

Private School in Japan

The function, status, and relative importance of private schools in education systems differ by country and change with the times. Generally speaking, Japan is a country in which there is a wide diffusion of private institutions of education. Japan has a peculiar configuration with respect to private schools. The development of private institutions of education is extremely different at the different stages of education. At both the preschool education level and higher education levels, the ratio of students who enroll in private institutions of education is extremely high. In striking contrast to these stages, in elementary and lower secondary education levels, the years that education is compulsory in Japan, the percentage of students enrolled in private schools is very low. In this article, we make a survey of the history of private schools in Japan and review governmental policy on in regards to them.

1. Establishment of a National System of Education and Private Schools

The introduction of modern education into Japan, using several Western countries as models, began in the latter part of the 19th century. However, up to that time, a relatively wide variety of educational institutions existed throughout the country. For the samurai-warriors class, there was a kind of public school established by the Tokugawa shogunate, the feudal government of Japan from 1603-1867, in which younger samurai learned Confucian studies. There were also various kinds of private academies, equivalent to secondary schools, established by eminent scholars that were open to both samurai and commoners. In addition, there were a large number of popular learning houses called *Terakoya*, which concentrated on teaching the practical skills of reading and writing to commoners. These popular learning centers were established and managed by individuals without any public support or official control. Not only boys, but also a considerable number of girls attended a *Terakoya*.

In 1868, a political revolution known as the Meiji Restoration took place. It was marked by the collapse of the Tokugawa shogunate, and the birth of a new system of political authority with the Emperor at its head. The new government under Emperor Meiji attempted to overcome the political crisis by abolishing the feudal system and turning Japan into a unified, modern nation-state. Educational reforms were part of this modernization. In 1871, the Department of Education was established and in 1872, the first systematic education regulation was promulgated.

An ambitious and systematic school system controlled by the central government was

planned. The entire country was divided into eight university districts, each of which was divided into 32 middle school districts, and then further divided into 210 elementary school districts. The school system was to be composed of 8 universities, 256 middle schools and more than 50,000 elementary schools. In principle, all children were required to attend elementary school, regardless of sex, parental occupation, or social status. In principle, schools were to be established and operated by the central and local governments or by local communities. The majority of the popular learning centers were transformed into the public elementary schools. However, in the early years of the development of this new education system, mainly for financial reasons, there were a considerable number of private schools and the government approved these private schools in place of public schools. These private schools were called “substitute elementary schools” In accordance with the development of public schools, the number of these substitute elementary schools decreased.

In the pre-modern period, the traditional religious institutions, such as Buddhist temples or Shinto shrines, had lost their influence on education. Education was primarily a secular affair. After the opening up of the country to the West, some Christian missionaries came to Japan to proselytize the Christian faith. They began to establish some mission schools in the foreign settlements located in Tokuji (Tokyo), Yokohama, Kobe and Nagasaki. In the Westernization boom of the early years of the Meiji era, mission schools for girls attracted a small number of students from the upper class families that oriented toward “civilization and enlightenment”. These schools provided Bible reading and modern Western education including English, literature, instrumental music, singing, and dancing. Shortly after, mission schools for boys were also established. These schools were gradually approved by the government and gained the status of formal private schools. In competition with those Christian mission schools, some Buddhist denominations established their own religious schools.

In 1885, the governing structure of the central government was reorganized and a cabinet system was introduced. Administrative structures, both central and local, were strengthened. In keeping with this, the government reorganized the existing education institutions and arranged schools within a more systematic system. A nationalistic educational policy was emphasized. The Minister of Education issued the orders that prescribed a state monopoly on the establishment of institutions of higher education (university, higher normal school, and high school). Normal schools for teacher training were to be established by the prefectural governments. Only at the elementary and secondary education levels, were private schools permitted.

In 1890, the government issued the Imperial Rescript on Education (*Kyôiku chokugo*) in the name of Emperor Meiji. Based on ideas drawn from Confucian culture and Japanese

classics, The Imperial Rescript set out the standards of behavior and the basis of national morality that was expected from the Japanese people and strongly emphasized the virtues of patriotism and loyalty to the Emperor. It prescribed an ideal image of royal subjects vis-a-vis the Emperor. For the next 50 years, this document, considered sacred, continued to have great influence on Japanese education. Soon afterward, some conservative critics espoused an attack on the mission schools denouncing Christian educational doctrine as being in conflict with the basic principles of the Rescript. A fierce controversy on “the collision of education and religion” occurred.

