

# Chapter 5

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## Future of the Japanese

### I. Introduction

Thinking about the future of society and the state is synonymous with thinking about people who are now growing up and those yet to be born. Formulating goals for Japan in the twenty-first century means, ultimately, formulating systems for education in the broad sense, systems for developing cultivated and vibrant human resources. At the turn of the century, knowledge and information are becoming more universal and sophisticated, cultural interaction is advancing, and the industrial structure is about to be transformed. What Japan needs now is human resources that can deal with these changes and lead the nation in the coming age.

The changing industrial structure, in particular, calls for urgent attention. World-class human resources that can create new technologies and produce new emotional values are essential for Japan. Moreover, at a time when the world's population is about to swell to 6 billion, developed countries have to help not only their own future citizens but also everyone within the confines of "spaceship Earth." This requires cultivating talented pioneers who will tackle the unknown with creativity and drive, intelligence, and imagination.

To nurture such pioneers and to put citizens' lives on a sound and stable basis, society as a whole must be imbued with sagacious shared cognitive skills. In addition, if Japan is to be loved and respected by the people of the world, its citizens must not only contribute to civilization by means of knowledge and technology but also demonstrate a societywide commitment to cultural improvement and an attractive, dignified way of life.

Because of an increasingly vigorous free market, the world today is characterized by major transnational changes. As we have seen in recent years, sometimes the market limits traditional nation-states' ability to govern and unduly disrupts society. Nevertheless, because the globalization of the free market is an inexorable historical trend and also brings immeasurable benefits to humankind, states are obliged to cooperate with the market and live with it while correcting it as necessary.

The market is a massive and distinctive evaluation system; in the course of myriad transactions, both goods and people are selected or rejected by means of what is in effect secret votes by a faceless mass. Unlike the evaluation systems of the state and other social institutions, the market's arbiters are anonymous, and the conflict among differing opinions during the evaluation process is invisible; only the results are visible, emerging as if they were natural phenomena. The market sometimes clashes with the state, confronting the state with an evaluation system that differs from the state's and evaluating the state itself.

The market excels in that it makes the most rational choices in its evaluations, including evaluations of people, at any given time. It benefits people in that it breaks down customs perpetuated by inertia, closed groups based on favoritism, and such groups' evaluations. It has the invaluable merit of universal fairness, transcending the bounds of regions and conventional communities.

On the other hand, because commercial transactions always take place within the context of the present, the market has the drawback of being unable to transcend historical time. It is immediately obvious that the market cannot provide social justice transcending time; it cannot, for example, redistribute wealth by redressing inequalities in inheritance. Nor is it effective in preserving resources or the environment—the distribution of wealth to future generations. Similarly, it lacks the capability to

evaluate people's latent intellectual and emotional qualities or long-term potential. And because the market's evaluations depend on secret votes by a faceless mass, it cannot discern specialized skills not immediately evident to the mass and cannot identify talent that will merit praise in future.

For the market to function effectively and soundly, humanity needs the state and other social institutions, nonmarket systems, and systems of human relations to compensate for the market's limitations. It need not always be the state that directly carries out human evaluation and development. Private schools, businesses, professional groups, nonprofit organizations, and journalism through its critical function can all contribute to education. For the foreseeable future, however, it will remain the state that is invested with the legal binding power to ensure the stability of social institutions. Only the state can be expected to rival the market, supporting the foundations of the educational system and assisting and regulating the activities of private-sector institutions. In contemplating the best form of education, we must accept as axiomatic that it will be determined by the tension between the two great civilizational factors of the market and the state.

## II. The Two Aspects of Education

The premise of education is human growth, and all value judgments regarding individuals are made with their future in mind. Education also includes the transmission of values from generation to generation, knowledge, aesthetics, and a sense of ethics, and its legitimacy and efficacy should be confirmed over the long term.

Meanwhile, our ideals and cultural values live and breathe by changing over the course of history. If civilizational and cultural values are confined within communities excessively defined by inertia and convention, they lack the necessary innovative power. Civilizational and cultural values have two aspects: the cohesiveness to resist temporal change and the fluidity to be stimulated by the flux of time. In thinking about education, we need to formulate policies that skillfully use both aspects. In other words, both state-administered and market-dictated education must be used simultaneously.

