

# Education in Tokugawa Japan: Its Effects on Modernization

Roger L. Reinos

## **Introduction**

Some in Asia have looked to Japan's history for lessons as to how non-industrialized Asian countries can quickly industrialize and build effective bureaucratic institutions that may be more appropriate for Asian cultures than Western models. Japan was the first Asian country to industrialize, and as yet, the only one that can be said to be fully competitive with its Western counterparts. Although other countries in the Asian region are on the road to full development; Singapore, Hong Kong, Korea, and certain designated economic regions in China; none has reached the overall high economic, educational, health, industrial and bureaucratic level of Japan. Among the various inter-related reasons that can be postulated for Japan's rapid industrial development is the unusually high level of education that was found at the beginning of the modern era. How did official and unofficial education develop in Japan's pre-modern era? What was the effect of increased literacy during the Tokugawa regime on the nation as it entered the modern period? And finally, are there lessons that can be drawn from Japan's experience that may be helpful to some of its Asian neighbors?

## Samurai Education

At the opening of the Tokugawa era, formal education was restricted to the samurai class, and in some of the lesser domains only to those in the upper levels of the samurai. Education for the samurai was officially supported, although carefully watched, by the Tokugawa regime because the Bakufu realized that, "higher education was required by the Samurai to maintain their position and efficiency as the governing class."<sup>1</sup> But by the close of the era both government and privately encouraged and funded education had become part of the training of all male samurai, and to a remarkable extent privately supported education became available to the merchant and peasant classes. At the close of the era nearly every domain had several domain supported schools for those of the samurai class, and there were probably as many private schools that he also could attend.<sup>2</sup> Even the lower samurai could read and write Japanese, and would have received enough education to read some basic Chinese as well.

This remarkable increase in education was prompted in part, as stated above, by the recognition that knowledge acquired through education had become a necessary ingredient for successful government. But there were other reasons for the Bakufu to encourage education, at least for the Samurai. Education had an explicitly moral purpose. To understand the proper order of human relations that was also the hierarchy of obedience that would help the Bakufu remain in power, one had to have access to the writings of Chinese Confucianism that were taught in Chinese courses. Also, for the upper and mid-level samurai and later for some from the merchant class and even for commoners in a few cases, education was a step towards social

mobility. It was also the means by which one acquired the skills and learning of a 'gentleman'; prose writing, administration, Confucian studies, and, for the samurai, military strategy. Finally, education was the only way by which the upper level samurai, the future rulers of the clans and domains, could gain the knowledge and wisdom necessary for the benevolent rule over his people. A benevolent rule based on Confucian doctrine.

The establishment of the Shoheiko (School for Officers and Bannermen) in 1603 was the beginning of officially sponsored education by the Shogunate. It was created mainly for the education of the Shogunates samurai and their male children. Towards the end of the era, however, it did allow some commoners who intended to pursue scholarly professions to enter, although on a limited and often unofficial basis.<sup>3</sup> Male children aged eight to fifteen of the samurai were required to attend domain schools, but education beyond this was dependent on the status and ability of the individual samurai.<sup>4</sup>

The content of the samurai education was based mostly on Confucian teachings, which was heavily moralistic, scholastic and conservative. Even though the Bakufu authorities relied on transplanted Confucian moral teachings to help maintain order in the domains, Confucianism in Japan acquired at least one characteristic which was quite different from that seen in China: while the Chinese scholar avoided physical exertion which left them unable to follow any profession other than that of officials or teachers, the Japanese insisted on retaining a warrior spirit as part of the mark of the 'gentleman'.<sup>5</sup>

