

ENTRANCE EXAMINATIONS IN PREWAR JAPAN, LATE MEIJI TO 1941

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this thesis is the influence of entrance examinations on the education and lives of students in prewar Japan. I investigate the content and the extent of the tests' effect through contemporary media reports and official criticism. I show that the influence was similar to that in postwar Japan, and that it extended beyond the few who entered the elite schools. In a direct or indirect manner, the tests affected the education of most elementary school students. Official criticism of this extensive influence was followed by vigorous reform efforts from the late 1920s. Despite these attempts, the influence persisted and was routinized. The reasons for this are explored by tracing the responses of the schools, the students and their parents to the bureaucratic reforms. These sectors of society defied official directives, for the tests (in their established form) served an important purpose for each of them. The government tried to alter the nature of the examinations and prohibited many activities resulting from them, but it had an interest in the continuation of the tests as well. This multiple interest facilitated the persistence of difficult entrance examinations and their effects. The basic reason for their extensive influence and for their multiple utility is found in the gap between the demand for and supply of post-elementary education in a society where

success through academic credentials was accessible and appealing to most youths.

The defiance of government orders by the concerned sectors of society illustrates aspects in the government-society relationship that suggest the need for revisions in the existing general interpretation of that relationship--the former exercising totalitarian control over the latter.

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INTRODUCTION

In this paper I explore the influence of entrance examinations in prewar Japan. I analyze the nature, the extent, and the routinization of the tests' influence. The saga of the routinization is highly relevant to re-understanding the state-society relationship before the Pacific War. I also examine whether or not the consequences of the prewar tests were similar to those in postwar Japan.

The postwar effects of entrance examinations have been the focus of several works.¹ Indeed, the examinations are extremely influential in contemporary Japan's social and educational scene. All high schools and universities select entrants by their own tests. Several prestigious private universities have attached lower-level schools that require entrance examinations as well. Entry into these attached

¹ Some such works are: Kuroha Ryoichi, *Nyûgaku Shiken* (Nihon keizai shimbunsha, 1978); Shimizu Yoshihiro, *Shiken* (Iwanami shoten, 1957); E. R. Beachamp, "Shiken Jigoku: The Problem of Entrance Exams in Japan," *Asian Profile* 6:6 (1978), pp. 543-560; T. P. Rohlen *Japan's High Schools* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1983), pp. 77-110; and Erza F. Vogel, "The Gateway to Salary: Japan's Infernal Entrance Examinations," in *Learning to be Japanese*, ed. E. R. Beachamp (Hamden, Linnet Books, 1978), pp. 213-239; Victor Kobayashi, "Japan's Examination Hell," *Education Forum* v. 23 (1963), pp. 19-23.

"escalator" schools assures access to the university without a grueling examination. Schools in general tend to be ranked by the difficulty of their examinations and how well they prepare students to enter prestigious institutions at the next stage. Companies give preference to graduates of highly ranked schools in hiring and promoting employees. Consequently, among the youth the race for a decent career at a respectable firm begins with school entrance examinations. Competition to enter prestigious universities, highly ranked high schools, and the "escalator" schools is severe to say the least. Even mediocre schools set difficult examinations that require considerable memorization. The competitive and demanding nature of the tests necessitate excessive preparation in and outside school. Students attend cram schools (*juku*) after classes, and if they fail to enter a school of their choice, they enroll as *rōnin* at private preparatory schools where they study for an extra year or two. The extra mental assurance of examination success talisman (*juken omamori*) usually accompanies academic preparation. Parents are as frantic as the students, and perhaps even more so. "Education mothers" (*kyōiku mama*) pester their children to study long hours from an early age. Come examination season, some mothers even abstain from a favorite activity (as in *ocha dachi*, or giving up tea) in the superstitious hope that their sacrifice will be rewarded by their child's success. Along with the preparatory schools, publishers of examination magazine and study guides depend

on the examinations for what appears to be a lucrative business. Preparation for the competitive tests and pressure to succeed makes the students' lives an "examination hell"--a state of mental and physical stress, leading in extreme cases even to suicide, usually after failure. A sense of controversy surrounds the examinations due to their extreme influence on the students' education and entire lives. The nation's prewar experience with entrance examinations is also pertinent to this controversy.

Western scholars investigating prewar educational history have focused on themes such as the elite in the higher schools and universities, government control, national ethics, and patriotism. Most Japanese and Western works examining entrance examinations have concentrated on the postwar period.² Some Japanese scholars have explained the origins of the examinations at the post-secondary level in the Meiji period (1868-1912).³ Most scholars have made brief comments regarding the prewar situation as they introduce their analysis of the postwar entrance examinations. There appears to be a general consensus that, even though entrance examinations were used as a means of selection before the

² Ibid.

³ Amano Ikuo has insightfully examined entrance examinations along with other school and occupational examinations in the Meiji period. Entrance examinations only affected an elite minority in the Meiji era. Amano Ikuo, *Shiken no shakai shi: kindai Nihon no shiken, kyôiku, shakai*, (Tokyo University Press, 1983). See also, Fukaya Masashi, *Gakureki shugi no keifu* (Reimei shobô), 1969.

war, there effects were limited to an elite minority. Such contentions are typically based on statistics showing that only 10% to 20% and 3% to 4% of those who completed elementary education proceeded on to secondary and higher schools respectively.⁴ Some have also contended that "the practice of *rônin* was virtually unknown,"⁵ or that concentration of applicants around the famous schools and the concept of a favored route to enter prestigious institutions were postwar developments.⁶

The Problem

The initial questions that I address are: What and how pervasive were the educational and social consequences of entrance examinations in prewar Japan? Were they in fact limited to the education of the few destined to proceed to the elite tracks? Were many of the examination phenomena prevalent today present before 1945?

I will show that most consequences already existed and extended beyond the student elite. The elite that passed the entrance examinations to middle and higher schools were,

⁴ See for example, Shimbori Michiya, *Gakureki: Jitsuryoku shugi o habamu mono* (Daiyamondo sha, 1966), p. 87-88; Shimizu, *Shiken*, p. 18-19; Shimizu Yoshihiro, "Entrance Examinations," *Journal of Social and Political Ideas in Japan* 1:3 (December 1963), p. 89.

⁵ H. D. Smith, *Japan's First Student Radicals* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 272-274.

⁶ Shimbori, *Gakureki*, pp. 88-93.

indeed, a minority compared to those that graduated from elementary school. Some effects were more prevalent among the elite, but not limited to them. Moreover, I argue that in order to understand the full extent of the influence of prewar entrance examinations, we have to reach lower and see how it affected the actual education (and thus the lives) of elementary school students. That influence on formal instruction, in the form of preparatory education, was widespread. It was widely perceived as a social problem, which persisted despite much criticism and numerous reform efforts by the authorities.

This raises other important questions. Why were the effects of entrance examinations so pervasive? Moreover, if their influence on elementary education was extensive and was even criticized, and if the government attempted to reform the situation, why were entrance examinations and their influence routinized during the period in question? Why were the tests not reformed enough to terminate their influence on education? What does this suggest regarding the relationship between Mombusho (Ministry of Education) and the actual conductors and receivers of education?

The basic reason for the widespread consequences of entrance examinations, the continued necessity of the tests, and the routinization of their effects in prewar Japan is the gap between the demand for and supply of "desirable" post-elementary education. Given the high demand or competition to enter good schools, the actual style or content of the

examinations is also significant in explaining the intensity of preparatory education, the most prevalent consequence of the tests.

To explain why entrance examinations and their influence persisted despite government reform, I will examine (in the context of that very reform movement) the interaction between the government and society, that is, the schools, the students and their parents. We shall see that these three elements of society managed to defy Mombusho directives aimed at curbing the importance of entrance examinations in the education system. The concerned sectors of society carried on as before. This was possible because each party had an interest in the continuation of entrance examinations. This autonomous and at times defiant behavior points to inadequacies in the general view of the government-society relationship in the realm of education which portrays Mombusho as controlling the latter in an extremely complete and authoritarian manner. Room in the interpretation has to be made for freedom and disobedience on the part of society.

The structure of the thesis is as follows: Chapter 1 briefly describes the prewar school system. The purpose is to provide the reader with the general framework and not to trace the evolution of the entrance examination *system* in the history of Japan's modern education.⁷ Chapter 2 examines the

⁷ The system history begins early in the Meiji period and is one of tedious detail with differences in each track. For our purposes, it is sufficient to note that the Mombusho

consequences of entrance examinations beyond formal education. Chapter 3 discusses the influence of the tests on formal education and Mombusho's efforts at reform. It also investigates the interaction between Mombusho and society. Chapter 4 analyzes the demand-supply gap in post-elementary education.

The purpose of this study is to clarify the influence of entrance examinations and some aspects of the government-society relationship in prewar Japan. Historical considerations aside, such an undertaking is also relevant to understanding the tightness of the examinations' grasp on education and society today.

Orders in mid-Meiji concerning each type of post-elementary school provided for the use of examinations as a means of selecting entrants. There is ample documentation for a system history in: Mombusho, ed., *Meiji ikô kyôiku seido hattatsu shi* (Mombushi, 1939), and Kindai Nihon kyôiku seido shiryô hensankai, *Kindai Nihon Kyôiku Seido Shiryô* (Kodansha, 1956-1959). For accounts in Japanese, see: Ikeda Susumu, "Nihon no nyûgaku seido no enkaku," *Kyoto Daigaku kyôiku gakubu kiyô* v. 4 (1958), pp. 96-124 and Masuda Koichi, *Nyûgaku shiken: kako kara genzai made* (Minshû kyôiku kyôkai, 1958).

CHAPTER 1
THE SCHOOL SYSTEM IN PREWAR JAPAN

The story of Japan's national school system begins early in the Meiji period. Starting with the Education System Order (*Gakusei*) of 1872, the system was constantly in flux for the next four decades. It is generally agreed, however, that the educational structure was consolidated by the late Meiji or the early Taisho (1912-1926) period. It is not my intention to trace the system's evolution. For our purposes, a basic familiarity with the general framework of the system in its mature stage, and the differences with the postwar school system, is essential.⁸

The upshot of several government orders and numerous revisions by the late Meiji period was an extremely complex, multi-track school system. Minor structural changes continued during the Taisho and the prewar Showa (1926-1989) periods. For us, however, these are of little significance,

⁸ For historical accounts of Japan's education system, see: Kaigo Tokiomi, *Japanese Education: Its Past and Present* (Tokyo, Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai, 1965); Ministry of Education (Tokyo), *Japan's Modern Education System* (1980); Department of Education, Tokyo, *A General Survey of Education in Japan* (1926 and 1933); Mombusho, *Gakusei hachijūnen shi* (1954); and Mombusho, *Gakusei kyūjūnen shi* (1964).

as are many of the complicated details in the official system charts. The general framework of the system from the late Meiji period to 1941 resembled the simplified system chart for 1919 (Figure 1 at the end of this chapter).⁹

As in Japan today, compulsory education began at age six. Tuition was made free from 1900, and the duration of the ordinary elementary school (*jinjô shô gakkô*) course was extended from four to six years in 1908.¹⁰ Elementary schools were coeducational, and the attendance rate for school age children was over 90% from 1902. By 1909, the rate had reached 98% and remained over 99% from 1920.¹¹ Textbooks were standardized, and the curriculum included Japanese language, Japanese history, geography, arithmetic, science, drawing, singing, physical education and sewing for girls.

By the Taisho period, most students proceeded to some form of post-elementary education. Unlike the compulsory, single-track junior high school in postwar Japan (Figure 2), prewar students had to choose from several tracks. No examination was required to enter the two-year higher

⁹ Detailed official charts can be found in Mombusho, *Gakusei hachijûnen shi*, pp. 1026-1033; Mombusho, *Gakusei kyujûnen shi*, pp. 583-591; and in Ministry of Education (Tokyo), *Japan's Modern Education*, pp. 429-449.

