

INVESTIGATION AND DESCRIPTION OF THE ROLE  
OF KOKUTAI  
IN JAPANESE EDUCATION: 1868-1941

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The purpose of the study was to determine the role of Kokutai in the Japanese public educational system from 1868 to 1941. Kokutai stresses the special relationship between the emperor and the people and emphasizes loyalty to the emperor, who embodies both supreme moral and political authority in an organically unified state. Kokutai was both a factor in the development of Japanese education and an important element of the instructional program. Many scholars have condemned Kokutai as overtly nationalistic and chauvenistic. They further claim that Kokutai was used to indoctrinate Japanese students, especially after 1931 when Japan's militarists wished to imbue the country's youth with fanatical devotion to their expansionist policies. This study attempts to determine the extent to which this indoctrination took place.

The Japanese educational system between 1868 and 1941 was designed primarily to serve the needs of an emerging nation-state, a policy which was clearly stated in the Imperial Rescript on Education of 1890. During this period of rapid growth, Japan moved from a feudal educational system to a modern centralized system based on French, German, and American models. Following 1919, the number of universities was expanded, but the Japanese university system remained

highly selective during the period under study. Changes which did occur in public education following 1918 included the introduction of optional military training in middle and higher schools in 1925, and the establishment of vocational middle schools in 1935.

The development of Kokutai, which originated with Aizawa Seishisai in 1825, is discussed in Chapter III, "The Development of Japanese 'National Polity' (Kokutai).\" The Meiji reformers used the symbol of the emperor as a basis for unifying the Japanese state. The emergence of Kokutai as orthodox thought can be clearly seen in the conflict which developed between the view that the emperor was subordinate to the nation as a whole, and the view that he was the mystical embodiment of the state.

Chapter IV, "Kokutai in Japanese Schools and Society, 1908-1941,\" discusses the contrast between liberal educational trends which appeared during the Taishō era (1912-1931) and the underlying conservatism of the Japanese educational system. Following 1931, the military became more influential in Japanese life, and textbooks were modified to stress the nationalistic elements of Kokutai. In 1937, the Ministry of Education issued the Kokutai No Hongi, which reaffirmed the basic principles of loyalty to the emperor and service to the state which had been set forth in the Imperial Rescript on Education.

Some principal conclusions include:

1. The concept of Kokutai helped to define the role of public education in Japan from 1868 to 1941.

2. The ideas of Kokutai were consistently promulgated in the Japanese public educational system from 1868 to 1941.

3. An analysis of the Kokutai No Hongi reveals that there was no significant change in the concept of Kokutai as promulgated in Japanese schools from 1890 to 1941.

4. From 1933 to 1941 Kokutai was not significantly reshaped to suit the designs of supranationalists and militarists in the Japanese government. Kokutai had always stressed loyalty to the emperor and to the state.

Whatever other means were used to win support for Japan's foreign policy following 1931, Kokutai was not employed as a primary means of political indoctrination. Rather, it was a reaffirmation of ideas which had been central to Japanese society and culture since 1868.