Although the curriculum was mainly based on classical Confucian teachings and included etiquette, Japanese and Chinese history and calligraphy at the beginning of the era, the curriculum soon grew to in-

clude other subjects as well. Toward the end of the era many domain schools included courses in Chinese, geography, astronomy, and 'national studies' or Japanese classics.<sup>6</sup> The study of arithmetic was often required for the lower samurai who might be involved in commercial aspects of administration, but were optional for the middle and upper ranks.<sup>7</sup> The military arts included swordsmanship, riding and archery for the upper samurai, and more basic fighting skills such as hand-to-hand combat, lancemanship, and rifle marksmanship for the lower class samurai. In the early Tokugawa, Western studies had been strictly forbidden. But towards the end of the era these studies were allowed and sometimes encouraged in the Shogunate schools as long as they were limited to medical, military and technical areas useful to the Bakufu and did not challenge Confucian doctrine or Shogunate directives. With agreement from the Bakufu some of the domains began to offer Western studies as well. By 1867 several of the domains had established schools of Western and Dutch study, Western medical schools, and were encouraging the study of foreign languages, especially English and Dutch.<sup>8</sup>

Although the domain schools were the only officially sanctioned and supported schools in the early Tokugawa, a large number of private schools, 'shigaku', were created and grew rapidly in number throughout the era. These elementary through college level academies were, for the most part, created to educate the samurai class but some of them also admitted students of the merchant and peasant class who intended to pursue scholarly careers.<sup>9</sup> Because these privately administered schools did not draw much attention from the government until the end of the era, they were able to be more flexible in the curriculum they offered and had specialized courses in medicine, Dutch

and Western studies and military tactics, even before some of the domain schools. Even such subjects as unorthodox and unapproved Confucian teachings could be found in these classrooms. By the end of the Tokugawa, the *shigaku* numbered more than 1,500, with enrollments from ten to twenty students to those with thousands of students.

At the end of the Bakufu, there were over 270 official domain schools, more than 375 schools supported by local authorities, and over 1,500 private schools and academies in the larger metropolitan areas. Private tutoring at home, the main form of education available to female children of samurai, was also fairly common for those with the financial resources.<sup>10</sup> By the end of the Tokugawa era, many, if not most, of the male children of the samurai class attended some kind of school or received tutoring for at least a short time during the year.

### **Merchant Education**

Most of the domain schools and *shigaku* were originally intended to serve the educational needs of the samurai class, but there was also high demand for education in the larger cities and towns, especially among the boys of the merchant class, or 'chonin'. By the end of the era a good education was a necessary element in building and operating a successful business. The merchant did not need to know the Chinese classics or have an in depth knowledge of Confucian teachings, but he did need a good knowledge of arithmetic, accounting, and writing. Though scholarship tended to be dominated by the samurai class, there were also those of the merchant and even peasant class that made significant academic and philosophical contributions in the mid and late nineteenth century. A good portion of the population

in towns could read and write Japanese, and many of the male children of the more affluent merchants attended shigaku or had home tutoring that was at a higher level than was available in the local schools.<sup>11</sup>

Although many children of the merchant class took advantage of the growing formal education that was becoming available outside the home, vocational training was provided by apprenticeships that were directly related to family businesses. Much of this vocational training took place within the family, the family business, and the extended family relationships that were a vital part of close hierarchical and overlapping family-business relationships. For some, an apprenticeship outside the family-business system was perhaps the main form of education. Younger sons, even as young as ten years old, were apprenticed to related or unrelated families for long periods of time. These apprenticeships were long and demanding, often lasting into their early twenties. They started their apprenticeships doing menial tasks around the masters' house and slowly graduated to business related tasks as reliability, and knowledge of the business increased. Free time was usually spent in academic studies, mainly reading, writing, and accounting. Some of these apprentices hoped eventually to be adopted as family members and take over part of the new family's business. For others the apprenticeships were used to cement relationships between commercial families in hopes of improving business.

### **Commoner Education**

Probably the group that showed the most dramatic advancement in education during the Tokugawa era was that of the common people in town and rural areas. Because the Bakufu government was mainly in-

terested in samurai education the growth of education for this group is even more impressive.