¹⁰ The term 'ordinary' was used to distinguish the compulsory years from the non-compulsory higher elementary school. In this thesis, 'elementary schools' is used to mean ordinary elementary schools.

¹¹ Mombusho, *Gakusei hachijûnen shi*, pp. 1036-1038.

elementary school (*kôtô shô gakkô*). Affordable for all, these schools offered manual training, agriculture, commerce and domestic science in addition to the elementary school curriculum. Entry into these schools did not preclude a student from applying for middle school or girls' high school entrance examinations. In fact, these schools were often viewed by students and parents as additional preparation for secondary school entrance examinations.

Secondary schools (*chûtô gakkô*) included the middle schools for boys (*chû gakkô*), ordinary course of higher schools (equivalent to middle school), the girls' high schools (*kôtô jo gakko* or *jo gakkô*), and the vocational schools (*jitsugyô gakkô*). Each secondary school had its own entrance examinations. For boys, the five-year middle schools were the preferred option. These schools were the initial step in the elite track that led to the universities. Middle school students studied morals, civics, Japanese language, Chinese classics, history, geography, a foreign language, mathematics, science, technical/vocational studies, drawing, music, practical work, and physical education. Rigorous training in academic subjects took precedence over vocational courses, which were generally offered as electives.

Girls' high schools were more diverse in character compared to the middle schools. In addition to the academic courses, the curriculum covered domestic science, sewing, handicraft, child care, and ethics for women. The mandatory school program would take four to five years. Students could

choose between a regular academic course or a domestic course with less academic emphasis. The majority of entry applications were to the former.

Vocational schools trained students in technical skills required for a variety of trades. This category of secondary schools was the most diverse as it comprised commercial, agricultural, nautical and other technical institutions. These schools held lower status than the other tracks, but competition to enter government and some private vocational schools was high. Vocational schools gained popularity as unemployment of higher school and university graduates became a periodic problem from the early Showa period.

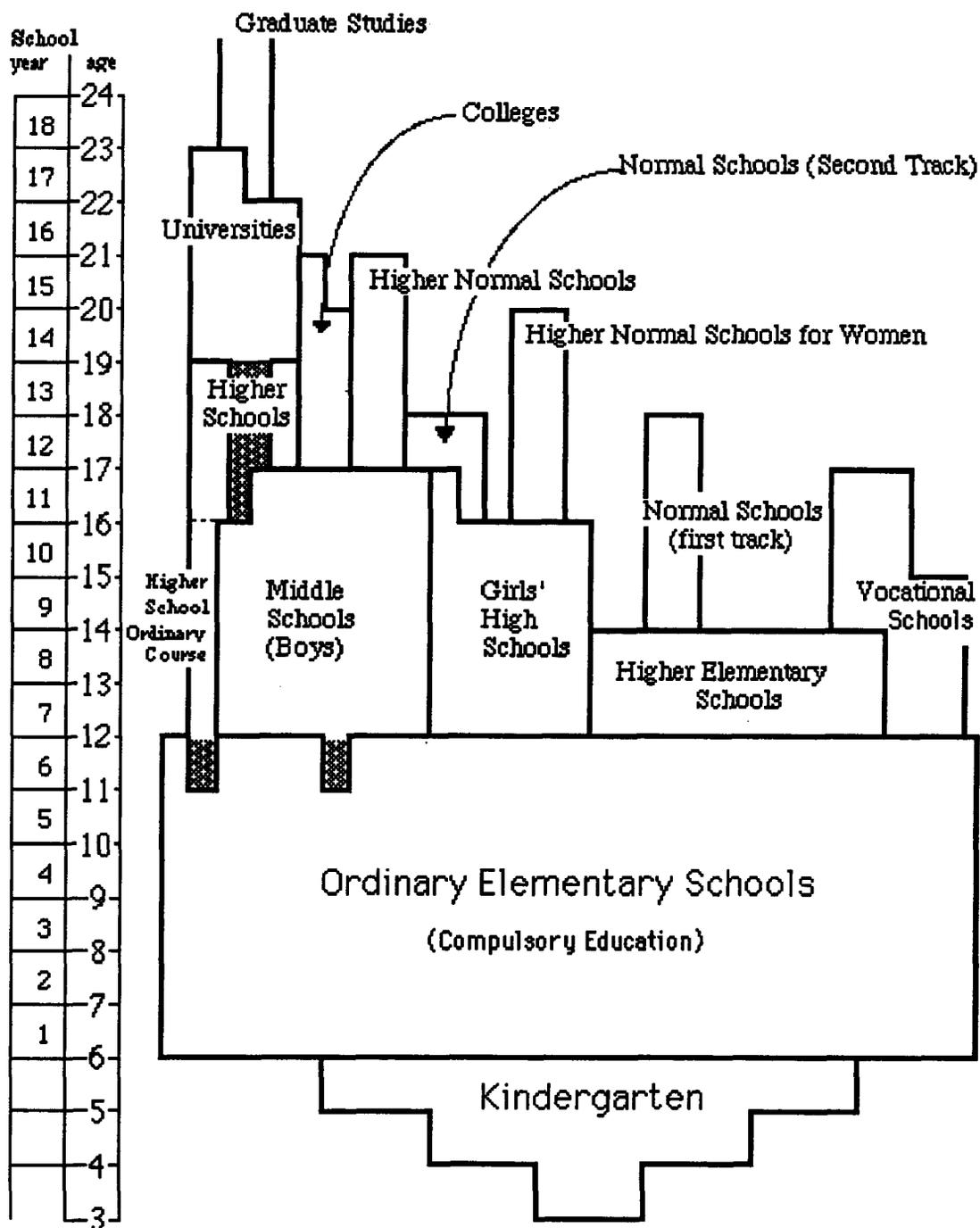
Post-secondary educational opportunities for boys not in middle schools and for all girls consisted primarily of normal schools (*shihan gakkō*). Some secondary institutions and higher elementary schools provided postgraduate or research courses after completion of the regular course. Some of these courses and all the normal schools required entrance examinations. In addition to normal schools, middle school graduates could proceed to private colleges (*sermon gakkō*) or to the three-year higher schools (*kôtō gakkō*) that led to the imperial universities. From 1918, colleges matching certain standards could attain recognition as universities. These private universities usually established their own higher schools. Selection methods at these higher institutions were also entrance examinations conducted individually by each school. Higher school graduates entered

universities without an examination, except in the case of popular departments such as medicine and law.

The establishment of part-time youth schools (*seinen gakkō*) in 1935 was the only structural modification to the school system between 1919 and 1940. Separate for girls and boys, these post-elementary institutions provided vocational training for working youths. Entry was without an examination and could be after completion of elementary or higher elementary school. Girls could attend until age 17 and boys until age 19. In 1939, these schools were made compulsory for 12-19 year old boys not attending any other school.

Such was the general framework of the school system from the Taisho to the prewar Showa period. Structurally the system was considerably different from the system today. However, the following pages will show that there were considerable similarities in the effects of entrance examinations in pre- and postwar Japan.

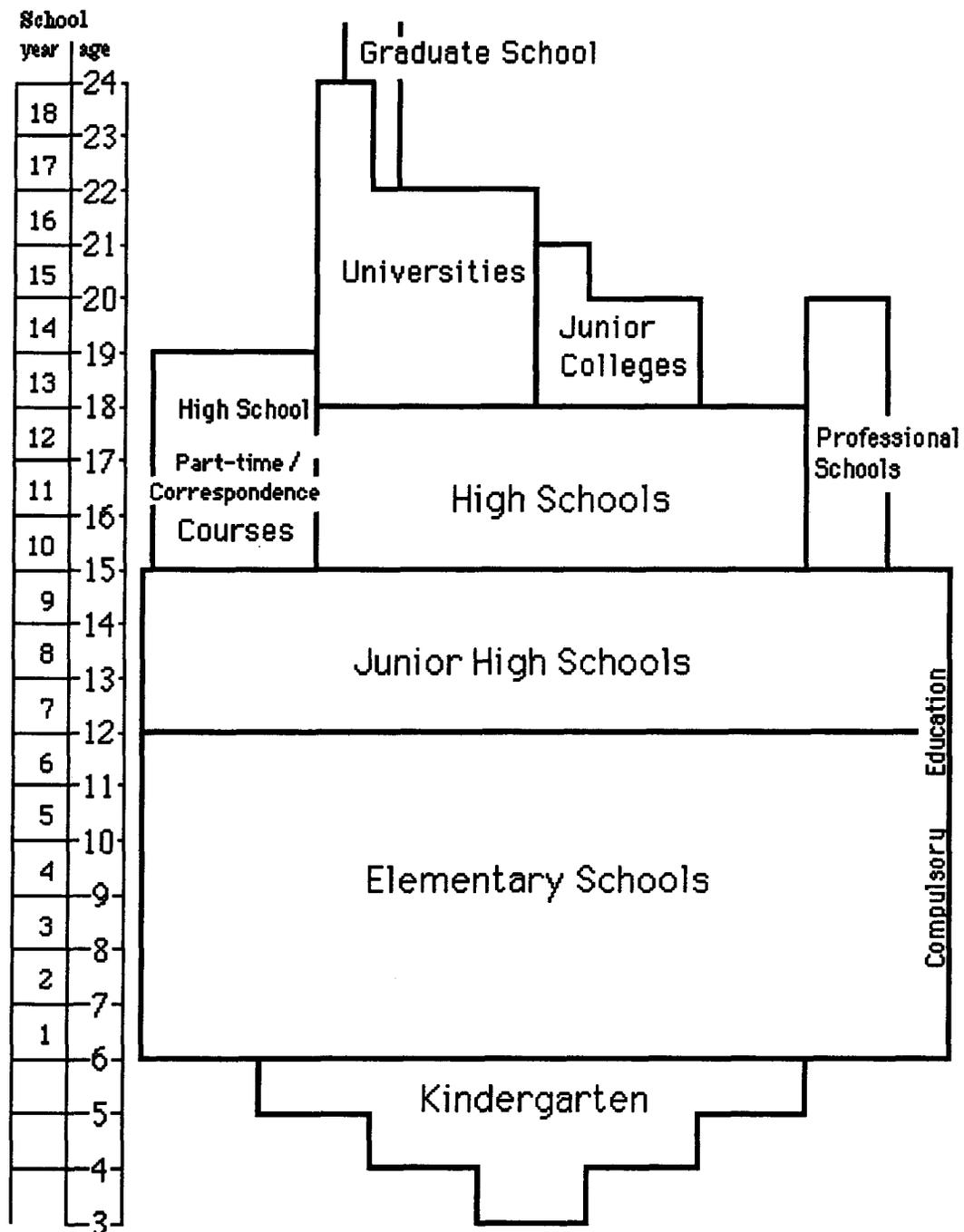
Fig.1 Japan's Prewar School System (1919)



■ preparatory course leading to the specific school the course was offered by.

Source: Compiled by author. Based on Mombusho, *Gakusei kûjûnenshi*, p. 588 and Ministry of Education, *Japan's Modern Educational System*, p.441.

Fig. 2. Japan's Postwar School System



Source: Compiled by author. Based on Mombusho, Gakusei kyūjūnen shi, (1964), pp. 590-591.

