decision. The prefecture and the local city or town may have to also provide tax support for the program, but it is not a matter of choice at the various levels. The commitment has been made so each level provides the necessary support as decided.

The cultures of the two countries play an important role in the commitment to education. National decisions in Japan are expected by

local districts and are expected to be implemented by both the local district and the Ministry of Education. Not only is it an accepted practice, but it is also the way decisions have been made for hundreds of years in Japan.

On the other hand, American school boards enjoying strong local control, would not accept national directives readily. There are, in fact, instances where Federal financial aid has been rejected because it imposed controls or restrictions on the local district. In addition, the independence and the innate individualism (even if expressed by a 5 or 7 member board) of Americans shows itself and for this reason alone, mandated controls, personnel selection, and dictation of curriculum would be opposed by local boards.

#### PUBLIC/PRIVATE RELATIONSHIP

Public schools in Japan have higher status in the eyes of the Japanese than private schools. Established, reputable private schools have more status than public schools in America. These conditions exist at both the high school level and the university level in both countries.

The most prestigious university in Japan is Tokyo University with several other public universities ranked nearly as high. (Ranking colleges is an accepted practice in Japan just as almost every other aspect of public life is ranked either overtly or covertly. ) Some private universities enjoy a good reputation, but if the student has the choice, the noted public university is chosen over the comparable private university. Enhancing the desire to get into the public universities is the relative scarcity of openings as 76% of the university students attend private universities. (MOMBUSHO, 1981)

Japanese high school students, based on their high school examination scores, apply to the universities of their choice to take the univer-

sity entrance examinations. As many as six or eight applications are filed. After acceptance has been granted, the student then makes the decision as to which university to enter. If all conditions are equal, the public institution is the one chosen. Private universities and colleges have the reputation of being inferior with the student body made up of those entrants who were not able to gain entrance to a public university.

High schools are also ranked. Entrance into all high schools is based on the scores of the entrance examinations taken in the third year of junior high school. Those students who do not pass the examination for high school either take the exam again or enroll in a private school. With the ranking of high schools which leads to the better universities or colleges and the examination process, the direction of a future career is basically decided at the end of the junior high school.

The reputation of public high schools in the United States waxes and wanes, but most people would rank good private high schools on a higher level than good public high schools. Just as in Japan it is believed a good public school will lead to a better education, many American parents believe that private schools provide better education which in turn will enable the student to enter the university of his or her choice.

Two other factors have influenced the decision of American parents in recent years to enroll their children in a private high school. Violence in schools has increased in recent years. It is more prevalent in larger high schools in larger cities, but smaller high schools in small cities are not without incidents also. The second factor is the current conservative trend with its accompanying return to a more religious atmosphere. Students are being enrolled in private, church-related high schools for the religious atmosphere and instruction which is not

legally available in public high schools.

Enrolling in a private high school in America is a conscious decision on the part of the parent to leave the public high school. Students proceed through the public school system attending the school near their home. The fees are minimal and most students are satisfactorily educated. Private schools are expensive since most of them do not receive financial assistance from the state or the Federal government. There is usually some concern about the student leaving friends behind in the high school and not being able to participate in the activities offered in the high school. In spite of these concerns, many parents are exercising their right to enroll their child in a private high school.

Admission to private universities or colleges is similar to entering a public institution. Application is made and entrance is granted on high school performance, extra-curricular activities, national tests, letters of recommendation and the evaluation of the records by the university. Attendance at a private university is much more expensive since little financial assistance is provided by the state or Federal government.

#### LEVEL OF INITIATIVE

A noticeable difference exists between Japanese and American students in self-initiative. Students in Japan, through training which is begun at home and continued in the schools, often will not act unless specifically directed to. Parents and teachers continue to make many decisions for students until the students are well into the college program.

In the United States, students in high school are expected to have the initiative to study properly, complete homework at the expected time, and prepare for exams. Most teachers and parents do not expect to have to nag them into doing the expected work. In effect, the students are expected to either complete the work satisfactorily or suffer the

consequences.

The attitude is even more pronounced at the university-college level for American students. Usually away from the control and observation of the parents, students are expected to act as adults. Professors give assignments which the students are to complete without constant reminders. The students are responsible for noting scheduled events, such as tests, and no make-up tests are given for a missed final test. Behavior is not constantly watched. Students are allowed to act within the prescribed limits without the faculty watching over them.

Japanese parents and teachers exercise control over the students lives extending to the college level. Behavior during class breaks, whether they should drive cars to colleges and other questions which do not directly relate to college work are voiced concerns at the college level. College students have the right to make up final tests that are missed and re-take the tests if the test was failed. Students expect to be taken care of by teachers included being reminded of the test schedules, homework assignments and other responsibilities. Teachers and parents respond; the ever-present concern shown throughout their lives as children continues on into the college level.

The control and/or concern for students is manifested by the cultures of the two countries. Stated briefly, attention to and from the group is expected in Japan; early independence is expected in America.

### SUMMARY

Both Japan and America have strong educational systems demonstrated more by the successes both countries enjoy rather than cited statistics or the results of tests. There are as many similarities as differences. Neither system is perfect. Both have strengths which could be selectively adopted by the other. It is a tribute to both systems that

the product, a functioning self-assured individual capable of achieving personal success and contributing to society, frequently is the result from both the Japanese and American systems.