The larger villages had their own village society, often descendants of petty Samuuri, with strict hierarchical relationships based on hereditary status at first, but later on economic wealth and social status. This group formed a village upper class that was, on the whole, educated and in close contact with the local castle administration through enterprise and official government business such as taxation. They needed at least basic literacy and mathematical skills to complete the administrative work that was required by the local castle authorities and to maintain their status in the community as leaders. In Japan's paternalistic society this village upper class, who often liked to think of themselves as the 'representatives' of the samurai administration, along with wealthier elders of smaller villages, saw it as their duty to help start and finance village schools. These schools were originally for the education of their own children but as the era progressed children of the lower peasant classes also started to attend. The village upper classes were not only concerned with the educational training of villagers and especially the leaders of neighborhood associations, but with their moral training as well. Thus, Confucian teachings were an important part of the curriculum. These schools usually required no fees from its students, but instead were supported by the patronage of individuals and voluntary contributions by parents of students if, and when, their economic circumstances allowed.<sup>12</sup> Payment was sometimes made in agricultural produce or personal services to the teacher. Most schools were set up in available buildings such as shrines, temples and private homes.<sup>13</sup>

The largest number of schools available to the rural villagers con-

sisted of small private temple schools, or 'terakoya'. The word terakoya originated in the previous era when children received their education in the 'tera' or temples. About 15,500 terakoya were in existence by the end of the Bakufu.<sup>14</sup> Despite their religious origins and although they sometimes used buildings on the temple grounds, terakoya in the Tokugawa had become strictly non-religious institutions.<sup>15</sup> Boys and girls attended terakoya, usually first entering at the age of 6 or 7 and continuing his/her education until the ages of 10 to 13.<sup>16</sup> The terakoya provided a minimum education for the majority of its students, rudimentary reading and writing, basic arithmetic and some instruction in manners and morals. It was usually just enough to read the village notice boards where orders and instructions of the local administration were posted, but others were able to read some of the popular literature that was just starting to be produced, or books on agriculture or commerce. Teaching methods in these schools were not standardized, and much of the instruction was closely related to family life and livelihood.<sup>17</sup> As the terakoya became more influential in the lives of the commoners, the Domain authorities began to take some interest in them. Some of the terakoya started to come under the official supervision and support of the domain authorities, and they in effect sometimes became 'branches' of the domain schools. Local officials began to take interest in curriculum, texts, and general course content, and some of the schools had students from both the petty samurai and commoner class. Towards the end of the era some domains gave financial support to the terakoya that included the awarding of financial prizes to teachers and sometimes schools, and in some cases the required use of textbooks that were being used in the domain schools.<sup>18</sup>

The government did not take direct control of the *terakoya*, but when it was decided that the spreading popular education needed to be controlled they set up a different school system, the 'gogaku' or local school.<sup>19</sup> The *gogaku* were created to educate the children of the ruling group within the commoner class, the heads of towns and large villages in urban areas and village elders in the rural areas. These children, who would eventually take over the administration of town and village affairs, were instructed in more advanced writing and arithmetic in order to carry out village business and instructions from the authorities. The creation of the *gogaku* was also a response to the growing political and economic unrest that was increasing among the commoners. Thus the curriculum, based heavily on Confucian doctrine, emphasized moral indoctrination for village leaders so that they could lead the village or community in the 'correct' moral manner in an effort to control possible political and social agitation.<sup>20</sup>

In the approximate two hundred years of the *Bakufu*, government supported, village initiated and individually purchased education increased dramatically. The total number of all schools in Japan increased greatly towards the end of the era. By the mid 1860's there were approximately 270 domain schools and Confucian colleges for the samurai, and 500 *gogaku*, 1,500 *shigaku* and more than 15,500 *terakoya* established for the education of commoners and merchants.<sup>21</sup> At the end of the era it has been estimated that most, if not all, of the samurai class were literate, that forty to fifty percent of the commoner and merchant class males were literate, and perhaps fifteen percent of all females were receiving some formal schooling outside their homes.<sup>22</sup>