In 1899, the government issued the first Private School Order and tightened its control and regulation of private schools. It stipulated clearly that the establishment of all private schools must be approved by the public authorities. The authorities could order the private schools to modify their teaching activities, facilities, and other things whenever they judged that these matters would be detrimental to education. Also they could order the closing of private schools by the reason of “a violation of the law” or “there are fears that they would disturb the public order or good customs of the society”. Despite this level of oversight, public financial support for private schools did not exist at all.

At the same time, The Ministry of Education issued a directive that prohibited religious education and the performance of religious rituals in all schools. Private missionary schools, especially, faced a crisis threatening their survival. Some schools took the risk of surrendering their status as an officially approved school and continued to teach religious education as a miscellaneous school. Other schools chose to abandon religious education and transformed themselves into the secular private schools. Some of these schools tried to survive as academic preparatory schools for students wishing to pursue higher education.

In the first two decades of the 20th century, a new type of private schools influenced by the world-wide New Education movement appeared. The educational ideas of John Dewey and other progressive educators, and new educational concepts, such as the Dalton Plan, were introduced into Japan. Some Japanese adherents established experimental elementary schools based on new education philosophies such as a child-centered education and activism in education. These schools became popular among the urban middle class and were supported by them. However, the expensive tuition fees circumscribed the expansion of these liberal private schools. The majority of Japanese public schools were left untouched by this movement.

Then in the 1930s, when the national education policy was directed toward militarism and ultra-nationalism, this liberal movement in education was suppressed and disappeared from the scene. The

number of private elementary schools throughout the country decreased from 369 in 1900 to less than 100 in the 1930s. In 1941, under the wartime regime, elementary schools were renamed “national schools” and all school subjects were to be integrated into the principles of ultra-nationalistic education. Private elementary schools could not use the name “national school” became obscure.

2. Development of Private Institutions of Higher Education

In contrast, in the field of the higher education, the governmental policy on private institutions of higher education was different than that for elementary and secondary education. In the early years, as mentioned above, the central government aimed to monopolize the provision of educated leaders. The government established an imperial university, 5 official preparatory higher schools, and one higher normal school. However, over time, this policy was modified to be more flexible. Between the final years of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, there was a shift in Japanese society. In this period, Japan experienced two international wars, the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905). These events accelerated the development of industry and of society as a whole. In 1897, a second imperial university was established in Kyoto.

However, in accordance with the development of diversified economic and social organizations, there was an increasing demand for more practically educated manpower. Education and training in the imperial universities seemed to be too time-consuming and too expensive to respond to such demands. In 1903 the government issued the Professional College Order and authorized a new category of higher education. In these non-degree granting professional colleges (*senmon gakkô*), graduates from middle schools and girls' high schools took specialized training courses, lasting at least three years, in disciplines such as law, economics, medicine, pharmacy, engineering, commerce, agriculture, literature, and arts. Not only the official professional colleges, but also public and private institutions were recognized.

The ban on religious education was not applied to higher education institutions, so some professional missionary colleges such as *Aoyama-gakuin*, *Dôshisha*, *Rikkyô-gakuin*, and *Meiji-gakuin* were established. Moreover, a small number of professional colleges for women appeared. With the exception of higher normal schools for women, these professional colleges for women were the only higher education institutions that accepted female students before World War II. These professional colleges, especially private ones, increased rapidly.

In 1918, the government issued the University Order permitting some well-organized professional colleges, both public and private, to be raised to university status. In 1920, the first eight private universities came into being. While the development of public higher education institutions was limited, that of private colleges and universities was more impressive. In 1918 there were 63 private professional

colleges with 34,000 students: By 1938, there were 25 private universities with 4,000 students and 120 private professional colleges with 80,000 students. In twenty years, therefore, the number of private institutions had increased more than three and a half times, and, in the later years, constituted nearly 60% of the total number of institutions of higher education. In 1938, students enrolled in private institutions constituted nearly two-thirds of the total university population, and over 70% of the college student population.

