



Tokugawa Education System: To Build Up Modern Education in Japan

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ABSTRACT

The success behind remarkable achievement of the rapid modernization of Japanese education following the Meiji Restoration of 1868 is the high standard of education which existed when Japan started to modernize her education by introducing Western theories and practices. The shogunate and local lords provided schools for their warrior to study the literary and military arts, while the common people attended the temple schools called *terakoya* in order to learn reading, writing and the use of the abacus. These were very popular at the end of the Tokugawa regime. The strong educational system of Tokugawa makes a new educational system was inaugurated in 1872 and provided the basis of today's educational system in Japan.

This article deals with various features of Tokugawa education system characterised by Chinese classics and Japanese abacus. The main objective of this paper is how the education of warrior or samurai in Edo period was considerable different from that of the mediaeval warrior and how to become a foundation of modern education system of Japan.

Keywords: Japanese education, *terakoya*, Tokugawa, mediaeval warrior, Edo period

In the Tokugawa period (1603-1868) Japanese society was a warrior society. Education was centred on the training of warriors. The education of warriors or samurai in Edo period was different from that of medieval warriors. The organization of the later warrior society took shape when the Tokugawa clan transferred the shogunate to Edo and made it political capital. The *han* in the provinces were established and governed by the local lords. After this kind of organization was established the city of Edo prospered as the political centre of Japan. Towns, called *jokamachi* were founded as the seats of clan government. Within these domains various classes (*shinokosho*) such warriors, farmers, artisans and merchants earned their living. The warrior, the highest position in the society lived peacefully for about 270 years. The other occupations were carried out each town and village of the domain.

In this prosperous and peaceful time warrior family no longer gained reputation and honour on the battlefield through military skills. They transformed their existence with the changing society, so the content of their education changed. Not only the education of samurai changed in Edo period, but the townspeople also gave a more organised education to their children. The merchants attained economic power in the society and they had great influence in the society. As a result, the education of the townspeople flourished and took a different pattern of organization from that of the warriors during Tokugawa era. We must distinguish in this period between the education of warrior class of samurai who held a high rank in the society and the education of the common people who served under them. But these common people gradually came to have real power and influence in the society.

Features of Tokugawa Education

During Tokugawa times the warrior families attempted to give education both military and letters. They have the same objective as the earlier medieval warriors. They differed from them in providing schools to educate their children in letters and military arts where the earlier warriors did not. In order for the warriors of the Tokugawa period to educate their children, they set up schools. Such schools were not established all at once in either Edo or in the provinces where the *han* were located. In the beginning of the period there were few schools, but from about the middle of the era we can observe the establishment of schools in the large *han*. The greater part of the *han* provided schools in the castle-town or other towns in the domains, and it was common for their children to commute to school to pursue their studies.

The largest of the schools for warrior families in Tokugawa times was the school set up in Edo for the shogunate. Tokugawa Ieyasu had a great interest in Confucianism and he sponsored and attended lecturers in Confucian studies. He promoted Hayashi Razan as the main lecturer. The fifth shogun, established the shogunate school at Shoheizaka in yashima, and he erected the sacred temple dedicated to Confucius. Shogun had to attend these lecturers and the Shoheizaka Academy becomes a school administered by the shogunate and gradually become the pattern for schools established by warrior families in each feudal clan.

The shogunate made Confucian studies central in its curriculum. The Academy was broadened, and its lecturers were not only drawn from the Hayashi family, but other Confucian scholars were hired. Since the majority of the scholars in the *han* schools throughout the country and studied in the Shoheizaka academy, this was regarded as the main school for the whole country.

In addition to the school for Confucian studies at Shoheizaka in Edo, the shogunate set up other schools such as the Wagaku-kodanjo (seminar for Japanese studies) in 1793. Here lectures and investigations were made concerning ancient Japanese classics. In order to teach Japanese and Chinese medicine, the Igakkan (medical institute) was formed in 1791 for training

doctors. At the end of the shogunate the Kaiseijo (new academy) was set up in 1863 to teach Western science and language. Also the Kobusho (military academy) was organized in 1856 to teach Western artillery, strategy and navigation, as well as other military arts of modern era.

The schools of the shogunate in Edo pursued a broad range of scholarship covering the fields of Confucianism, national classics, Japanese and Chinese medicine, Western medicine and military sciences, modern science and Western language. Since each of these schools was administered by the shogunate in Edo as a special college, it may be considered that a combined university existed in Edo in that period.