It must be kept in mind that however much education had increased by the mid 1860's, there was probably still a great deal of variation in

literacy rates throughout the country. In the larger cities, trade and cultural centers such as Edo, Kyoto and Osaka, where the number of affluent households was much larger than that found in rural areas, where good schools with experienced teachers were more available, and where education was highly valued and considered a necessity for success and advancement in commerce and academics, the estimated literacy rate was quite high, perhaps as high as eighty percent. On the other hand, in rural areas such as Hokkaido, Kyushu and Shikoku, where schools were difficult to support financially and teachers of any kind were difficult to find, and where time spent in the classroom added little to the poor farmers' prospects for improved livelihood, the literacy rate was well below the overall average, estimated at only fifteen to twenty percent.<sup>23</sup>

As the above statistics show, by the end of the Tokugawa era, literacy had become almost universal among the samurai class who were to take responsible positions in the growing bureaucracy. Literacy had also become very common among the rural upper class who needed a decent education to successfully handle the increasingly complex village administration, and also common among the merchant class as commerce and agricultural trade continued to develop and spread throughout the country.

### **Causes of Increased Education**

What are some of the factors that can account for the dramatic increase in opportunities for education throughout the country and more or less across social strata during the Tokugawa era?

Certainly the lack of class conflict, especially compared to European countries of the same period, played a role in spreading educational op-

portunity. There is little evidence that the Bakufu saw an educated commoner class as a threat to the political or social order as its English or French counterparts may have done. In all but a few cases there seem to have been no policy by the authorities that education should be withheld from the lower classes.<sup>24</sup> There certainly was an established class structure but there are few examples of class antagonism. The peasants and vast majority of the growing middle class knew and accepted their order in the hierarchy. The sometimes quite large peasant revolts in rural areas were responses to famine, flood, or incompetent administration, not acts of opposition to the Bakufu authorities. Many of the middle class relied on the Bakufu to keep order in an already well ordered society so that successful and growing businesses would not be disrupted.

While the Bakufu authorities may not have been motivated to encourage education or start new schools for commoners, they were certainly willing to use the growing interest in education and the increasing number of schools as an instrument for maintaining their administrative control over Japan. The developing and spreading educational opportunities proved to be valuable for this purpose, especially because of the tendency for instructors to rely heavily on Confucian moral instruction. One's learning and following the five hierarchical obligations, especially the moral right of higher over lower, and elder over younger, made the learning of Confucian morality even more important for servants and younger brothers because their duties were the most burdensome. Thus, the control over content, and in many cases over availability, of education made a growing education system valuable to the Bakufu in legitimizing and maintaining power.

The relative stability and peace that the approximately two hundred

years of Tokugawa rule brought to Japan was another and perhaps equally important factor in the spread of education, especially among the samurai class. The decades of peace and the dwindling coffers of some of the domains due to years of bad weather and inflation made many of the samurai either unnecessary or left the domains unable to continue paying for their employment. One option open to these unemployed samurai, or 'ronin', was to turn to education as a means of livelihood. This course was especially available to the wealthier samurai families and their sons. As demand for warriors was decreasing, the need for young educated men to take over the increasingly complex administrative tasks of the domains and the country as a whole was increasing. It was fortunate for the Bakufu to have had so many young men from samurai families to carry out the administrative tasks because they brought with them their sense of loyalty and dedication to the Tokugawa regime. This in effect created a dedicated civil service that helped Japan enter the modern era when the Meiji Restoration came.

The great degree to which private households and local villages supported education cannot be underestimated. This was quite a different development than was seen elsewhere in Asia.

In China, for example, even in the late nineteenth century, the only elementary education opportunities open to children came from private sources; there was still no government sponsored elementary education system.<sup>25</sup> The small amount of elementary instruction that existed was privately financed and was found in wealthy households and in village and lineage schools. The only schools the Chinese imperial government did support were those that acted as 'feeder schools' into the imperial academies where candidates studied long and hard,

sometimes for decades, for the imperial examinations. Thus, the Chinese educational system was largely an imperial state organ whose essential purpose was to supply candidates for further examinations and ultimately for bureaucratic positions within the imperial government.