Thus, a large number of private institutions of higher education developed in the pre-war period and contributed to the quantitative expansion and diversification of the Japanese higher education system. In order to have stable and sound management, it was requested that private universities be established based on a well-established foundations. With exceptions, there was no public subsidy for these private institutions.

3. Postwar Education Reform and Private Schools

At the end of the war in 1945, with Japan under the control of the Allied Powers, demilitarization, democratization, and the rebuilding of the nation were required. In line with this, under the direction of the American Occupation authority, education reform was thus carried out. With the aim of democratizing Japanese education, a number of educational laws determining the structure and management of the new education system were enacted in succession between 1947 and 1949, including the “Fundamental Law of Education”, the “School Education Law”, the “Board of Education Law”, and the “Private School Law”.

The government began to pay more serious attention to the principle of freedom of education and more positively promoted the sound development of private institutions of education. Private schools were expected to provide an education that was distinct from or with characteristics distinguishing it from public schools. Within a short time, the ban on religious education in private schools was lifted.

Under the new private school law of 1949, the government policy on private schools and the status of private schools were completely revamped. This revised educational policy for the private schools was composed of three pillars; a) the democratization of educational administration for private institutions of education, paying high regard to the autonomy of the private schools, b) the establishment of a distinct corporative body for operating private schools, c) public financial assistance for private schools.

The procedures and required conditions for establishing private schools were relaxed. The regulations for private schools, as well as interventions by the authorities were reduced.

A new, distinct corporative body called the “school corporation” was introduced. A school corporation must be authorized by the Ministry of Education or the local government. Only school corporations could establish and operate private schools. In other words, individuals, businesses or companies, religious organizations or other non-governmental organizations could not establish private schools. The structure and competencies of the school corporations were stipulated by a law for ascertaining a democratic and fair management of private schools. The members of the same family could not occupy the majority of the board of directors in any school corporation.

In order to review the eligibility of school corporations and grant approval of private schools, a Private School Council was established in each prefecture. They deliberated on matters concerning private schools at the primary and secondary education levels. In the Ministry of Education, the Private University Council was established to screen private institutions of higher education. Before making a decision, the authorities must seek the advice of these councils.

Furthermore, recognizing that private schools do make an important public or social contribution to society, for the first time, the private school law justified official subsidies to private institutions of education. Accordingly, the subsidized private schools are required to submit report on the operation and accounts of the school to the authorities.

In spite of the provisions in the private school law, direct public financial assistance remained restricted to a limited number of private schools well into the post-war era. In the latter part of the 1960s, however, the concurrent rapid expansion of private universities and the deterioration in teaching conditions in these same universities, resulted in increased calls for the promotion of the official subsidies. Concerns were raised over the confused conditions in the private universities that resulted from the admission of an excessive number of students, deficiencies in the facilities, mass production education, and frequent struggles against the rising fees.

In 1970, the government commenced to distribute regular official subsidies to the private universities. In 1975, the Law for Promoting Public Subsidies for Private Schools was enacted. Under this law, the national subsidies for private institutions of higher education and public subsidies from prefectural authorities for private senior high schools were regulated. Consequently, in the private schools, especially in a large number of private universities, educational conditions and salaries for teaching staff greatly improved.

4. Development of Private Institutions of Education

Table 1 shows the trend in the percentage of private school students by level of education. At both the preschool level and the post-secondary level, the ratio of students who enrolled in private institutions of education is overwhelming. At the preschool level, the ratio of students in private kindergartens amounts to more than 80%. From their inception, an extremely high ratio of students attending junior colleges, which were established as part of the post-war education reforms, has enrolled in private. At the university level, the percentage of students attending private universities increased from 59.7% in 1955 to 77.3% in 2010. At the upper secondary level, after a significant increase between 1955 and 1960, the ratio of private school students has remained at about 30%. At these levels of education, it is clear that private institutions of education have greatly contributed to the quantitative expansion of education in Japan.