CHAPTER 2

FROM *JUKEN ZASSHI* TO SUICIDE: THE CONSEQUENCES OF ENTRANCE EXAMINATIONS BEYOND FORMAL EDUCATION

The effects of entrance examinations can be broadly divided into those within and those beyond formal education. The former category comprises the tests' influence on actual instruction at schools. Preparatory education (*jumbi kyôiku*)--teaching geared towards preparing students for the entrance examinations of the schools at the next level--and the effects of this education on the students' lives come under this category. However, the influence of the examinations is not limited to formal learning. The tests affect the students' lives beyond the classroom, and their social consequences are numerous. These affects outside the classroom are categorized in this paper as those beyond formal education. The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate the influential nature of prewar entrance examinations in the sense that they had already produced many of the phenomena beyond formal education that characterize entrance examination competition in postwar Japan.

Several phenomena that are the subject of this chapter affected fewer students than did the consequences related to formal education. Whereas preparatory education at the

elementary level affected even those students who did not aim to enter difficult schools, these phenomena largely concerned those who did attempt to enter competitive institutions. It is nevertheless important to examine these aspects, for they constitute part of the total picture of the educational and social influence of entrance examinations. They also show a continuity in the effects of entrance examinations from the prewar to the postwar period. It should be noted, however, that these consequences did extend beyond those who actually attended middle school. Several girls' high schools and vocational schools were as competitive as the middle schools. Moreover, anyone able to pass the middle school graduation equivalency test was eligible to sit for the higher school and higher normal school entrance examinations. In terms of the education system charts, it means that proceeding to a higher elementary or vocational school did not preclude one from the elite track to the university. The fact that many tried and some succeeded is evident from Mombusho directives in 1935 that made it harder for vocational school graduates to proceed to higher institutions.¹²

Juken Zasshi

Juken zasshi are magazines aimed at students preparing to take entrance examinations. In postwar Japan, they are

¹² Ikeda, *Nyûgaku seido*, p. 122-123.

considered to be indispensable by the *jukensei* (students preparing for or taking an entrance examination). They also constitute a significant portion of the industry that depends on entrance examinations (*juken sangyô*). Examination preparation magazines were already an integral part of the examination industry and the *jukensei*'s world in the prewar period. Thus, this *juken* literature requires our attention as an important aspect of the influence exerted by entrance examinations.

Juken zasshi targeted at youths preparing for post-secondary school entrance examination were in existence since the late Meiji period.¹³ Their prototype was the *Tokyo yûgaku annai* (A guide to studying in Tokyo). First

¹³ Most of the prewar *juken zasshi* are not easily accessible now. Kimura Shoshu, in *Shônen Bungaku shi Meiji hen* (Dowa Shunju sha, 1949), discusses some Meiji period youth magazines, but not entrance examinations. A 16 volume collection of Meiji to prewar Showa examination magazines is now being compiled and is much awaited: Ogawa Toshio et al., eds., *Kindai Nihon Kyôiku sôsho*, Part V, *Shingaku annai* (Nihon tosho senta). The following is summarized from: "Myônen no jukensei no tame ni - Showa saisho no jukenkai no taisei o hôzu" (A report for next year's *jukensei* on the general trends of the examination world in the beginning of the Showa period), *Chûgaku sekai* no. 30:7 (1927), pp. 2-10; Amano, *Shiken*, pp. 231-238; Takeuchi Yo, "Jukensei moyu Meiji no shojin," *Nihon Keizai shimbun*, 3 February, 1991; Arase Yutaka, "Mass Communication Between the Two World Wars," *Developing Economies* 5:4 (December 1967), pp. 755-6. To my knowledge, the only English work that has significantly used some of these youth periodicals, though in a different context, is E. H. Kinmonth, *The Self Made Man in Meiji Japanese Thought: From Samurai to Salaryman* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1981).

published in the 1890s, the magazine gave its readers useful tips on studying in Tokyo to prepare for entrance examinations to higher institutions. It contained a section on the entrance regulations of several institutions and a few sample questions from entrance examinations of leading government schools. However, this magazine was concerned more with assisting students to adjust to life in Tokyo than the examinations themselves, since the success rate to enter higher school was still relatively high compared to the late Meiji period onwards. Between 1896 and 1908 the rate declined gradually from 56.0% to 20.5% and was between 10% to 18% in the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁴ The rate is higher in the earlier period because the middle schools had not yet expanded enough to produce sufficient graduates to create severe competition.

The first magazine to directly address entrance examinations was the irregular special issue of *Chūgaku Sekai* (Middle school world). Titled *Saikin juken kai* (Contemporary Examination World), this issue appeared twice or thrice per year from 1907. From the Taisho period onwards, there appeared some 30 different magazines, such as *Katei to gakkō* (Home and Schools) and *Juken to gakusei* (Examinations and Students), that were devoted completely or

¹⁴ Annual Report for the Minister of State for Education, Tokyo, nos. 28-59 (1900-1932), Masuda, *Nyūgaku shiken*, p. 117. Severe competition was, needless to say, a crucial reason for the effects of entrance examinations. It receives further treatment in Chapter 4.

partially to entrance examinations . These magazines contained accounts from successful students, hints on how to study, how many hours to study per day, and which preparation reference books to read how many times. Also common was additional advice on how to stay refreshed by taking walks and applying cold cloths to one's body, as was caution against the distractions of one's surroundings. Students seem to have been among the regular patrons of Tokyo's red-light districts. Some magazines actually provided useful information about specific higher schools and their entrance procedures. It seems, though, that most were not examination preparation magazines in the strict sense of providing study material or questions. Rather, they were advisory guides that helped create the concept of an ideal life of a *jukensei* or a *rônin* much like the one that still exists. The ideal *jukensei* concentrated singularly on his studies. He woke up to his books before dawn and did not part with them until late at night. In general, anything associated with pleasure was not for his world of effort and diligence. While a visit to a prostitute or an involved relationship with a girl could be devastating, even masturbation was considered to decrease one's intelligence and the ability to memorize.

A somewhat different brand of *juken* literature targeted at applicants to higher schools were the reference books or study guides (*sankôsho*). In existence since the mid-Meiji period, these guides provided study material and practice questions. Some covered all the subjects tested in higher

school entrance examinations, while others specialized in a particular area. Some of these were actually quite useful in preparing for the tests. There seems to have been quite an abundance of these guides, for many *juken zasshi* often had a section on selecting from the available references.¹⁵

Apart from the wide variety of *juken* literature for those attempting to enter higher schools, there appeared similar periodicals aimed at elementary school students preparing for secondary school entrance examinations in the prewar Showa period. Shôgakkan published curriculum review magazines for first to sixth grade students.¹⁶ These were simply titled *Shôgaku rokunensei* (Sixth grade elementary students), or *Shôgaku gonensei* (Fifth grade elementary students). The sixth grade supplementary reader was predominantly a preparation magazine for entrance examinations. It included sections such as "Key points for examination preparation," and "How to prepare a *juken* strategy for guaranteed success." The readers could also mail their answers to practice questions back to the publisher for marking and advice.

Secondary school entrance examinations were also a regular feature of *Nihon shôgakusei shimbun* (Japan elementary

¹⁵ "Jukenyô sankôsho no sentaku" (Selecting reference books for entrance examinations), *Chûgaku sekai* no. 9:8 (1906).

¹⁶ These are discussed briefly in Akiyama Masami, ed., *Shôgakusei Shimbun ni miru senjika no kodomotachi*, 3 vols. (Nihon Tosho Senta, 1919), p. 15.

school students newspaper).¹⁷ Each issue contained a study corner (*benkyô shitsu*) with a skill testing section (*chikara dameshi*) explicitly aimed at sixth graders preparing for secondary school entrance examinations. There were questions on the five major subjects: Japanese, Japanese history, arithmetic, geography, and science. Answers were provided in the following issue or in the Sunday edition.¹⁸

From October 1936, every Sunday edition of *Shôgakusei shimbun* carried a mock examination for its fifth and sixth grade readers. Subscribers were encouraged to attempt these tests as they would an actual entrance examination. Answers were printed the following Sunday. Students could also mail their answers for correction by the paper.¹⁹ One wonders how the young students felt about spending part of their Sundays writing these tests. It is most likely that the parents were more keen on having their children do these mock tests.

Like the *juken* literature for the more senior students, *Shôgakusei shimbun* went beyond academic assistance. It carried a variety of advice for the serious *jukensei* and for

¹⁷ Established in 1936, this paper was published daily, except Mondays. At one stage, it had a circulation of one million. *Shôgakusei Shimbun ni miru* is a collection of articles from this newspaper. The paper changed its name several times. The title *Shôgakusei shimbun* is used in this thesis.

¹⁸ *Shogakusei shimbun*, 21 September, 1936, in *Shôgakusei shimbun ni miru*, v. 1, p. 6 and p. 2.

¹⁹ "Mogi shiken" (Mock test), *Shogakusei shimbun*, 11 October, 1936, in *Shôgakusei shimbun ni miru*, v. 1, pp. 14-15.

parents. We see dietary advice from a medical expert.²⁰ He explains that it is difficult to study with a stomach full of delicious food, for "the stomach and intestines require a lot of blood to digest it and the head becomes empty." This makes one sleepy. As a solution, the doctor recommends easily digestible foods over oily meat and fish, *tempura*, and other deep fried food. Among non-vegetarian foods he sanctions raw fish and chicken. He further cautions that lack of exercise during examination preparation can lead to constipation, which interferes with studies. Interestingly, though, instead of a little exercise, the doctor endorses only vegetables and fruits with high fiber content.

The newspaper also carried other advice. Night snacks and heaters were not good during examination preparation. One had to sit up straight for efficient studying.²¹ For the examination day, there was advice on how to dress, how to conduct oneself, how to relax before and during the test, and what to take to the examination centre.²²

²⁰ "Benkyôchû no tabemono" (Food while studying), *Shogakusei shimbun*, 13 March, 1938, in *Shôgakusei shimbun ni miru*, v. 1, p. 69.

²¹ "Chishiki no peiji" (The knowledge page), *Shogakusei shimbun*, 13 December, 1938, in *Shôgakusei shimbun ni miru*, v. 1, p. 69.

²² "Kittô nyûgaku dekiru kokorogamae" (Preparedness for definite success at entrance examinations), *Shogakusei shimbun*, 7 March, 1938 and 3 March, 1938, in *Shôgakusei shimbun ni miru*, v. 1, pp. 72-73 and 209.

Juken periodicals aimed at elementary and secondary school students were a direct consequence of entrance examinations. For some, these magazines were a source of income. For others they provided a service that became essential for everyone, for no one wanted to be left behind. The fact that so many periodicals existed and that the students were willing to buy them is one indicator of the anxiety encountered by the students preparing for entrance examinations. Their popularity points to the importance, and thus the influence, of entrance examinations in the students' lives.

Ranking of Schools and "Escalators" Schools

Ranking of schools within each track was intensified by entrance examinations. In general, government schools ranked above private schools, and prestige increased with the age of an institution. Entrance examinations, however, were a more concrete yardstick to measure the standard of a school and determine its relative rank. The criteria were not only the difficulty of a school's examination, but also the school's capability to send as many of its graduates as possible to a prestigious higher school. Thus, a position achieved by age was not always permanent.

In the Meiji period, this hierarchy had been largely limited to higher schools.²³ By the Taisho period, however, it had spread to secondary schools as well. At the higher level, the First Higher School (Dai Ichi Kôtô Gakkô, or Ichikô) ranked the highest. This schools was considered to provide the best chance to proceed to the department of one's choice at the Tokyo Imperial University.²⁴ At the secondary level, though the average entrance rate was rarely below 50% and often above 60%, it was regularly below 10% at the two boys middle schools administered by the national government. The story was much the same at other prestigious middle schools and government-run girls' high schools.²⁵ These schools with a low success rate ranked highest within their

²³ Amano, *Shiken*, pp. 228-229, 294.