In this context, the state's function in regard to education in the broad sense, that is, the development of human resources, has two qualitatively different aspects. First, we must bear in mind that to the state education is a function of governance. Precisely because the state is charged with unifying the people, mediating their interests, and maintaining social calm, it has the right to require of its citizens a certain degree of shared knowledge, or cognitive skill. A state with people that do not possess a common language and script cannot pave the way for public participation in democratic governance. It cannot guarantee fair benefits to citizens who lack a certain minimum standard of numeracy or protect them from fraud and other crimes. It cannot provide law and order free of violence and oppression to citizens who cannot think rationally. In view of all this, one aspect of education is invested with authority similar to that accorded to the police and the courts, and has the function of augmenting the state. The long-established term *compulsory education* implies that citizens have an obligation to the state to acquire a certain level of cognitive skills, just as they are obliged to pay taxes and respect the law.

At the same time, however, for individual citizens education is a means to self-realization, an instrument for pursuing diverse ways of life rather than social unity and order. The state's role in this second aspect of education is limited to supporting free individuals; education in this sense is one of the many services provided by a modern state. The state does not and cannot have any right of compulsion in regard to this aspect of education. If, however, the modern state encourages individualism in the good sense, indirect assistance to facilitate diverse forms of self-realization can be regarded as one of the functions of the state. If, moreover, a variety of able individuals achieve self-realization thanks to well-developed services, it is self-evident that this benefits the state and the people. Supporting people of pioneering talent and making fiscal outlays for this purpose should be counted among the state's functions because they serve the national interest.

Of course, when it comes to specific educational content, there is no way of gauging mechanically how much is a function of governance (the state's requirement of shared cognitive skills) and how much is a service aimed at diverse forms of self-realization. Moreover, these two domains alter as civilization advances; policies that were once necessary inevitably become superfluous over time. For example, at one stage of civilization it was considered necessary to teach children to wash their hands as a matter of social defense—in other words, as a matter of governing. Meanwhile, at a stage of civilization in which society has diverse educational functions, such as journalism, it may be possible to remove from the curriculum a great deal of knowledge once conveyed through compulsory education. Precisely because the content of education fluctuates, the state must always carefully define the border between education as a function of governance and education as a service. And the state should be aware that compulsory education, aimed at ensuring a certain minimum shared understanding, is essentially a function of governance and implement it rigorously and vigorously. At the same time, government should entrust the driving force of education as a service to the market, scrupulously maintaining an attitude of providing only indirect support.

### III. Japanese Education Today and Its Challenges

Looking back over the history of Japanese education, we can say that education as a function of governance has been a brilliant success; we can see its history as a process of building on success by cramming in more and more content. Today, far too much education as a service has been incorporated into education as a function of governance, so that the border between compulsory education and education as a service is almost indiscernible. With the modernization push of the Meiji era (1868–1912), Japan concentrated on improving educational policy in a way seen nowhere else. From the start, the government set up public schools throughout the nation, standardized teaching qualifications, systematized the curriculum and even textbooks, and strove for homogeneity. The government invested huge funds in education, and school education carried the beacon of civilization to the most remote hamlet. The Japanese, too, were extremely keen to see their children educated and willingly accepted this as their obligation. A century of educational success provided high-quality, homogeneous human resources for Japan's modernization, especially its industrialization. A high literacy rate, widespread basic scientific knowledge and numeracy, and the national traits of fastidiousness and precision all attest to the triumph of Japan's modern education.

Now that we have reached the end of the twentieth century, however, the great success of public education has spawned a number of problems, as many have pointed out. The most conspicuous problem is that Japan finds it harder than other developed countries to develop the pioneering human resources needed to underpin the shift from an industrial to a postindustrial society. Possessing pioneering abilities goes beyond merely winning out in competition and achieving social success. The correct exercise of competitive ability calls for a sense of adventure that does not fear the unknown, curiosity for its own sake rather than preoccupation with immediate utility, and willingness to take responsibility for the risks that may arise.

These sterling qualities, however, do not thrive in an overly homogenized, systematized educational environment. True mental resilience will not emerge unless not only educational techniques and methodology but also the individuality of those on the teaching end, the social climate of student-teacher interaction, and other conditions are diversified. Seen in this light, Japanese education has provided such an exhaustive array of educational conditions that the healthy tension that should exist between educator and educated has been lost. Students lack the stimulation of selecting their own educational environment, teachers, and schools, and teachers cannot experience the excitement of interacting with students of their own choosing.