Table 1 Ratio of Private School Students by Education Level

year	preschool	primary	lower secondary	upper secondary	junior college	university
1955	62.6%	0.3%	3.1%	19.7%	81.1%	59.7%
1960	68.3%	0.4%	3.5%	28.7%	78.7%	64.4%
1970	73.6%	0.6%	3.0%	30.4%	90.1%	74.4%
1980	73.4%	0.5%	2.9%	28.1%	90.9%	75.0%
1990	78.1%	0.7%	3.8%	28.7%	91.4%	72.7%
2000	79.1%	0.9%	5.7%	29.4%	91.2%	73.3%
2005	79.6%	1.0%	6.7%	29.9%	92.7%	77.7%
2010	81.3%	1.1%	7.2%	29.8%	94.1%	77.3%
2015	82.6%	1.2%	7.0%	31.4%	94.7%	73.4%

<source> MEXT, Statistical abstract, each year edition

On the other hand, at the compulsory levels of education, primary and lower secondary school, the percentage of private school students is extremely low. The ratios have increased very gradually recently, however, the ratio is still very limited, at only 1.2% and 7.0% respectively in 2015. Private schools at the primary and lower secondary education levels exist but only as a small minority of the Japanese school system.

Some assumptions about the causes for these trends can be made. In Japan, the general standard of education in public schools is considerably high and there are few differences among the schools in regards to facilities and teaching staff. Especially at the compulsory education level, the national curriculum standard, or Course of Study, prescribed by the Ministry of Education circumscribes the margins for the activities within private schools. Even in the private missionary schools, religious education is not obligatory; students are able to opt out. In spite of charging fairly expensive fees to parents, at these education

levels, it is not easy for private schools to provide a distinctive or distinguishing education different from that offered in the public schools.

In recent years, however, private schools at the compulsory education levels have become increasingly popular among certain circles of society. The ratio of private primary schools has increased from 0.7% in 1990 to 1.21% in 2015. At the junior high school level, the ratio has doubled from 3.7 in 1990 to 7.0% in 2015.

Another reason for these trends may be that, in many cases, one school corporation operates schools that cover the preschool level straight through to university. Most of the private school at the primary and lower secondary education levels are affiliated with high schools or universities operated by the same school corporation. In most cases, the students attending these private primary and lower secondary schools are able to go straight on to the affiliated high school and then university with only a recommendation from their school instead being required to take the selective entrance examinations that are typically necessary for enrollment. This privileged system, often referred to as the “escalator system,” has an appeal to some urban middle class families. However, parents and their preschool-age children must make a notable effort to enter the “escalator system” from the private primary school level.

At the secondary education level, there are a group of prestigious private schools that have adopted an integrated six-year secondary education program. It has been said that such a consistent program has the advantage of sending a lot of graduates to the top universities. However, a lot of primary school students attend cram schools to prepare for the entrance examinations required to enter private junior high schools.

Another reason for the increase in private school enrollment at the compulsory levels may be that parents and children are concerned about problems in some public schools, which are frequently reported by the media. Attention has been drawn to the increase in the number of children who are unable to keep up with their lessons, the so-called *ochikobore*. They would be sensitive to the news on the “desolation of education” such as *futôkô* a phenomenon whereby some students refuse to attend school. Issues such as school violence, bullying (*ijime*), and apathy on the part of the students in some schools have also received increased attention. Families might be seeking a safer and more comfortable place for their children by sending them to private schools.

In 2002, there were 657 school corporations approved by the Ministry of Education for operating the higher education institutions and 6,059 school corporations approved by the prefectural authorities for operating private schools below the secondary education. And in 2015, there are 604 private universities, 328 private junior colleges, 3 private colleges of technology, 17 private secondary education schools, 1,320 private senior high schools,

774 private junior high schools, 227 private primary schools and a great number of private kindergartens.

In summary, in pre-war Japan, education was exclusively regarded as an affair of State, or a public concern, so the central government intended to control all aspects of education at the compulsory level. The Imperial Rescript on Education laid down a national ideology and a moral code for Japanese people, or loyal subjects, and the basic principles of school education. From such a conformist stance, the government recognized private schools only as a substitution for public schools and scrutinized the activities of private schools, especially Christian mission schools. At the same time, a more flexible policy on private institutions of higher education was adopted.