In China, many factors kept academic achievement out of the hands of commoners. The long preparation period for examinations meant that only those of the already wealthy and well-connected scholar-official families had the motivation and financial resources necessary to forgo income lost by sons studying for exams, hire tutors, pay for travel to examination sites, and purchase texts during the time required to master each succeeding examination. Towards the end of the imperial regime, candidates for academic degrees and government positions were mainly chosen by merit through the exam system, but there still existed special examination quotas for the sons and nephews of incumbent officials and thus hereditary advantage still played a part in limiting educational goals for all but the smallest number of Chinese.<sup>26</sup> Entrance examiners for the academies and education commissioners were important to a career because it was they who decided who entered the academy and who would sit for exams, and thus patronage networks connected with the academies also became crucial to a career. Finally, neither the examination system nor the bureaucracy expanded as quickly as needed to satisfy the demand for bureaucratic positions. The number of candidates allowed to take and pass the examinations was limited by quotas and did not keep pace with the population increases and the demands of technical advancements the new era was bringing.<sup>27</sup>

The situation in Tokugawa Japan, however, was quite different.

Although the main academies and colleges of higher learning were funded and maintained by the Bakufu administration, as stated above, a greater amount of educational opportunity came from private individuals and families, and neighborhood and village associations. These local villages and private sources were instrumental in setting up, funding, and running schools from the elementary level upward. Whereas the Chinese village upper class did not see the education of the whole community as their responsibility, their paternalistic Japanese counterparts tended to and in many cases spent a large amount of individual and village resources on education. Therefore, much of the support for education, until the beginning of the Meiji period, did not come from government intervention but from the private sector.

Likewise, although Japanese students may have been graded and tested throughout their schooling, and families undoubtedly did make financial sacrifices in order to purchase education from the most respected teachers and send their sons to the better academies, there was no comparable stringent examination system that one was subjected to that required such great financial resources and decades of study as that found in China.

In Japan as in China, patronage, or more accurately in Japan's case, connections, could also be important in securing a good education. But the emphasis seems to have been more on promoting 'men of talent', those who showed promise whatever their social background. There began to emerge the idea that one could improve oneself, and be recognized as a scholar through self study. This was especially true towards the close of the era, as schools became bigger and it was necessary to institutionalize some method of graded achievement to

determine fitness for promotion from grade to grade. Slowly at first, but increasingly towards the end of the era, hereditary rank began to be less important and promotions and positions of honor were more often awarded based on ones potential and performance. Also, there was no absolute quota system that would have blocked the gifted and ambitious from finding suitable academic or bureaucratic jobs as existed in China. Thus, the numbers of aspirants could and did rise as the demand for academics and administrators increased towards the end of the Tokugawa.

Finally, there were intrinsic and immediate rewards for literacy. Late Tokugawa Japan was becoming increasingly urbanized and commercial. The use of written documents, contracts, government regulations, public notices of local affairs, shop signs, advertisements, and the growing popular literature, required and encouraged interest in literacy and education. At the very least, basic literacy reduced the chances of being cheated in transactions as business and commerce started to widen outside ones immediate family and local associations.

### **Effects On The Nation: Leadership**

The widespread education that was found at the end of the Tokugawa was mostly directed towards the elite; the samurai and some of the merchant class. These elites were to be the leaders in the coming era in both political and commercial areas. How did the spread of education, especially the strict Confucian kind, affect these future leaders and in what ways did these affects differ from those found in China at approximately the same time?

Although both the Chinese and Japanese education systems were based on Confucian doctrine and hierarchical relationships, several distinc-

tions can be made between education in the two countries. The Chinese education system was a state system under strong central authority. The educated, the literati and bureaucrats, were almost all graduates of the examination system which tended to make them classicists and conservatives.<sup>28</sup> The type of education required for success in the examination system was one that was very likely to inhibit curiosity and eagerness for learning in all but the most ardent and brilliant student. This lack of curiosity and the centuries old tendency for China to turn inwards, to regard knowledge of and from other countries as insignificant, were two factors that caused China to be slower than Japan in accepting and adapting Western ideas and technological advancements in the mid and late nineteenth centuries.