²⁴ "Tôdai e tôdai e to shio no gotoki kôkô sotsugyôsei: kabetsu ni suru to ika ga ooi" (Higher school graduates rush to Tokyo University like the tide: Medical department is the most popular), *Miyako shimbun*, 26 March, 1926, in *Shimbun Shuroku Taisho Shi*, v. 14, p. 113. The Third Higher School in Kyoto was the nation's second most prestigious. Kyoto city, ed., *Kyoto no rekishi*, v. 8 (Kyoto, Kyoto shi hensanjo, 1968), p. 523.

²⁵ Department of Education (Japan), *Annual Report of the Minister of State for Education*, provides separate entrance rate statistics for the government schools attached to the Tokyo and Hiroshima Higher Normal Schools. The rest are categorized together as public (local government run) and private middle schools. See also: "Sukuwarenu chû jo gakkô no shiken jigoku: shigansha ga boshû no jû bai" (The unresolved middle and girls' high school examination hell: Number of applicants ten time those to be admitted), *Tokyo Nichinichi shimbun*, 1 February, 1928, in *Shimbun shûsei Showa shi no shôgen*, v. 2, p. 45.

category. They were also most successful in placing their graduates into popular higher institutions. This kind of ranking meant that considerable significance was attached to the last school from which one had graduated if one sought a white-collar job. For girls, graduation from a prestigious girls' high schools increased the chances of marrying into a respectable household. Some rich parents only considered graduates of Ochanomizu Girls School as prospective brides for their sons.²⁶

Severe entrance competition and ranking are like two sides of a coin. Higher competition to enter some schools created ranking, but ranking caused and perpetuated excessive competition to enter the most prestigious schools. Excessive competition, on the other hand, was responsible for some of the more extreme effects of entrance examinations discussed later in this chapter.

In prewar Japan we see also the prototype of another phenomena related to entrance examinations that characterizes some educational institutions today: the attached (*fuzoku*) schools. Often called "escalator" type schools, these are lower level schools attached to a private university. Most are high schools, but a few extend all the way down to the elementary level. They are called escalators because entry

²⁶ "Shusshinkô ga kekkon no jôken to naru keikô" (Graduation from a certain school a condition for marriage), *Yomiuri shimbun*, 6 March, 1917, in *Shimbun Shuroku Taisho Shi*, v. 5, pp. 88-89.

at a lower level almost guarantees acceptance at the next level all the way to the university. These escalator type attached schools trace their roots to the prewar period. Preceding their regular five year course, some middle schools had a one-or two-year preparatory course equivalent to the last year of elementary school. Ichikô and almost all private higher schools had a seven-year higher school course. The first four years replaced middle school and were called the ordinary course, and the last three were the regular higher course.²⁷ Most private universities, such as Waseda and Keio, had attached lower level schools, as did the higher normal schools for both men and women. In effect, successful entry into most of these preparatory or ordinary courses and the attached schools assured admission to the next higher level. As in postwar Japan, competition to enter these attached schools was high.

Rônin, Yobikô, and Tokyo.

The practice of *rônin* -- studying after graduation until one can pass the entrance examination to a desired school --

²⁷ These are explained in the middle and higher school sections of each *Annual Report of the Minister of State for Education*. See for example, no. 59, 1931-1932, pp. 152-153 and 173-174. In Figure 1, these are denoted by a shaded pattern.

originated in prewar Japan.²⁸ It also illustrates the influence of entrance examinations on the lives of the students. A contemporary reform minded critic, Kubota Yuzuru, described the situation in 1899 as follows: "At present, it is impossible to determine how many thousands are waiting to enter middle school after completing elementary school, and to enter higher school or other professional school after middle school...On the whole, there is a shortage of educational institutions and no matter how many new schools are set up, they will not be an obstacle in the way of educational reform."²⁹

This sort of sentiment also underscores the problems and tasks created by the spread of elementary education, for it meant an increase of students in a position to advance to the next step on the ladder. It points to increased popular demand for post-elementary education, while supply did not keep pace. This is a crucial issue in explaining why the pervasive influence of entrance examination originated and persisted. The issue will repeatedly come forth as we examine the effects of the examinations. It also raises the question of why there was an increased demand. This demand and the reasons behind it receive separate attention in chapter four.

²⁸ The original meaning of *rônin* is a masterless or an unaffiliated samurai. In the case of youths waiting to enter a school, it points to their status as unaffiliated students.

²⁹ Ikeda, *Nyûgaku seido*, p. 107.

The routinization of the practice of *rônin* is evident from official statistics. *Mombusho nempô* (Annual Report of the Ministry of Education) indicates the percentage of middle school students "studying at home" after graduation. In 1927, it was 18.2%. It reached 26.5% in 1929 and stayed above 25% through most of the 1930s.³⁰ Some of these youths may have been studying for a vocational qualification examination, but many were *rônin*. There were also those graduates who had not taken up any career. Still others were attending "miscellaneous schools." Some graduates in these categories were probably *rônin* as well. Though the exact figure cannot be determined, there seem to have been a significant number of *rônin* in prewar Japan. This is also testified to by the demand for the *yobikô* discussed below.

The practice of *rônin* was mostly visible among secondary school graduates waiting to enter higher schools. We see, however, a similar phenomena among elementary school graduates as well. Most students entering middle or girls' high school did so immediately after completing the six-year ordinary elementary school as they were supposed to. Inevitably, there were some who could not pass the entrance examination of a desirable school. Some tried again after additional studying while attending higher elementary school. In 1927, 26% of the students entering middle school, and 16% of those entering the regular course of girls' high school

³⁰ Shimizu Yoshihiro, *Shiken*, Iwanami, 1957, p. 11.

had completed one or two years of higher elementary school.³¹ These students were not true *rônin* because they were affiliated students in an official track of the school system. What they were doing, however, was the same thing as the *rônin* - studying extra years to enter the desirable track. Unlike the real *rônin* waiting to enter higher schools, these quasi *rônin* were fortunate to have a "waiting" track in the school system.

The existence of *rônin* without an official track in which to wait and study necessitated the *yobikô*, or entrance-examination preparation schools.³² These institutions catered to middle school graduates and anyone else who sought to study privately and enter a higher institution or its attached preparatory course. The situation regarding these unofficial, private preparatory schools around the end of the Meiji period is described critically by *Kyôiku Jiron*, a contemporary educational journal. It explains: Many instructors of higher schools and colleges take on part-time jobs at such preparatory schools. "There is a popular notion among students that it pays to find out which instructor of a particular higher school is teaching at a *yobikô* and enter it to prepare for the entrance examination of that school." Though such schools and their

³¹ *Annual Report of the Minister of State for Education*, no. 56, p. 143 and p. 153.

³² *Yobikô* are different from preparatory *juku* in that they enroll students not attending a formal school, while the latter are typically extra classes for those in school.

instructors are able to earn much money, whether the schools actually benefit the student is dubious. Typically "100 to 150 students cram into one classroom, smell foul air, and try to listen to the lecturer, while some have to do so from the hallway. Often there is pushing and shoving and it is impossible to listen. Even if the lesson is audible, there are rarely any desks or even space for the students to take notes." The journal expresses pity for the students who, "in their desperate desire to enter a higher school, enroll in such a school, thinking that it will be of some assistance in preparing for entrance examinations, ...but end up returning to their *geshuku* (quarters rented in a private home) totally exhausted from its chaotic sessions."³³ Whether all the *yobikô* were of such character is hard to say. There was a "yobikô rush" in Kanda (a Tokyo ward) in the Taisho period.³⁴ Many of the now famous private universities such as Meiji University also managed lucrative *yobikô* besides their own regular courses.³⁵ One suspects that with competition, some would have had to improve their quality to stay in business.

³³ *Kyôiku Jiron*, no. 875, quoted in Ikeda, *Nyûgaku seido*, p. 114.

³⁴ Takeuchi, "Jukensei moyu."

³⁵ "Meiji kôtô yobikô gakusei boshû" an advertisement by Meiji for its *yobikô* in Kanda that was put along side the advertisement for the Meiji University course in *Taisho dai zasshi* (Ryudo Shuppan, 1978), p. 272.

The issue of Kanda brings us to yet another influence that entrance examinations had on youths preparing to take them; they drew those students to Tokyo. This process started in the early Meiji period and was a considerable burden to many students and their families. We have already mentioned the *Tokyo yûgaku annai*. One scholar cites an account of a student who in the early days of Meiji had to travel for days by ship just to reach Tokyo and apply for entrance.³⁶ Until the mid-Meiji period, some students attending local middle schools would willingly quit and move to a *yobikô* in Tokyo. These schools, with a narrower focus, were seen as a better way to prepare for higher school entrance examinations compared to the as yet evolving and inadequately manned local middle schools. This problem was partially caused by the lack of an official connection between middle school graduation and higher schools. From the late Meiji period, however, that link gradually developed with the improvement in the quality of regional middle schools. It was further strengthened by Mombusho reforms in 1896 that opened the possibility of entering a higher school by recommendation from one's middle. With this connection and improvement of middle schools, the phenomena of quitting middle school in favor of a *yobikô* disappeared.³⁷

³⁶ Karasawa Tomitaro, *Gakusei no rekishi* (Sobunsha, 1955), p. 57-58. For the Meiji period, see also: Amano, *Shiken no shakai shi*, pp. 267-70.

³⁷ Ikeda, *Nyûgaku seido*, p. 104-5.

For *rōnin*, however, Tokyo always remained the place to be. Adjusting, staying, and attending a preparatory school in Tokyo was expensive, but was the only option since most *yobikō* with any credibility at all were located in Tokyo. Studying at home in the country was seen as a disadvantage over one's competitors studying in the more cultured and competitive environment of Tokyo. The top ranking higher institutions and the most prized jobs were in Tokyo as well. However, coming to Tokyo did not always produce the best results. We have already mentioned the cautionary advice of the *juken zasshi* against the city's red light district. Many students led lavish and degenerate lives at the expense of their parents.³⁸ Some private companies and serious private schools even offered deals to parents to manage their children's money while they studied in Tokyo.³⁹

Shiken Jigoku and Extra Efforts

"Examination hell" (*shiken jigoku*) is a general term that includes all the mental and physical hardships faced by students preparing to take entrance examinations. In this section we will briefly examine the agony of those in the elite track of middle school who were preparing to proceed to

³⁸ See: Amano, *Shiken no shakai shi*, p. 268; Takeuchi, "Jukensei moyu."

³⁹ Amano, *Shiken no shakai shi*, pp. 268-270.

higher school.⁴⁰ This examination hell was a direct result of the severe entrance examination competition (*nyûgaku nan* or *nyûnan*). The number of applicants to public (government) higher schools was routinely nine or ten times the number of places available.⁴¹ The competition also extended to private colleges and higher schools attached to private universities.⁴² This suggests that examination hell at the

⁴⁰ The tough times faced by these elites in the Meiji period have been mentioned by Amano, *Shiken no shakai shi*, and Kinmonth, *Self Made Man*. The examination hell faced by elementary school students applying to secondary schools is more significant in showing the pervasiveness of the examinations' influence. This lower level examination hell is discussed along with preparatory education in Chapter three.

⁴¹ "Hônin o yurusanu gakusei no shiken jigoku" (Examination hell that can not be left wild), 19 March, 1927, *Tokyo Asahi shimbun*, in *Shimbun shûsei Showa shi no shôgen*, v. 1, pp. 118-9. This article explains that examination hell was becoming a social problem.

⁴² The number of applicants to private institutions was usually three to five times the spaces available; *Ibid.* In the case of Waseda, until 1909, anyone who had graduated from any public or private middle school was eligible to enter without an entrance examination. The university took pride in maintaining such an open door policy till then, which suggests that others such as Keio required examinations from an earlier date. Beginning with its School of Science and Engineering in that year, by 1918 competitive entrance examinations were made mandatory for all its departments. The success rate was typically from 20% to 30%. The University history cites the increasing demand for this unavoidable change in policy. See Waseda Daigaku Daigaku shi henshûjo, ed., *Waseda Daigaku hyakunen shi*, Waseda University Press, 1982-1987, v., p. 735; v. 2 pp. 16-17, 310; v. 3, pp. 63, 73, 91, 221, 268.

secondary to higher school transition extended beyond those aiming at the elite higher schools.

