Book Review

Benjamin Duke. *The History of Modern Japanese Education: Constructing the National School System, 1872–1890.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009. 448 pp. Hardback $65.00

How did an emerging nation, Japan or otherwise, build its modern school system in the nineteenth century? If the nation was located in the East, what were the challenges that it faced, considering that modernization often meant Westernization? In this volume, Benjamin Duke uses intriguing and meticulous detail to present an illuminating account of the Japanese efforts—and conflicts—taken to (re)build such a national education system during the years immediately following the 1868 Meiji Restoration. The volume, consisting of three parts, provides readers with ample evidence so as to overcome a simplistic view concerning the origin(s) of modern Japanese education—a view that often overlooks the continuities that were carried over from the feudal system and the conflictive and complex processes that the nation underwent in terms of borrowing Western ideas while simultaneously reinventing Japanese traditions.

The first part, entitled "The Feudal Foundation of Modern Japanese Education," consists of three chapters. It discusses the state of education during the late Tokugawa shogunate era, focusing on the education of the ruling warrior class (*samurai*) in feudal domain schools (while touching on the common people's education at numerous local private "temple" schools). Since the mid-eighteenth century, most of the feudal lords had built schools in their domains to educate their young males. In these schools, the samurai youth studied both literary and military arts; however, the former (i.e., the study of Chinese classics) overshadowed the latter, as the Tokugawa regime depended on the knowledge/power that connected Confucianism with a disposition toward public service (i.e., maintenance of existing social order). The domain school education produced "[v]irtually all of the leaders in the initial period of modernization of Japanese education in the Meiji era" (pp. 11–12). Here one may find it interesting that some of them became modernizers while others became traditionalists in later years. In any case, as Duke relates, many domain schools transitioned into the modern school system after 1872, when the Meiji government set up the First National Plan for Education (*Gakusei*), modeled after the Napoleonic French education system, to provide elementary education for all children regardless of class or gender, aiming at "mass education and mass literacy" (p. 74).

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The second part, entitled "The First Decade of Modern Education, 1870s: The American Model," contains eleven chapters that examine various topics of national education building, including the Gakusei implementation (and the resistance to it), the support of study abroad students (including young girls sent to the United States), and the introduction of Pestalozzi pedagogy in teacher training. Under the direction of Tanaka Fujimaro,[1] head of the Ministry of Education, the U.S. model was implemented. Many English-speaking scholars—some very prominent—were hired to teach in higher education (where the classes were taught in English, except for the medical school, which was taught in German). Rutgers professor David Murray took the newly established country's superintendent position, which oversaw the nation's entire system of schools and colleges. While Tanaka wanted to introduce a more locally autonomous system that was modeled after the United States, he met with serious oppositions not only from traditionalists, including the emperor—but also, interestingly, from his own modernizer camp. In particular, Murray's recommendation to Tanaka was that "the Department of Education must be vested with sufficient powers of supervision and control" (p. 244). Duke regards the "striking" (p. 243) difference between the two men as an illustration of the controversy over the control of education within the ministry. It also indicates, in my view, the tensions and contradictions within the modernizers—ones that often exist in any modernist project.

Part three, entitled "The Second Decade of Modern Education, 1880s: Reaction against the Western Model," consists of four chapters. Duke, like many Japanese scholars, regards the events of the 1880s as a reaction from the traditionalists, led by Confucian scholar and advisor to the emperor, Motoda Nagazane. In fact, the nation's top political leaders were still inclined to employ a Western model (a German model now preferred), as they were in the middle of writing the Constitution of 1889—the nation's first constitution—to establish a parliamentary system (and the schools were critical for that nation building). Former diplomat Mori Arinori became the Minister of Education. When confronted with the traditionalist demand to place Confucian morality at the core of education, Mori's only compromise was to introduce military training and Herbartian theory to teacher education. (Herbartianism was seen as creating a condition where "national ethics superseded individualism" [p. 340]. In any case, as Duke puts it, "Pestalozzi from Switzerland and Herbart from Germany came into sharp conflict in Japan" [p. 341].) Mori was soon after assassinated, and Motoda's influence over educational policy became more pronounced. The 1890 Imperial Rescript on Education combined Confucianism with imperial ideology, constituting the moral foundation of education. Duke concludes that, with the Rescript, "the modern Japanese school system finally achieved a sustainable balance" (p. 369). Some might feel uneasy about the term balance (which carries a positive connotation), considering that the cost of the balance was high in the way the Rescript functioned in the subsequent history. They might suggest that the Rescript be regarded as a milestone of the traditionalists.

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[1] In this review, as is the case in the volume reviewed here, I follow the Japanese convention in which the family name or surname precedes the given or personal name.

Telling the history, Duke incorporates both Japanese works and non-Japanese sources very well. Many scholars of Japanese history attempt to do so, but often find it difficult to accomplish for many reasons (including "impossibilities" of translations). The volume's second part vividly presents the perspectives and works of foreign scholars and advisors. In particular, I like the depiction of Superintendent Murray and his policy suggestions (and I cannot help but wonder what Murray would say about the current problems with Japanese education). Treating the history of the early Meiji period as the conflict between the modernizers and the traditionalists, Duke tends to write from the standard (modernist) perspective held by most Japanese educational historians; however, his text allows us to identify contradictions within the modernizers and the reinvented-ness of traditionalists, and so it allows us to attain much more nuanced understandings. Given that international lending and borrowing of educational policies thrives today as much as in the past, I suggest that any person wishing to gain historical insights into the experiences and meanings of such policy transactions consult this volume.

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