Chinese achievements in scholarship and the arts came from those educated and trained within the system and usually from within official channels. Because access to political and economic power in China was primarily through success in the examination system, both the conservative majority, and the few radical intellectuals that were able to reach the higher levels of government, were still very much oriented toward the existing social structure and the state when the old imperial order began to collapse.

As shown above, although tightly controlled by the Bakufu, a larger portion of education in Japan came from the private sector. More of the Japanese literati originated in the merchant class, and even some from the commoner classes in the later Tokugawa, than was true of China. Many classrooms in both domain schools and shigaku had students from most social classes and this mingling gave rise to questioning, especially towards the end of the Tokugawa, of the strict social order of the time.

The neo-Confucian education these young samurai received, and the rigid Japanese social structure, both with their strong emphasis on strict authoritarian hierarchical relationships, also proved ideal for quickly assimilating and spreading the new ideas and technology from the West that was vital to Japan's jump into the modern era. Despite the strict discipline and often rigid instruction in domain schools, curiosity and an eagerness to learn managed to survive in many Japanese students. Strict though it was, the young men who went through these schools emerged with well-trained minds and the ability to apply their training and analytic abilities to other bodies of knowledge. Also, unlike China, and despite the seclusion policy of the Bakufu, curiosity about the outside world was and continued to be a Japanese characteristic.<sup>29</sup> The absolute humility required of the pupil towards his teacher assured that knowledge imparted to him by the teacher was accepted in a literal manner. This was especially provident for technological information that came from the West for it was put immediately to use and there was little sense that ideas were to be questioned or experimented with.

Lastly, some of the successfully educated did strive for political power, but competition for power was allowed within the system as long as it was competition that served the needs of the domain, and not for the purpose of seeking power, prestige and income for oneself, family or cronies.

The conditions that created a large number of unemployed samurai towards the middle and end of the Tokugawa era were indeed fortuitous for Japan. As stated above, many of these young samurai turned to education as a means of securing a livelihood at a time when their fathers' profession was becoming unnecessary. The domains

could well use these young men, educated in neo-Confucian doctrine, for the increasing bureaucratic positions that were opening. The members of this new bureaucracy, with its strict bushido code of behavior and loyalty to the domain, later became the foundation of a civil service that easily converted to the idea of loyalty to the nation when the Meiji Restoration came.

### **Effects On The Nation: The General Population**

The spread of education and literacy in Japan had great effects on the eras political, literary and commercial leaders. But perhaps the greatest difference, and the most difficult to document, was the influence that increased literacy had on the general population and nation.

A general population that was literate had potentially great political consequences for the Tokugawa authorities. On the negative side, as literacy increased there was always the danger that radical or subversive material might make its way into the wrong hands. But the control and censorship of educational materials, literature, and information that was possible as a result of the seclusion policy greatly reduced the chance of this happening. Also, the increased involvement of the Bakufu towards the end of the era in the terakoya and shigaku administration and curriculum, such as it was, permitted domain authorities to stop the teaching of possibly subversive ideas. As to the overwhelmingly positive influence of education, written directives posted on the public notice boards, or relayed through the already established communication links of teachers to pupils and village leaders to the village population, would have ensured that Bakufu directives were disseminated quickly and widely.

It would also be much easier for a large and at least partially literate population that has had some experience with schooling to accept a formal and rationalized school system than a population with no such previous experience. A large portion of the Japanese population was just such a group.<sup>30</sup> The domain schools, *terakoya* and *shigaku* introduced the idea of education as a sequential activity, that learning and advancement had some relation to the amount of effort spent in study, and that a graded curriculum and maturity were related to achievement level. The transition to a formalized and modern school system at the end of the Tokugawa was also made easier because hundreds of thousands of Japanese had become somewhat accustomed to a school routine; spending several hours of each day at school, being grouped with other unrelated students, competing for awards for academic accomplishment, learning patience, discipline and attentiveness, and experiencing a teacher-pupil relationship.