The hazardous influence of this entrance examination competition on the lives of *rônin* and *jukensei* ranged from excessive anxiety, worry, and depression to nervous breakdowns, severe damage to health, and in some cases suicide.⁴³ A contemporary critic also cites examination hell as one of the factors leading to suicide from failure.⁴⁴ Having to confront one's parents, relatives, and friends was not helpful either. Many students dropped out of middle school, or even after they entered higher school, due to the ill health they inherited from the ordeal of examination preparation.⁴⁵ Examination hell is also the theme of a short story written in 1918, in which a *rônin* commits suicide on his way back home to the country after failing the entrance examination of Ichikô twice, while his younger brother succeeds.⁴⁶

In light of the anguish caused by examination hell, it is not surprising that the examinees resorted to the extra support of magazines and the additional effort at preparatory

43 "Hônin o yurusanu gakusei no shiken jigoku."

44 Takada Sanae, "Jisatsu mondai to rakudaisei mondai" (The problems of student suicides and failures) *Gakusei* (Oct. 1915), in *Taisho dai zasshi* (Ryudo shuppan, 1978), pp. 293-294.

45 Ibid.

46 Kume Masao, "Jukensei no shuki" (Notes of a Student Examinee), summarized in *Introduction to Contemporary Literature* (Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai, 1939), pp. 108-111.

schools. Some also hired private tutors (*katei kyôshi*). These tutors were usually university or higher school students.⁴⁷ Extra assurance was also sought by other means such as good luck talisman for entrance examinations. In an extreme case, students repeatedly stole the name plate of Prime Minister Hamaguchi, a "successful individual," in hope of similar success on entrance examinations.⁴⁸ Some parents regularly visited a shrine or a temple to pray for their child's success.⁴⁹ A mother even made her son live in Osaka for over a year, for she felt that he needed to breathe the cultured air of a city to compete fairly with city students. To have her extra effort acknowledged, she went and told her story to the principal of the school her son had applied to.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ "Katei kyôshi" (Private tutors), *Jiji shimpô*, 7 August, 1923, in *Shimbun shûroku Taisho shi*, ed. Nakajima Kenzo, v. 11, p. 289. Working as private tutors was an important source of income for many senior students. This is still true today.

⁴⁸ "Arataka na 'shiken pasu" no omamori rei" (A miraculous examination success talisman), *Yomiuri shimbun*, 24 January, 1929, in *Shimbun shûsei Showa shi no shôgen*, v. 2, p. 1928.

⁴⁹ "ko ni masaru oya no nayami" (Parents worry more than their children), *Osaka Asahi shimbun*, 26 Feb, 1922, in *Shimbun shûroku Taisho shi*, v. 10, p. 85. In Japan today, Dazaifu Shrine in Kyushu and Yushima Shrine in Tokyo are thought to bring success to examinees. Students who can, visit these shrines themselves. If relatives are travelling or living near these shrines, they often send a talisman.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Examination agony sometimes led to illegitimate efforts and other frauds. The use of stand-ins (*kaedama*) to take examinations seems to have been a headache for the schools.⁵¹ In extreme cases, examination questions were leaked out for money. This happened in Osaka in 1927.⁵² Desperate examinees and their parents were also susceptible to frauds such as private tutors or even older students faking to be school instructors and charging high tuition for lessons.⁵³ In general, however, such problems were not so common as to severely rattle the system.

Together, the phenomena discussed in this chapter depict the wide variety of influence that entrance examinations had in prewar Japan. Examinees bought preparatory magazines, spent additional year(s) studying at preparatory schools, hired private tutors, and sought extra support in a variety

⁵¹ "Kaedama ga nen nen ooku naru" (The number of stand-ins increasing year by year), *Hochi shimbun*, 20 March, 1917, in *Shimbun shûroku Taisho shi*, v. 5, p. 8, and "Jukensha ga kaedama" (Stand-in Examinees), *Kyushu nippo*, 18 April, 1929, in *Shimbun shûsei Showa shi no shôgen*, v. 3, p. 129. This problem still occurs periodically. A few years back, a father tried to take his daughter's entrance examination. He used a wig, wore make-up, and dressed as a girl, but was caught.

⁵² "Kôkô nyûshi mondai ga jizen ni Osaka de moreru" (Higher school entrance examination questions leaked prior to examinations in Osaka), *Osaka Asahi shimbun*, 9 April, 1927, in *Shimbun shûsei Showa shi no shôgen*, v. 1, p. 151.

⁵³ "Nise kyôju o nitatete jukensei o kû gakusei" (Students who use examination takers by pretending to be teachers), *Tokyo Asahi shimbun*, 8 July, 1936, in *Shimbun shûsei Showa shi no shôgen*, v. 10, p. 299.

of ways. The schools they applied to were ranked by entrance examinations. Preparation for the tests made life hellish. The examinations also produced a dependent industry - examination literature, *yobikô*, and private tuition. All these phenomena indicate the importance attached to entrance examinations by prewar *jukensei*. They also bear much similarity with the influence of entrance examinations beyond formal education in postwar Japan.

The consequences explained in this chapter are largely inherent potentials of entrance examinations. I call them inherent potentials since a system, which judges entry into prized institutions by competitive examinations of few hours without much regard to how the examinee spent the preceding year(s), by its very nature encourages the extra and extreme efforts even at the cost of time and health. Increase in the demand for education and excessive competition to enter some schools were crucial for the realization of these potentials. Before we discuss the social reasons behind the increase in demand, however, we must treat the effect of entrance examinations on formal education. In light of the nearly universal attendance rate at elementary schools, the effect on elementary education is particularly significant.

CHAPTER 3
PREPARATORY EDUCATION FOR ENTRANCE EXAMINATIONS
AND THE ATTEMPTS AT REFORM

By the Taisho period, apart from middle schools, institutions in the other two tracks of secondary education - the vocational schools and girls' high schools - employed entrance examinations as well.⁵⁴ Use of the examinations went beyond the elite girls' high schools attached to national normal schools. For example, in a 1914 instructional guide to prospective applicants to a prefectural girls' high school in Iwate, the entrance examination requirement is mentioned as a matter of course.⁵⁵ Even the private girls schools, generally less prestigious than local or national government schools, selected entrants by an examination. At one private academy in Kyoto, the success rate was one in two

⁵⁴ See "Chûgaku, jogakkô no nyûgaku shiken: tatakedomo hirakanu sono kômon, mongai ni wa shônenshōjo gun o nasu" (Middle and girls' high school entrance examinations: those gates do not open even if you knock, and there are crowds of boys and girls outside the gates), *Yomiuri shimbun*, 23 February, 1915, in *Shimbun shûroku Taisho shi*, v. 3, p. 81.

⁵⁵ Iwate kenritsu kyôiku senta, ed., *Iwate ken kyôiku shi shiryô 1914* (Morioka, 1989), v. 45, p. 123. For a vocational school reporting the use of entrance examinations, see *Iwate...1911*, v. 42, p. 207.

by the end of the Taisho period.⁵⁶ At a public girls' high school, it was one in almost four in 1933.⁵⁷ At the top ranking Ochanomizu Girls' High School the number of applicants routinely exceeded ten times the number of spaces available.⁵⁸

The influence of competitive secondary school entrance examinations on the formal education and the lives of elementary school students was extensive. Preparatory education (*jumbi kyôiku*) - education aimed at preparation for entrance examinations - at the elementary level was perhaps the most pervasive consequence of entrance examinations. As we will see, preparatory education was not merely limited to a select few. In fact it came to characterize general elementary instruction, particularly at the sixth grade, in prewar Japan.

The existence of preparatory education from prewar Japan is also another aspect in the long continuity of the consequences of entrance examinations. In postwar Japan, preparatory education at the elementary level is not an issue because junior high schools are compulsory. However, junior

⁵⁶ Kyoto Joshi Gakuen, ed., *Kyoto Joshi Gakuen sôritsu gojusshûnen kinen shi* (Kyoto, 1960), p. 58.

⁵⁷ *Showa niman nichi no zen kiroku*, v. 3 (Kodansha, 1989), p. 147.

⁵⁸ "Jûsû bai no nyûgaku shigan - Ochanomizu kôjokô" (Over ten times more applicants than spaces available - Ochanomizu Girls' High), *Yomiuri shimbun*, 14 February, 1916, in *Shimbun shûroku Taisho shi*, v. 4, p. 62. Ochanomizu was attached to the Higher Normal School for Women in Tokyo.

high and high schools are concerned about preparing their graduates for entrance examinations to the next level. In the final year at these schools, there is immense pressure on teachers to prepare the students well. Students often want to know if a certain topic is commonly tested on entrance examinations. "Do you want to enter that useless X school!" is often all the teacher needs to tell final year students misbehaving in class.⁵⁹

The content of Secondary School Entrance Examinations

In order to appreciate fully the influence of secondary school entrance examinations upon the education and lives of prewar elementary school students, an idea of the actual content of those examinations is essential. We need to be familiar with the subject material that was covered, the type of questions that were asked and the skills that were tested. We can examine the content of the tests through a prewar

⁵⁹ Thomas P. Rohlen has correctly argued that not all high schools in postwar Japan are concerned with entrance examination preparation. Education is fairly uniform until the junior high level where preparatory education affects almost all students. However, a de facto sorting occurs while entering high schools. Vocational and night high schools are the lowest ranked. Those students who can only pass the easy entrance examinations of these schools usually give up hope to enter a university. Therefore, these category of high schools do not engage in preparatory education. T. P. Rohlen, *Japan's High Schools* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1983).

study-guide for middle and girls' high school entrance examinations.⁶⁰ This comprehensive study aid provides many sample questions and advises on effective study techniques. It is a reliable source for our purpose, for it often cites actual questions from previous examinations at accredited secondary schools. *Shôgakusei shimbun*, the newspaper aimed at elementary school students, regularly provided practice questions, mock tests, and actual entrance examination questions. These questions are very similar in nature to those cited in the study-guide.⁶¹

The subjects tested were those covered in elementary school: Japanese (*kokugo*), geography, history (mostly Japanese), mathematics, and science. The study-guide gives extensive treatment to each subject. Rather than analyzing the various kinds of questions in each subject, for us it sufficient to note some common characteristics. The questions largely required remembering and recalling details and larger issues from the material covered in the prescribed elementary school curriculum. In history, for instance, multiple choice, matching, rearranging into chronological order, filling in the blanks, and reproducing short descriptions of issues described in the textbooks were the

⁶⁰ Washio Tomoharu et al., *Saikin mondai no keikô to chûgakkô jogakkô juken hiketsu* (Kyodo sha, 1931).

⁶¹ This newspaper is discussed in Chapter 2. See *Shogakusei shimbun ni miru*, v. 1, pp. 14-15, 74-74, and 206-207.

most common type of questions.⁶² For most of them, the compiler of the guidebook is able to give exact reference to a standard school text.⁶³ Of greater significance, is the guide's section on how to study.⁶⁴ Out of the necessity to choose from an excess of applicants, most schools asked much more than the students could remember. Entrance examinations of popular schools also had some very difficult questions that required much time to answer. Consequently, the study methods section of the guide stresses remembering as much of the vast material as possible and reviewing it many times to be able to answer quickly the maximum number of questions on the test. It tells of effective ways to memorize some of the plethora of material the students were held responsible for.