Of course, homogeneity is necessary in education as a function of governance, as is a minimum degree of systemization. If, however, the two kinds of education are conflated, so that education as a

service is required of students and education that should be a function of governance appears to be a service, neither can fulfill its original function. Governance necessitates strong authority, whereas services require entrepreneurial zeal. When the two are conflated, there is a tendency for schools to be deprived of the requisite authority and market competition to be excluded from services. This is the irony of success. The self-directed motivation and will to teach on one hand and learn on the other have deteriorated in schools today. The conflation of governance and services has imposed an inordinate burden on children who cannot keep up with course content, whereas children who achieve well and want to stretch their minds further are forced to mark time.

The enhancement of Japan's school education has been achieved at the expense of social education and cultural administration in the broad sense. Statistics testify to the meagerness of Japan's cultural administration budget—in other words, its support for education as a service outside the official school system—relative to other countries'. There is little state support for people who seek self-realization by continuing study or engaging in the arts or sports of their own volition after finishing formal schooling.

This has clearly diminished the attractiveness of Japanese society in the eyes of foreigners, but that is not the only problem. In Japan, the individual's life is divided broadly into the phase in which one is supposed to improve oneself through cultivation and that in which one simply consumes the skills one has acquired in work. Children and adults are different, and it is natural that they are treated differently in various aspects of life. But in terms of self-realization, life must be a continuum. A society made up of children who diligently absorb culture as a duty and adults who are robbed of the chance to satisfy cultural interests perforce appears impoverished.

Another frightening thing, and another baleful effect of the conflation of governance and services, is that children are losing the sense of reverence for education as a citizen's duty. Unless the view that compulsory education is not a service but an obligation, just like the obligation to pay taxes, is revived, teachers will not regain self-confidence. It is no wonder that the kind of class disruptions that have caused such concern recently should occur. Distinguishing sharply between the two kinds of education, which have been so carelessly conflated, by means of tireless vigilance and effort and formulating policies making people fully aware of the difference are matters of the utmost urgency.

#### IV. A Reform Proposal

To stimulate the efforts suggested above, we suggest one specific direction to pursue at the outset of the twenty-first century, with a deadline of 2010 or so. It is something educators have talked about repeatedly: thoroughly culling and refining the compulsory education curriculum, fundamentally rethinking the minimum learning essential to live as a sound member of society—in short, what curriculum should be compulsory. Of course, it is hard to decide this mechanically, but if the difficulty of the enterprise is used as an excuse for neglecting study of the curriculum and simply leaving it to experts in various fields of learning, teachers, and textbook editors, it is clear from past experience that the curriculum will only become still more overloaded.

Here we would like to set a goal that may appear extreme at first sight in order to encourage specialists to address the selection of what is truly important in their own fields. We propose that over a ten-year study period, including the necessary interim measures, the present compulsory education curriculum be compressed into three-fifths its present size, the aim being a three-day week for compulsory education. Of course, there are no grounds based on formal logic for a three-day school week or a curriculum compressed into three-fifths of its present size. But then, who can say what grounds there are for the present five-day school week or what grounds there were for reducing the former six-day school week to Five days? What we are proposing is that more than half the week—in other words, more than half the period of childhood—be left to the free choice and self-responsibility of students and parents. Another aim of this reform is to reawaken strong enthusiasm for teaching

among educators as they wrestle with the difficult challenge of selecting the truly essential curriculum with the aim of boiling it down to three-fifths of its present size.

With a three-day school week, students will naturally have two more days at their disposal. We would like to see them free to use the extra time voluntarily for aims that are judged to be socially healthy. But because a reduced curriculum will represent the absolute minimum knowledge and skills that every citizen is obliged to master, it will be necessary to provide separate assistance for students who cannot do so in the time allotted. To achieve this goal, supplementary classes based on the public school system should be established. Schoolteachers can conduct them in school on their two free days, or in some cases can even open their own preparatory schools. Because this kind of instruction will be an extension of compulsory education, the state will bear 100 percent of the costs.

Meanwhile, students who are able to fully assimilate the curriculum in the three days can use the remaining two days for higher-level, more specialized studies, for the arts, sports, and other forms of cultivation, or for basic vocational education, depending on their interests. This area will be entrusted to established private-sector educational institutions or educational groupings developed in the future. Traditional schools can even make their own classrooms available for such education. Because this kind of education will represent government administration as a service from the point of view of the state, an appropriate degree of fiscal support will be provided.