The increases in commercial and agricultural transactions beyond the narrow limits of local communities, the rapid industrialization, and the military's appetite for adventure and conquest that were to take place after the fall of the Tokugawa, also greatly benefited from the spread of literacy and a population 'used to' schooling. For one who has had some childhood experience with basic schooling, and the idea of sequential training, it will be much easier to accept further training as an adult especially if the written word can complement the spoken instruction. Thus, military training, technical instruction, and advances in agriculture will all be more efficient, detailed and easily responded to.

### **Social Mobility**

One other aspect of the increase in literacy that was important for

Japanese social structure in the late Tokugawa was an increase in the hope for, and possibility of, social mobility or self improvement. Although limited but not to be disregarded, education was one way in which commoners were able to improve their status and move into professions such as doctors, priests or scholars.<sup>31</sup> In a few of the domain schools, but for the most part in the *gogaku* and *shigaku*, students from both the samurai and commoner classes intermingled. For the first time commoner and samurai students were able to observe each other and compete in oral and written examinations and reports. They competed for praise and awards and received grades based, not on hereditary standing, but on individual achievement. Studying and competing closely together as they did, the idea of individual qualities that were separate from hereditary determinants such as class or family began to take root in some of the commoners and petty samurai as well.

Thus, at least some of the students who passed through these schools, and even some of the samurai whether they liked it or not, came away with the idea of appraisal based on ones' ability and achievements. The idea that advancement and reward in academic achievement should be based on merit rather than position found its way into the commercial, and more importantly, the administrative and political arena. People were beginning to understand that an education gave one the opportunity to improve ones own and ones children's economic and social circumstances and that the sacrifices made in obtaining an education were worth while. Even in the rigid class society that Japan was in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a good education had come to be perceived as a means of social mobility and economic advancement by commoners and petty samurai alike. A com-

petitive and educated society was being created that would soon gain a national identity and become a competitive nation.

### **Final Remarks**

Although much research has been done on the spread of literacy and education in Tokugawa Japan and also Japan's rapid post-Tokugawa industrialization, an examination of these areas in hopes of finding characteristics that may be transferable to other Asian countries in a hurry to develop may have limited usefulness. Japan differed in many aspects from its Asian neighbors in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Japan's well-enforced seclusion policy, its geographic isolation from the Asian mainland, its lack of natural resources and commodities that were attractive to foreign powers were some of the factors that enabled it to escape the colonization and domination by the major world powers that crippled the social, political and economic development of its Asian neighbors. Japan was undoubtedly also helped in its development by becoming a colonial power itself in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Also, Japan's modern development started from an unusually high point. Throughout the Tokugawa era Japan was a highly centralized state with a well-developed bureaucracy and a recognized central authority. The population was largely ethnically homogeneous with common religious and ethical foundations and thus was able to avoid the ethnic and religious cleavages that have plagued other Asian nations. It also had a long history of literature and philosophy that undoubtedly contributed to the desire for educational improvement. Another great advantage Japan had was that of a single national language. Despite sometimes great variations in dialect, especially in

the remote southern and northern areas of Japan, education was carried out in the standard Japanese language with little need for change or adaptation.<sup>32</sup> This helped facilitate the development of a modern education system, that by the 1880's, laid the foundations for rapid modernization.

It is difficult to assess fairly the effects of literacy and education on Tokugawa Japan and on its modern development. In comparison to other Asian countries, Japan entered its modern era with the basis of an educational system already in place. Many of the teachers, the actual buildings, and perhaps most importantly, the traditions of the old *terakoya*, *shigaku* and *gogaku* continued during this period and served Japan well until a modern, standardized education system was set in place. Many had also by this time established the attitudes and routines of formal schooling and education, and had come to value education and literacy, not only for its economic effects, but for its intrinsic characteristics. This literacy made the general population more aware of the events around them, and also gave them a feeling of being part of a people and of a nation that was important for developing national consciousness and competitiveness. It also made more accessible the many new ideas and technical advances that were just beginning to have widespread exposure.