Advice from a middle school superintendent in 1924 to those recent graduates of elementary school preparing for secondary school entrance examinations provides further evidence regarding the type of questions and skills tested. The superintendent contends that the tests were changing in nature to those intended to gauge not only the students' memorization capability, but also their ability to imagine, think about and apply what they had learnt. Not "rote

⁶² Washio, *Saikin mondai*, pp. 90-107.

⁶³ Though this study-guide does not address itself to vocational school students, the text of an Iwate vocational school entrance examination depicts an almost complete similarity. See: *Iwate ken kyôiku shi shiryô 1911*, v. 42, p. 207-208. Moreover, it suggests that the pattern existed from much earlier than the year the guide appeared.

⁶⁴ Washio, *Saikin mondai*, pp. 125-135.

memorization" (*anki*) but "remembering the material in one's heart" (*kokoro ni oboeru*) was necessary to be able to answer the questions that were out of the ordinary. As an example of such a question that required application of what the student had memorized, the superintendent gave the case of a question in history which asked the examinees to rearrange three or four names of individuals in chronological order, for even if the textbook did not list them in that order, a student who really knew his material had to be able to answer it.⁶⁵ Though the superintendent tries to present it in a more sophisticated manner, he only ends up underscoring the factual memorization orientation of secondary school entrance examinations. The example he gives required exact memorization of the dates of historical figures. He makes one wonder about the nature of questions in earlier years if what he meant by a trend towards application oriented questions was questions like the one mentioned above.

Perhaps the strongest evidence of the amount and detail that the examinations required one to memorize is Mombusho's guidelines in 1929 concerning the content of secondary school entrance tests. The Ministry advised that the questions be made easier and "not be based merely on rote memorization, but rather on the understanding and imagination ability" of

⁶⁵ "Nyugaku shiken to katei e no chui" (Entrance examinations and advice to families), *Yomiuri shimbun*, 5 January, 1924, in *Shimbun shûroku Taisho shi*, v. 12, p. 8.

applicants.⁶⁶ The superintendent's comments and Mombusho's guidelines not only testify that the examinations tested memorized knowledge but also indicate that such testing was perceived as a problem. A certain amount of such testing is not an unusual feature of examinations. The fact that it was causing alarm, however, suggests that an extraordinary amount of memorization was required to prepare for secondary school entrance examinations. Thus, the advice of the study guide to remember as much as possible was not an exceptional counsel.

The excessive amount of material and details within it the students had to study and memorize in preparation, and its direct relation to the elementary school syllabus is highly significant in understanding the influence entrance examinations had on elementary education.

Preparatory Education

Preparatory education at the elementary level and its effects on the lives of young students haunted the educational scene in prewar Japan from the early Taisho period. The elementary level is especially significant considering the virtually universal rate of attendance by the

⁶⁶ Mombusho, *Meiji ikô kyôiku seido hattatsu shi* (Mombusho, 1939), v. 7, p. 230.

late Meiji period.⁶⁷ Preparatory education at the middle level was also widespread, but it will only receive very limited attention in this chapter. Middle schools were an elite track; therefore, preparatory education at this level is less significant than at the elementary level in showing the prevalence of the influence of entrance examinations.⁶⁸

Preparatory education at the elementary level and the government's reform efforts are the focus of the remainder of this chapter. Through official and media criticism, I will discuss the nature of preparatory education and will show that it was widespread and routinized despite criticism. I will also examine the crucial question of why preparatory education and its hazards persisted despite that criticism and bureaucratic efforts to end them. I will argue that it persisted because, until the late 1930s, the schools and the students' families were capable of defying Mombusho's reform efforts. Though Mombusho vigorously tried to abolish preparatory education and simplify entrance examinations, its reforms stopped short of abolishing the tests. As we will see, the examinations served a purpose for the government.

⁶⁷ Attendance rates for school age children are noted in Chapter 1. For boys and girls respectively, in 1904, that rate was 97.16% and 91.46%; in 1912, 98.80% and 97.62%; and in 1921, 99.30% and 99.03%. Mombusho, *Gakusei Hachijūnen shi*, pp. 1036-1039.

⁶⁸ Since middle schools were an very elite group, preparatory education at these schools was not as widely criticized as a social problem as it was at the elementary schools.

It did try to abolish written tests once, but was unsuccessful. The schools and parents defied the reforms because the examinations served a purpose for them as well. Difficult examinations and preparatory education continued despite all the bureaucratic efforts to stop them. This successful tenacity is highly suggestive of certain aspects in the government-society relationship in the realm of education that seem to have to been neglected until now.⁶⁹

The phenomena of formal education becoming oriented towards entrance examination preparation first occurred in the middle schools. In 1905, an editorial of *Kyôiku Jiron* noted that all the post-secondary public educational institutions were using selection examinations (*sembatsu shiken*) to determine who entered their school, and an increase in the number of middle school graduates had resulted in more competition and tougher examinations. The number of graduates successful in proceeding to a higher institution had come to be associated with the prestige of a school; therefore, the editorial continues, "it seems to have

⁶⁹ In my own case, while building my hypothesis for the factors behind the routinization of the consequences of entrance examinations, due to a preconception of a high degree of control the Mombusho exercised over the nation's educational affairs, I was inclined to credit it with a much greater role for that routinization than it actually played.

become the preoccupation of many middle schools to emphasize preparatory education for the selection examinations."⁷⁰

Such preoccupation with the preparatory education and the school's reputation came to characterize the elementary schools in the Taisho period. As early as 1915, a newspaper cautioned against the harmful effects of preparatory education: Every year graduates of elementary school take competitive examinations to enter middle and girls' high schools. As soon as the students enter sixth grade, they begin preparing for entrance examinations at and outside school. At each elementary school one or two hour review sessions are held after classes for these students.⁷¹ An elementary school principal explained that the harmful effects of review sessions were recognized by schools. However, these sessions were necessary as long as there were competitive entrance examinations. Schools, according to the principal, could not abolish these sessions, but should limit

⁷⁰ *Kyoiku Jiron*, 5 June, 1905. The text is quoted in Ikeda, *Nyûgaku seido*, p. 111. In 1909 the same journal also complained about the inappropriate difficulty of the questions examinees have to face at higher schools entrance examinations. It suggested the use of an applicants middle school academic and behavioral record as partial criteria for determining entrance. no. 865, 1909, p. 42, quoted in Ikeda, p. 112-113.

⁷¹ "Shôgaku sotsugyô no oriowai danjo o tsûkôdome suru zankoku na sekisho - kôjo chûgaku nyûgaku no kyôsô shiken" (Girls' high and middle school entrance examinations - a cruel barrier for delicate elementary school graduates), *Yomiuri shimbun*, in *Shimbun shûroku Taisho shi*, v. 3, p. 81.

them to avoid any harmful consequences.⁷² One senses an interesting tension in the principal's comments - review sessions are harmful, but necessary, so they should be limited. However, it is not very easy to limit something whose purpose is to achieve an edge in a competition. Thus, the newspaper is skeptical about these sessions being limited, and it ominously warns that because the examination questions are difficult, preparatory education and its hazards are likely to continue.⁷³ That they did continue is affirmed by media accounts in subsequent years.

In 1916, a critic argued that difficult entrance examinations could "fundamentally destroy the spirit" of young students.⁷⁴ Especially worse off was the majority that did not pass despite excessive preparation, for failure ruined their pride and self confidence. Two years later, an educator bemoaned that all day long the children were pressured to study hard for the examinations. Not all students applied to the most difficult schools. Parents, however, naturally wanted their children to enter as good and highly ranked a school as possible.⁷⁵ Thus, extra

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Chûgaku nyûgaku shiken - yuyushiki daimondai: seishinteki ni shônenshû o korosu mono da" (Middle school entrance examinations - a serious problem: they kill the spirit of young students), *Kokumin shimbun*, 31 March, 1916, in *Shimbun shûroku Taishô shi*, v. 4, p. 114.

⁷⁵ "Shiken benkyô wa oyoshi nasai - fukei ya shônenshû e osusume suru" (Stop studying for examinations - advice to

preparation was required to increase the chances of entering a school even slightly more prestigious than what a child was capable of.

A newspaper in February 1920 described the situation regarding preparatory education at elementary schools as follows: "With the new school term approaching, over a million students (and not just the 122,935 that took the boys middle school examination that year) who will have finished the sixth year of elementary school will engage in fierce entrance examination competition to enter secondary schools. The tests are the first step of the *toryûmon*.⁷⁶...Each elementary school is conducting special preparatory education after school for those who wish to enter a secondary level institution. It seems that as the examination time approaches, more than the students, the teachers and parents are becoming frantic as if they were the ones sitting for the tests."⁷⁷ The newspaper reports an elementary school principal's comments on the issue. He indicates that

parents and children), *Chûô shimbun*, 8 March, 1918, in *Shimbun shûroku Taishô shi*, v. 6, p. 94.

⁷⁶ "Dragon Gate"--a metaphor for a gateway to success. For a brief discussion of 'toryûmon' in English, see R. M. Spaulding, *Japan's Higher Civil Service Examinations* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 3.

⁷⁷ "Shogaku jido no ichidai nankan: chugaku juken no jumbi kyôiku de gekiretsu na shinkei suijaku ni ochiru" (Severe nervous breakdowns from middle school entrance examinations, the biggest barrier in front of elementary school students): *Hôchi shimbun*, 3 February, 1920, in *Shimbun shûroku Taishô shi*, v. 8, p. 51.

preparatory education was not just the business of a select few, but was being demanded by an increasing number and that was why elementary schools found it necessary. A précis of his remarks follows: From the point of view of spread of education, it is a commendable thing that the number of students wishing to continue their education has increased. Ideally, secondary education ought to be provided to all those wishing it. But there is a severe lack of such institutions at present, and even those eligible to enter secondary schools are stopped short by examinations. In fact, elementary schools do not wish to engage in such unnatural instruction as special, after-school preparatory education, but the present situation makes that unavoidable. The fact that all this competition is causing severe nervous breakdowns among some students is unbearable from the point of view of a teacher. The lack of secondary schools is indeed deplorable and the authorities should make it their urgent priority to make up for the shortage.⁷⁸

This article clearly indicates that preparatory education for entrance examinations extended well beyond the elite that proceeded to middle school. The principal's criticism also indicates the gap that existed between the supply and demand. At the same time, however, one senses a certain responsibility on the part of the elementary schools as well, since competition among them to have as many

⁷⁸ Ibid.

graduates proceed on as possible and concern with the reputation of each school were also factors behind the seriousness with which *jumbi kyôiku* (preparatory education) was carried out. As the newspaper appropriately describes, it was as much an examination and competition for the teachers as for the students. It also notes the ill-effects, such as nervous breakdowns, that had come to accompany the preparation effort at the elementary level.

Concerning these health-related hazards, an article that appeared in 1924 is highly suggestive. A synopsis of its relevant contents is as follows: Whether there is a devastating earthquake or not (the reference is to the great Kanto earthquake of 1923), the intense competition to enter secondary schools shows no signs of relaxation. As before, innocent children are suffering from competitive entrance examinations. Many people have recognized the detrimental effects of preparatory education for those examinations on the growth of young students, and recently the Japan Doctors Association (*Nihon Ishi Kai*) has undertaken research of those effects from a medical perspective. The association will announce its warnings to educators and parents as soon as it has sufficient results. Meanwhile, a Mombusho official declared that according to the Ministry's survey of 439 recently successful girls' high school entrants, most started examination preparation from the first term of their sixth year at elementary school, while some had already started in their fifth year. More than half of the students suffered

from one or more emotional or metabolic disorders such as loss of appetite and weight, insomnia, headaches, depression, near-sightedness and so on.⁷⁹

This article indicates that Mombusho became concerned about the consequences of preparatory education for secondary school entrance examination by the late Taisho period. The survey cited was for girls, which is highly significant for our argument about the pervasiveness of the examinations' influence. One suspects, moreover, that the boys probably started preparing even earlier than the girls and suffered from more disorders than them.