We look forward to debate in various sectors of society over ways and means. One idea is to issue students "education vouchers." Of course, a new system presents various problems, and careful thought would have to be given to ways of preventing abuse of vouchers. There are a great many issues that need to be sorted out, such as prohibition of the resale of vouchers and accreditation of private-sector educational institutions and instructors. But if we get hung up on such problems at this stage and use them as an excuse for wriggling out of even attempting reform, we will not be able to accomplish anything.

In one sense, the system proposed above injects market principles into education, but in another sense it encourages state support for cultural activities, which have been left to the market so far. Theaters, concert halls, museums, art museums, libraries, and lifelong learning courses, as well as scouting, community-development campaigns, and so on, will be able to contribute to education with more generous state support while still being exposed to market forces. As for schoolteachers, although the basic part of their work will be publicly guaranteed, they will also be allowed to jump into the free education market if they have the will and the drive.

State expenditure on education will probably rise as a result; how much will be determined in a study of the details of the new system. A variety of ideas are possible. One is to freeze schoolteachers' remuneration at present levels, even though the curriculum and class time will be reduced by two-fifths, and pay them extra for teaching supplementary classes. Another is to reduce basic pay and have teachers secure a higher income through supplementary classes or classes conducted outside school. Because our proposal is intended purely to stir up educational circles and promote serious debate, we will not go into further detail.

## V. Conclusion

Post-compulsory education, including high school, should be even further liberalized and diversified and should be left to competition. Ultimately, universities and graduate schools should individualize themselves in keeping with their own ideals and academic culture and declare clearly the kinds of graduates they want to turn out. High school education should aim at becoming more multistream, in line with society's diversifying goals. If society can pave the way in this manner, children and their parents should be left to make their own free yet tense choices. This diversification will add vitality to both young people and the larger society that nurtures them. It will also generate people of grace and dignity who have a lifelong love of culture, are full of the spirit of adventure, and are awake to the

concept of self-responsibility.

No doubt reducing the time devoted to compulsory education will change children's sense of group affiliation. Allowing students to choose where to learn does not mean sanctioning a sloppy laissez faire approach. Unlike in the past, students will more actively choose the study groupings they join, and by affiliating themselves with diverse groupings—schools, private-sector educational institutions outside the official school system, citizen groups, and so on—they will be able to cultivate a sense of voluntary participation and belonging. Meanwhile, it is expected that by getting to know people of different backgrounds and ages from themselves, young people will gain greater mental fulfillment.

Furthermore, because internationalization and cultural diversification will be expected of Japan in the future, to anticipate and promote those developments the carefully selected compulsory-education curriculum proposed should be as ethnically and culturally neutral as possible. Of course, this in no way conflicts with patriotism based on the state's justice and humanism. The importance of a state that strictly upholds the law and systems, guarantees social order and security, and corrects for globalized markets as appropriate is self-evident, and teaching students to love their country falls within the scope of compulsory education. Rather than expect didactic classroom instruction alone to inculcate patriotism, however, it should be taught to the next generation of young people primarily through the example of Japan's actual behavior.

Essentially, society as a whole is involved in education, which is an endless process of self-improvement addressing society. Learning should be everyone's lifelong task and should be provided by all social institutions. Our reform proposal is intended not simply to pare the volume of systematized school education but, with this as a stimulus, to invigorate the educational functions of society as a whole.

We hope that diversification of children's educational institutions will catalyze increased dialogue regarding choices between children and parents, young people and older people. We hope that competing educational institutions will work harder to demonstrate to society the delights of learning and the significance of their course content. Artists, scientists, and people of religion should be more keenly aware of their functions as educators and make greater efforts to address society. The participation of journalism is especially desirable. It should wield more effective power both as an educator in its own right and as a critic of education. Broadcast media, in particular, in view of their powerful influence and the privileged status society has granted them, must contribute more to education.

Finally, generally speaking, deregulation and liberalization of systems put a greater burden of self-responsibility on various specialists. Individual educators, educational institutions, and journalists should be more strongly aware of the specialized intellectual nature of the professions they represent and set up institutions for restrained mutual criticism. If liberalizing systems means introducing the market mechanism, the next thing required is the introduction of nonmarket assessment of the market. In a society ruled solely by program ratings, copies of publications sold, numbers of students admitted to educational institutions, and so on, neither education nor culture develops. To maintain society's intellectual caliber and its grace and dignity, enhancement of the prestige of and confidence in specialists and state efforts to assist this will become ever more essential. This will determine the success or failure of Japan as a free-market society and as a nation of "affluence and virtue."