In each province in the nation, the *han* provided schools for their retainers. A representative school was the clan school of the castle-town. These schools were under the administration of the local *han* government. The schools were built near the castle so it was easy to commute. However, there were differences in the scale of schools depending on the size of the clan and its strength. Schools of greater clans had larger campuses, and they possessed school gates, buildings dormitories, Confucian chapels and places for the practice of the military arts.

The *han* or clan schools were set up and administered independently according to the situation in each area. As a result, there was no uniform system created for the whole nation. Each *han* determined for its at what age an individual could enter the school and how long he had to study there. It was the case that students begun school at the age of 7 or 8 years and graduated at 15 to 20 years of age.

The purpose of the clan schools as in earlier times was to provide education in letters and military arts for warriors. The clan schools which devoted great effort to education in letters concentrated on Chinese studies. Chinese studies refer to education based completely on the ancient Chinese classics. The content of such study was divided into four parts, namely, the classics, history, poetry and prose. The study of the classics employed Chinese texts and commentaries. These commentaries were made in Japan in order to teach the principles of Confucianism. Chinese writings were used as models in the study of prose, and the students wrote their own compositions in Chinese.

In addition to the study of Chinese classics, other areas of scholarship such as medicine, national classics and Western studies were also considered part of a liberal education. The study of medicine was important for providing doctors for the clans. Since it was a specialized field not open to the general student, special schools were set up within the clan school for training doctors. The national classics consisted of study based on the Japanese classical texts from which the students learned about Japanese culture and tradition. This study was carried on parallel with study of the Chinese classics.

Education of the Townspeople

When the townspeople came to have more social influence during the Tokugawa period, they also developed a characteristic system of education for their children. Since the way of life of these people differed considerably from that of the nobility or warriors, the education they required also differed. In order for the townspeople and merchants to educate their children in these skills, they taught them reading, writing and use of the abacus. These were the foundation of education. Such education, however, was given outside the home of the merchant by teachers to whom the children were spent.

The fundamental form of education developed by the merchants in the Tokugawa period was the *terakoya* which was a private, elementary school originally set up in temples for the common people. As a term *terakoya* indicates, such schools developed in the Buddhist temples (*tera*). Actually they originated before Tokugawa period. As we have seen earlier, the warriors had employed temples in the education of their children, and at about the close of the Muromachi period (1336-1573). The *terakoya* evolved into institutions for general education apart from the temples as independent school.

The education of the *terakoya* consisted largely in mixing the *sumi* ink in the morning and being taught penmanship by the teacher throughout the day. The instruction began with the practice of *iroha* or Japanese syllabary, *hogaku* or names of places and direction, and computation. The most used in the *terakoya* are given in the Terakoya Monogatari (story of temple school).

Training in the abacus was also an important feature of the education in the *terakoya*. Students began with exercises in simple addition and subtraction on the *soroban* (abacus). They progressed to multiplication and division and learned to estimate prices. Skill in learning the abacus was indispensable for the business townspeople. However, only the first steps were taught in the *terakoya*. When the children of the townspeople completed their education they usually inherited the family business of their parents or set up their own shops.

These institutions flourished and the education which the townspeople received was considerable. It must be remembered that they were created by the townspeople themselves to provide a moral education.

CONCLUSION

From this study for of the Tokugawa period it is revealed that the warriors provided special schools for their children, and common people established separate schools called *terakoya* to give instruction in calligraphy and the knowledge necessary for a merchant. While some these schools were begun at the beginning of Edo period, they increased as the period developed. At the end of the shogunate, they were numerous. Although there were about 270 provincial schools set up for warriors throughout the country and in the various regions regional schools were established. The popular *terakoya* schools were small, private establishments and their number cannot be determined. In any case, there were a great many schools both for warriors and common people, numbering in the hundreds.

After the end of the shogunate and in the time of the Meiji Restoration, such schools for common people had come to be set up in every town and village,. In The Meiji period the *terakoya* were transformed into primary school. At that time, three or four local *terakoya* would be amalgamated into the village school. These *terakoya*, perhaps numbering above 40,000 and the existing warrior schools become the basis for the development of the modern school in the Meiji era.

Thus, in the education of the *terakoya* the child received discipline and training in his attitude towards life.

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