Another account in 1925 not only provides further evidence for the prevalence of preparatory education but also further illustrates the fact that, along with the students' desire to succeed in secondary school entrance examinations, the schools' preoccupation with ensuring that success for as many of its graduates as possible was a strong factor behind that education. It reports that although "it has been decided that this year the middle schools entrance examinations will be made easier, and it is said that the customary preparatory education is not required," each

⁷⁹ "Chûgaku nyûgaku no yoshû wa jûdai na shakai mondai to shite ishi kai ga chôsa" (The Doctors Association to examine the review sessions for middle school entrance as a serious social problem), *Yomiuri shimbun*, 29 April, 1924, in *Shimbun shûroku Taisho shi*, v. 12, p. 172. See also, "Jidô no juken yoshû de isha no dai ronsen" (Doctors debate review sessions for entrance examinations), *Miyako shimbun*, 25 February, 1923, in *Shimbun shûroku Taisho shi*, v. 11, p. 497.

elementary school was busy providing such education for students in the higher grades. It gives the example of a Tokyo elementary school where 82% of the boys and girls in the sixth grade were staying after school three or four days a week for extra *jumbi kyôiku*.⁸⁰ In an attempt to distance its school from the "unnatural preparatory education," the principal of this school says, "at his school no special *nyûgaku shiken jumbi kyôiku* is held." Rather, he declares, all year round such extra review classes are held for the benefit of the students. Success rates of this school, it is noted, are high, and one of its teacher boasts that the thoroughness of the school's education and the "real understanding" that results enable students to tackle any sort of question.⁸¹

This school, owing to its location in Tokyo, may not represent the average situation at elementary schools all over Japan. However, its case does indicate a sense of "entrance examination-performance competition" among the schools which resulted in the paradoxical situation where criticism of *nyûshi jumbi kyôiku* on the part of the schools was not accompanied by its reconsideration, but rather by its intensification. Even though the Tokyo school mentioned

⁸⁰ "Sora mata hajimatta: nyûgaku jumbi no inokori yoshû - kaku shôgakkô no yakki" (There they go again: after-school reviews for entrance examination preparation - each elementary school is frantic), *Yomiuri shimbun*, 12 January, 1925, in *Shimbun shûroku Taisho shi*, v. 13, p. 20.

⁸¹ Ibid.

above tries to present its extra review sessions in a more palatable tone, their being held all year round suggests nothing but the routinization and intensification of preparatory education.

An official history of education in Kumamoto prefecture (in Kyushu) compiled in 1931 indicates that the problem of preparatory education at the elementary level was not limited to urban areas such as Tokyo. The section on elementary education of this three-volume history notes that competition to enter secondary schools had become tougher than before. Preparatory education at the prefecture's elementary schools had existed in earlier years, "but now it exhausted the students more and more. The preparatory nature of school instruction had become so intense that it threatened the maintenance of elementary education."⁸² This sentiment shows that the influence of entrance examinations indeed extended beyond those actually preparing to take the tests. The way in which all students were educated at the elementary level was dictated by entrance examinations.

Without student demand and the competition resulting from lack of supply, the *jumbi kyôiku* consequence of middle, girls' high, and vocational school entrance examinations is inconceivable. Equally important, however, was a willingness on the part of the elementary schools to get actively and solidly involved in preparatory education, and thus nurture

⁸² Kumamoto kyôiku kai, *Kumamoto ken kyôiku shi*, v. 3 (Kumamoto ken kyôiku kai, 1931), pp. 640-641.

and intensify the resultant reputation-related, inter-school competition. In the process, the schools were adding to the load born by the preparing students by establishing the extra instruction as an unavoidable step to entrance examinations.

From 1927, Mombusho issued a series of directives to reform the problems of preparatory education and entrance examinations. This reform effort not only provides us with much official evidence regarding the problems, but it is also significant in showing the persistence of the influence of secondary school entrance examinations. Tracing the reforms also reveals the tenacity on the part of the people and elementary schools to continue preparatory education and middle schools to carry on giving difficult entrance examinations despite Mombusho efforts to prohibit both. To be sure, with regard to entrance examinations, we see a more lenient attitude suggestive of a utility they possessed for Mombusho. I will first examine the efforts to enforce simpler entrance examinations, and then return to preparatory education.

Mombusho and Entrance Examinations

Even before Mombusho embarked on its reform efforts in 1927, a few secondary schools experimented with new types of entrance examinations. These schools attempted to replace academic examinations with intelligence tests (*mentaru tesuto*) and to use an applicant's elementary school report

card as criteria for selection. By doing this, they hoped to end excessive preparatory education at the elementary level. Instead, they created further problems because preparation for the examinations had to be diversified and adapted to the different types of tests given by different schools.⁸³ Had these schools been a majority, they may have succeeded in relaxing the extent of preparatory education. However, according to a Mombusho survey in 1925, only 20% of the schools surveyed used an intelligence test.⁸⁴ In fact, most of these schools combined it with an academic examination and gave more weight to the latter. An exceptional school drew complaints from the parents when it tried using elementary school report cards to preselect the students allowed to take its examination. The parents felt that it was unfair not to allow all students to sit for the examinations.⁸⁵ This indicates that entrance examinations were regarded by the public as a very fair way of selection. Their unwholesome effects aside, they did serve a purpose for the people. This

⁸³ Ibid. See also *Shimbun shûroku Taisho shi*, v. 10, p. 119; v. 13, p. 37 and v. 14, p. 420. The experimental "mental tests" varied in nature and did not become a regular feature of entrance examinations.

⁸⁴ "Nyûgaku shiken no mentaru testo o Mombusho de kenkyû" (Mombusho researches mental tests), *Hôchi shimbun*, 19 April, 1925, in *Shimbun shûroku Taisho shi*, v. 13, p. 180.

⁸⁵ "Atarashii nyûgaku shiken no hôshin ni nemoto no sô" (Fundamental disagreement over a new entrance examination policy), *Tokyo Asahi shimbun*, 10 February, 1926, in *Shimbun shûroku Taisho shi*, v. 14, p. 53.

is also evident from the people's response to Mombusho orders in 1939 and 1940.⁸⁶

Government reforms of entrance examinations began early in the Showa period. On 22 November, 1927 Mombusho issued a report regarding the Ministry's intention to reform the particulars of the Middle School Order (originally issued in 1886). It expressed concern over the effects of entrance examinations on primary school education. It bemoaned that the excessive preparatory education at the elementary level was unhealthy for even those who wished to proceed to middle school, for it hindered the original motives of elementary education. These aims were to provide moral and "citizen oriented education" (*kokumin kyôiku*), along with a program that ensured healthy physical development of the students.⁸⁷

Accordingly, in the same year, Mombusho revised the provisions for the selection of entrants in the Middle School Order by replacing the use of "entrance examinations" with "appropriate selection methods" (*tekitô naru senbatsu hôhō*). From 1928, selection was to be based on an applicant's educational record submitted by the principal of his elementary school, a "personal character test" (*jinbutsu kôsa*), and a physical examination. The *jinbutsu kôsa* included an oral examination (*kôtô shimon*), but there was no

⁸⁶ These reactions are discussed later in this chapter.

⁸⁷ Mombusho, *Meiji ikô*, v. 7, p. 77 and 196.

provision for a written test.⁸⁸ This meant that the written test was abolished and the media hailed the move as one that would end examination hell.⁸⁹

At many schools, however, difficult written entrance examinations were held as usual in 1928. They were given as part of the oral test; the questions were asked orally and the students had to write out the answers!⁹⁰ It was the same story the next year.⁹¹ One is almost surprised at the ingenuity of the schools in finding ways of defying government orders. From their point of view, written tests were necessary to select from an excess of applicants, for entrance competition was not reduced by the reforms. At the Girls' High School attached to Japan Women's College, the

⁸⁸ Ibid., v. 7, p. 193 and 197. Similar directives were also given to the higher schools in order to rectify excessive preparatory education at the preceding middle school level. Mombusho, *Meiji ikô*, v. 7, p. 194 and 200.

⁸⁹ "Chûgakkô no shiken jigoku o kyusai suru Mombusho gawa no shin an" (Mombusho's new plan to resolve middle school-entrance examination hell), *Tokyo Asahi shimbun*, 20 Sept., 1927, in *Shimbun shûsei Showa shi no shôgen*, v. 1, p. 364; "Chugakko e susumu kanmon wa tada koto shimon" (Only an oral examination to enter middle schools), *Tokyo Nichinichi shimbun*, 7 Dec., 1927, in *Shimbun shûsei Showa shi no shôgen*, v. 1, p. 444.

⁹⁰ "Shiken Jigoku no gyaku modori" (Back to examination hell), *Tokyo Nichinichi shimbun*, 3 January, 1928, in *Shimbun shûsei Showa shi no shôgen*, v. 2, p. 14.

⁹¹ "Kaisei no nyûgaku shiken hô wa hatashite kotoshi wa kanzen ni okonawarareru ka" (Will the reformed entrance examination method be followed fully this year), *Miyako shimbun*, 20 January, 1929, in *Shimbun shûsei Showa shi no shôgen*, v. 3, p. 31.

number of applicants was ten times the available spaces in 1928. Moreover, 50% of the applicants had the highest average mark for six years of elementary school. The newspaper that reported this was understandably doubtful whether examination hell would be resolved by the new selection methods.⁹²

At a general meeting in 1929, middle school principals decided that the new entrance examinations were unfair and unacceptable. Elementary school marks and oral interviews were too subjective as criteria for selection. A certain mark could mean different things depending on the teacher and the school, and interviews could not be held equally for all candidates, since one interviewer could not conduct them all. Thus the principals decided to ask Mombusho to allow the use of written entrance examinations.⁹³

Mombusho's response came within the year. In November 1929, the Ministry allowed the use of a written examination in "cases deemed necessary." It stipulated, however, that the questions be based on the prescribed elementary curriculum. They also had to be simple questions not

⁹² "Sukuwarenu chû jo gakkô no shiken jigoku" (The unresolved examination hell to enter middle and girls high schools), *Tokyo Nichinichi shimbun*, 1 February, 1928, in *Shimbun shûsei Showa shi no shôgen*, v. 2, p. 45.

⁹³ "Gyaku modori suru nyûgaku seido" (Return to the old examination system?), *Tokyo Asahi shimbun*, 29 October, 1929, in *Shimbun shûsei Showa shi no shôgen*, v. 3, p. 347. A similar decision was made at a meeting of higher school principals.

requiring rote memorization.⁹⁴ In effect, Mombusho submitted to the schools' demands and tenacity to continue entrance examinations. The "cases deemed necessary" clause did not deter the secondary schools. All the schools in Tokyo, for instance, declared that they would use a written entrance examination in the coming year within a day after Mombusho's capitulation.⁹⁵

Despite repeated directives, the stipulation that the examination questions be easy had no affect on secondary schools either. In 1935, *Yomiuri shimbun* reported that some schools had ignored repeated directives and continued to use very difficult questions, some of which were not even in the primary school syllabus.⁹⁶ This, according to Mombusho, perpetuated preparatory education at elementary schools. Thus the Ministry decided to strictly enforce the regulation that questions be from the prescribed syllabus by requiring all secondary schools to submit their examination questions to regional government offices, where they would be closely inspected. Schools that gave questions from outside the

⁹⁴ Mombusho, *Meiji ikô*, v. 7, p. 230.

⁹⁵ "Issei ni hikki shiken fukkatsu" (Unanimous resumption of written examinations), *Tokyo Asahi shimbun*, 30 November, 1929, in *Shimbun shûsei Showa shi no shôgen*, v. 3, p. 399.