Thus, the schools, the positive attitudes towards education, and the basic literacy provided in the Tokugawa era created in Japan the foundation for the modern school system. This was a significant factor, albeit one of many, which helped Japan in its rapid industrialization and allowed the new 'nation' to use its already developing intellectual resources, whether they were commoner or of high hereditary position, in the rapid modernization process.

- 1 Herbert Passin, *Society and Education in Japan*, (New York: Columbia University), 1965, p. 16.
- 2 In this paper, the 'close of the era' is understood to mean the beginning of the Meiji Reformation or 1867, and 'late Tokugawa' is defined as approximately 1850 to 1867.
- 3 Tetsuya Kobayashi, *Society, Schools and Progress in Japan*, (New York: Pergamon Press), 1976, p. 14; also Passin, p. 23.
- 4 Passin, p. 17.
- 5 John King Fairbank, *The Great Chinese Revolution: 1800-1985*, (New York: Harper & Row), 1986, p. 191.
- 6 Ken Ishikawa, *The School in the Early Modern Period*, (Tokyo: Kodansha Press, 1957), pp. 265-266.
- 7 Tomutaro Karasawa, *History of Japanese Education*, (Tokyo: Kodansha Press, 1962), pp. 171-172.
- 8 Ken Ishikawa, *The Development of Schools*, (Tokyo: Maiuri Press, 1951), p. 262; also Kobayashi, p. 16.
- 9 Passin, p. 24.
- 10 Karasawa, 187.
- 11 Hiroshi Irie, "Hereditary Family Education in the Merchant Society", in *A History of Japanese Education: No. 4*, (Tokyo: Tokyo University Press, 1961).
- 12 Passin, p. 33.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 28.
- 14 Kobayashi, p. 18.
- 15 Iwazo Ototake, *History of the Education of the Common People in Japan Vol. 6*, (Tokyo, 1929) p. 883, Kobayashi, p. 17; Passin, p. 27.
- 16 Kobayashi, p. 18.
- 17 Some of the texts used were, *Farmer's Reader*, *Bumper Crops*, *Commercial Reader*, and *Navigation and Shipping Reader*. For a further list of the primers used from 1758 to 1825 see Passin, p. 32.
- 18 Kobayashi, p. 18; Passin, p. 34-35.
- 19 Ototake, p. 903.
- 20 Ishikawa, *The Development of Schools*, pp. 267-268.
- 21 Ronald P. Dore, "The Legacy of Tokugawa Education", in *Changing Japanese Attitudes Towards Modernization*, Marius B. Jansen ed., (Princeton University Press: Princeton, New Jersey, 1965), p. 100.
- 22 Ototake, pp. 926-946.

- 23 Ibid., p. 938.
- 24 Karashima cites cases where gogaku and shigaku were closed and teachers imprisoned by domain authorities for teaching unorthodox subjects. Ken Karashima, "The Moral Instruction of Students", in *Materials on the History of Japanese Education Vol. 8*, (Tokyo: Kodansha Press, 1953) p. 11.
- 25 Fairbank, p. 190.
- 26 Susan Naquin & Evelyn S. Rawski, *Chinese Society in the Eighteenth Century*; (Yale University Press: New Haven, 1987), p. 122.
- 27 Ibid., p. 124.
- 28 Richard Story, *A History of Modern Japan*; (Penguin Books: New York, 1960) p. 83.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Kobayashi estimates that there were 300,000 to 800,000 students enrolled in the terakoya alone by the end of the Tokugawa. (Kobayashi, p. 17.) Dore estimates that the literacy rate for males was 40% to 50%, and about 15% for females at about the same time. (Dore, p. 100.) Passin calculates that the number of students in terakoya, domain, gogaku, shigaku and Shogunal schools in 1854-67 to be at least 1,143,000 students. He also agrees with Dore's literacy percentages for the same period. (Passin, p. 44, p. 47)
- 31 Kobayashi, p. 12.
- 32 Herbert Passin, "Writer and Journalist in the Transitional Society", in *Communications and Political Development*, Lucian W. Pye, ed., (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 87-93.