After the World War II, the government policy on private schools was shifted toward respecting the autonomy of private schools and promoting sound development of private institutions of education. In the higher education and preschool levels, students in private institutions constitute a great majority. On the contrary, private schools at the primary and lower secondary education levels remain a small minority in Japanese school system. Although concerns about entrance examinations to these private schools are sometimes reported by the media, the overall significance of this limited number of private schools in the entire school system seems to be confined.

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日本の私立学校（記述の要点）

教育制度全体のなかでの私学の占める比重、社会的地位や機能は、国により時代により異なる。日本は、私立教育機関の広範な発展がみられ、世界的にみても教育制度全体の中で私立学校の比重が大きい国のひとつである。しかしながら、教育段階別にみれば、私学の占める比率は大きな相違があり、就学前教育と高等教育という学校制度の両極において圧倒的に高く、義務教育段階の小学校、中学校ではきわめて低いという特異な構造をもつ。本稿では、日本の私立教育機関の発展の歴史を概観するとともに、政府の私立学校政策の変遷を提示する。

1. 国家的教育制度の形成と私立学校

戦前の日本では、教育は国家の事業であると考えられた。政府は、教育のあらゆる側面を国家の統制管理の下に置こうとし、公立学校中心の学校体系を構想した。制度開始当初は、私立小学校、中学校も少なくなかったが、それらは、公立校の未整備や不足を補うために国が民間に特別の許可を与えたものとみなされた。公立学校が整備されるにつれて、私立の代用小学校は減少していった。また西欧化の波とともに、来日したキリスト教教団の設立したミッション系私立学校も出現する。しかし、教育勅語の理念を基盤に、国民の精神的統合と道徳的規範の形成をはかることが教育政策の中心目的とされるにつれて、政府は、私立学校、とりわけ、宗教系私学に対して警戒感を強めていった。1899(明治 32)年に制定された「私立学校法」は、政府が、私立学校、とりわけ宗教系私学を厳しく統制するという性格が濃厚なものであった。

2. 私立高等教育機関の発展

一方、高等教育の分野では、政府の私学政策はより柔軟なものであった。国の近代化が進み、経済分野をはじめさまざまな分野で高等教育人材の需要が増すにつれて、政府は、帝国大学等の国立の高等教育機関では対応しきれない人材の供給を私立高等教育機関に依存するようになった。すでに戦前期において、私立高等教育機関は高等教育全体の量的拡張に役立ただけでなく、私学のなかには、宗教系の機関や、女子学生向けのものもあり、高等教育の多様化にもまた貢献していた。

3. 戦後教育改革と私立学校

戦後、私立学校は、従前の統制的、監督的色彩の強い私立学校行政から開放され、自律的な運営に基づく健全な発展が期待される存在となった。1949年に制定された新しい私立学校法は、(1)私学の自主性を尊重する私立学校行政の民主化、(2)学校法人による私立学校の民主的運営、(3)私学への公的助成の推進、の三本の柱から構成されるものであった。戦後しばらく、私学への直接的な公的助成は抑制されたままであったが、1960年代後半になると、特に高校教育や高等教育の分野での私立機関の量的拡大、私立機関の果たしている公共的役割の認識、私学経営の健全性の確保、父母の教育費負担の軽減などを理由に私学助成を求める声が高まってくる。1975年には「私立学校振興助成法」が制定され、これによって、私立大学等に対する国からの経常的経費助成、高等学校以下の私立学校に対する都道府県からの助成の方式が法律で規定された。

4. 私立教育機関の発展と構造

高等教育や就学前教育において、私学の量的発展はめざましいものがある。しかしながら、これとは対照的に、初等教育および前期中等教育分野での、私学の発展はきわめて限定されたままにと

どまっている。わが国のように、一般的に公立学校の教育水準が比較的高く、また、学校間的格差も小さい社会において、私立学校とはいえ、とりわけ特色のある、あるいは、公立学校に差をつけるような教育を提供することは現実的にはかなりむずかしい。近年、こうした少数の私学の人気が高まりと、これにともなう「お受験」騒動は、これらの学校が提供する教育の質というよりは、むしろ、同じ学校法人が経営する高校、大学へのいわゆるエスカレーター式の進学制度、中・高一貫教育という独自の方式の魅力、あるいは、近年、マスコミ等で報道される公立学校の「教育の荒廃」にたいする一部の父母の懸念や不信感に起因すると思われる。