

JAN 13 1994

THE REFLECTION OF SELECTED ASPECTS OF JAPANESE CULTURE
in
THE PREWAR EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM OF JAPAN

A THESIS
PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
OF DANBURY STATE COLLEGE

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF SCIENCE

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August 1962

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Not long ago, the Oriental and the Occidental worlds seemed mutually exclusive. Few observers were sufficiently clairvoyant to foresee a world of jets, rockets, and atomically-driven ships. It may be a cliché to say that the world has shrunk, yet this idea has been substantiated by recent historical events. We are no longer offered the opportunity for isolation for, with this new proximity in the dimension of time, all nations of the world are virtually next-door neighbors. Therefore, we must begin to take cognizance of the ideologies and the emotional climates of all countries, because we have seen during the past few decades how deeply they can affect us.

It is, to a considerable extent, through the educational system which a country initiates and supports that the youth are indoctrinated, in order that future citizens will be equipped to perpetuate the approved attitudes and ideals. It is logical, therefore, to assume that the educational system of a country will reflect the culture of the people, just as a well-constructed mirror reflects an image--with minimal distortion, though never absolute perfection.

Japan is a country whose cultural patterns, whose entire way of life, prior to World War II, were so dissimilar from our own that we regarded it, not simply as foreign, but as strange and exotic. Japan today, however, is intimately involved with the United States. Thus, it seems both timely and challenging to study her prewar educational system, for Japan represents a classical example of a totalitarian nation whose schools reflected the peculiar culture of its people.

To undertake such a study of Japan's prewar system of education it appears necessary to gain an understanding of the background of this society through investigation of the origin and development of selected aspects of Japanese culture, major currents in its historical heritage, and the evolution of its educational system.

Finally, it will be necessary to consider many aspects of the school system itself--specific objectives, structure and supervision, curriculum, attitudes of educators and students, methodology and disciplinary techniques. Only in this way is it possible to ascertain the interdependent relationship between Japanese culture and its prewar system of education.