⁹⁶ "Shiken mondai o kenetsu: jumbi kyôiku no heigai kaishô - Mombusho zenkoku e tsutatsu" (Mombusho's circular to all secondary schools - Inspection of examination questions in order to end the harms of preparatory education), *Yomiuri shimbun*, evening edition, 5 February, 1935, in *Shimbun shûsei Showa shi no shôgen*, v. 9, p. 63.

elementary school syllabus were to be penalized. This, it was hoped, "would finally end the ills of elementary level preparatory education that has been a social problem for many years."⁹⁷

The necessity of such a severe measure indicates that middle schools had not felt bound by bureaucrats and had continued as before with difficult entrance examinations. Moreover, even after the 1935 directive, secondary schools still gave difficult questions from the elementary school subjects. This is evident from the steps Mombusho had to take in 1940. Realizing that written entrance examinations existed as before, it had to abolish the use of entrance examination based on academic subjects (*gakka shiken*). It enforced the use of previous school records and oral interviews as the selection criteria.⁹⁸ Secondary schools' long defiance of government orders until 1940 suggests that government control in prewar Japan was not as complete as we tend to think it was. (In the next section, we will see that elementary schools and parents were not always obedient either).

Mombusho's reforms indicate that the Ministry was genuinely sensitive to the problems created by overly difficult entrance examinations. However, it only enforced

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ "Chûgakkô nyûshi gakka shiken haishi" (Middle school written entrance test abolished), *Asahi Nenkan*, 1941, p. 420; "Kôtô gakkô nyûshi hôhō henshin" (Changing the higher school entrance examination procedures), *Asahi Nenkan*, 1942, p. 397.

the abolition of entrance examinations in 1940. That move, though, was temporarily necessitated by the war emergency. The emergency required schools to become a part of the war effort by emphasizing physical and military training. Until then, however, schools were not reprimanded for using tough entrance examinations. All this suggests that the examinations had some utility for the bureaucracy. Evidence for this utility, which may otherwise seem obvious, is hard to come by since Mombusho's main thrust from the late 1920s was to reform the ills of entrance examinations. A comment of a Mombusho official responsible for social education in 1929 is, however, revealing. He stated that providing knowledge-oriented education to more than is necessary causes unemployment, "which has led to deterioration of thought" (*shisô no akka*).⁹⁹ One gets the impression, after all, that entrance examinations were efficient as a tool in purposefully narrowing the number of students proceeding to the elite tracks. Expanding these channels would have been a financial drain on the government. It may also have increased the risk of intellectual qualms with official ideology. If we compare post-elementary higher education

⁹⁹ "Nijûyon man nin no tame ni hyaku rokujû man nin ga gisei: jôkyûkô shibôsha henjû no shôgakkô kyôiku ni shokugyô, ryôdo chishiki o kuwau" (1,600,000 suffer [sacrificed] for 240,000: vocational and community knowledge to be added to elementary education baised towards those wishing to continue their education), *Yomiuri shimbun*, 26 February, 1929, in *Shimbun shûsei Showa shi no shôgen*, v. 3, p. 391.

institutions to bridges, each having the narrow gate of entrance examinations, Mombusho was concerned about too many flocking to the gates of the few bridges that led to the world across the river because in the process they were neglecting their appropriate duties. However, the Ministry did not wish to expand drastically the number of bridges or to remove the existing narrow gates, for there was an acceptable number the other side could accommodate for the "health" of the nation. This, it seems, was the reason why Mombusho did not completely abolish entrance examinations until national priorities absolutely dictated so. That was when the nation was at war, which necessitated physical and military training. Hence, any preoccupation on the part of schools or the youth with examination preparation became useless, even an obstacle, in the war effort.

Mombusho efforts to curb preparatory education, however, were more serious. Perhaps they were in accordance with the above mentioned mentality, for the same 1929 article that quoted the social education official, also mentioned Mombusho directives for decreasing preparatory education and increasing community centered and vocational education at elementary school to create "nationally useful resources" (kokumin yûyo no zaisan).¹⁰⁰ Due to the economic depression at this time, unemployment of graduates from higher

100 Ibid.

institutions was a problem.¹⁰¹ Thus, instead of a large number of highly educated youths, from the government's point of view, it was probably safer to produce elementary graduates with basic community service and vocational skills.

Nevertheless, Mombusho was truly concerned about the harmful effects of preparatory education on children. The following chronological discussion of the vigorous efforts by the Ministry to abolish preparatory education indicates not only its widespread influence, but also the tenacity of the students' families and elementary schools to carry on with it. To be sure, the above mentioned failure to completely abolish entrance examinations until 1940 was what made this persistence feasible. Disregard of repeated directives against preparatory education further indicates that people and institutions could defy government efforts in prewar Japan.

Mombusho and Preparatory Education

Local authorities attempted to prohibit preparatory education at the elementary level before Mombusho tried to do the same at the national level from the late 1920s. In June 1920, Kumamoto prefectural authorities ordered that

¹⁰¹ "Shûshokunan kara jitsugyô gakkô oo mote" (Vocational schools become highly attractive due to high unemployment), *Tokyo Asahi shimbun*, 3 April, 1929, in *Shimbun shûsei Showa shi no shôgen*, v. 3, p. 114.

preparatory education at elementary schools be completely stopped. They soon realized, however, that preparatory education "could not be prohibited just by an order. Even if a school wished to stop that education, complaints from parents flooded in."¹⁰² Thus, most schools in the prefecture continued it. Some tried to limit it to a certain time in the afternoon, but found it difficult to follow such limitations.¹⁰³ As I noted earlier in this chapter, after all, it was not easy to limit something designed to provide an advantage in a competition.

Since Mombusho's attempt in 1927 to abolish written entrance examinations was unsuccessful,¹⁰⁴ preparatory education did not disappear either. Mombusho was concerned and issued repeated directives against such education at the elementary level. On the evening of 8 January, 1929 it broadcast a radio address consisting of several cautions to elementary schools and parents. To the latter, it advised: "keep preparatory education injurious to health within limits; do not make the children cram everything; and allow the children to proceed in fields they wish to." To the elementary schools it cautioned "not to be engrossed in

¹⁰² Kumamoto kyôiku kai, *Kumamoto ken kyôiku shi*, v. 3, p. 641.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ See preceding section.

preparatory education and neglect the nurturing of the real ability (*jitsu ryoku*) of the vulnerable students."¹⁰⁵

According to the results of a Mombusho survey released in 1929, only 13% of the fresh ordinary six-year elementary school graduates proceeded on to secondary schools. The rest went on to higher elementary school, miscellaneous schools, or started work. Mombusho criticized the fact that for the sake of 13%, "the other 87% are also subjected to an education with a deep preparatory color (*jumbi teki shikisai no nôkô na kyôiku*)."¹⁰⁶

This, however, does not present a correct picture regarding the nature of the demand for secondary education. Even if only a total of 13% proceeded to it successfully, that figure does not account for the many more who tried but failed and those who tried again from higher elementary or other miscellaneous schools. Nevertheless, the above official sentiment shows the prevalent influence of preparatory education at elementary schools. It is strong testimony for the contention that directly or indirectly, the majority of youngsters were being affected by entrance examinations in the sense that the elementary education they

¹⁰⁵ "Mata kuru shiken jigoku: senbatsu seido ni kanshi zenkoku ni tsûtatsu," (Examination hell approaches again: A circular regarding the selection system), *Tokyo Asahi shimbun*, 9 January, 1929, in *Shimbun shûsei Showa shi no shôgen*, v. 3, p. 9.

¹⁰⁶ "Nijûyon man nin no tame ni hyaku rokujû man nin ga gisei."

received was colored by preparation for the tests even if they did not plan to take them.

Parents' and teachers' tenacity to continue preparatory education in one form or another despite official efforts to stop it, is evident from a newspaper article in 1930. It reported that since the authorities had circulated a notice to all elementary schools strictly forbidding any preparatory education, many worried parents were sending their children to the homes of the homeroom teachers and paying money for extra preparatory lessons. In some cases, it was rumored that teachers themselves told students to come to their homes for such lessons.¹⁰⁷ This shows that both the schools and the pupils and their parents were willing to disobey government directives to do what each felt was necessary to increase the chances of passing entrance examinations.

This story of defiance against government efforts does not end here, however. In fact in 1930 preparatory education at school was not seen. This may have been because the Mombusho had just issued the prohibition. But, as we will see, even that was temporary compliance at best, which itself was meaningless with regard to any significant curtailment of preparatory education, for extra lessons just seem to have shifted from the school building to the teachers' homes. The

¹⁰⁷ "Kyôin jitaku jumbi kyôiku o genkin" (Prohibition on preparatory education at teachers' homes), *Yomiuri shimbun*, 11 February, 1930, in *Shimbun shûsei Showa hennen shi*, v. 5, p. 96-97.

prohibition seems to have created further problems, since the students had to commute to the teachers' homes and pay for preparatory education. The 1930 article mentioned that the authorities were soon going to issue an order prohibiting school teachers from having private classes at home for the sake of examination preparation and were intending to strictly enforce that order.¹⁰⁸ Their directives, however, were not successful in actually curbing preparatory education in the future.

In October 1933, a newspaper reported that, as a result of pleas from parents, at each elementary school groups of boys and girls were already staying after school for two to three hours, and in some cases until late at night, to prepare for entrance examinations. Many students were also going to the homes of teachers to get special preparation. On Saturdays and Sundays, special "ability testing" (*chikara dameshi*) sessions were held where they took mock entrance examinations.¹⁰⁹ Clearly the government directives were being ignored or circumvented. The schools and anxious students and parents were continuing preparatory education

108 Ibid.

109 "Chûtôkô nyûgaku jumbi de kodomo o korashimeru na: shiken no yarikata mo kôryô shite...to fu gakumu tôkyoku no o watashi" (A circular from the prefectural educational authorities: Do not "punish" the children with secondary school entrance examination preparation; give consideration to the nature of examinations.), *Tokyo Nichinichi shimbun*, 19 October, 1933, in *Shimbun shûsei Showa shi no shôgen*, v. 7, p. 444.

under some pretext or other at school and at the teachers' homes.

Realizing that the intensity of *jumbi kyôiku* was even stronger than in previous years, the educational authorities again circulated some cautions to elementary schools. This directive prohibited the following: "1) conducting extra review sessions outside of the prescribed school hours or on school holidays, 2) altering the hours prescribed for each subject, 3) school teachers holding classes at home, and 4) sending students to private preparatory schools (*shijuku*) or to mock tests for the purpose of entrance examinations preparation."¹¹⁰ This official directive again indicates that despite previous prohibitions, preparatory education on the part of students and schools continued unabated. In fact, the new restrictions suggest that it had intensified. The second prohibition was aimed at the "tendency of schools to replace music, physical education and other nonacademic classes by preparatory education as the entrance examinations season approached."¹¹¹ This tendency again shows the influence of entrance examinations on the education of even those students not aiming to enter competitive secondary schools. This was in addition to the preparatory education

¹¹⁰ Ibid. This article also noted that, according to government observer, there were many students who harmed their health so much while preparing for middle school entrance examinations that, after they finally passed, their bodies failed them and they had to drop out.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

bias of the usual elementary education that they received. The fourth point in the directive indicates that an entrance-examination related phenomena, the attending of private preparatory schools, which had been previously limited to middle school students or *rônin*, had extended to some of the eager elementary school students as well. This was probably limited to an anxious few, though, since there is no repeated mention of it in Mombusho criticism or the extensive press coverage of elementary level preparatory education.

Despite these repeated efforts by the bureaucrats to order elementary schools to quit preparatory education, in 1938 the elementary schools were still continuing it in defiance of all previous directives.¹¹² Thus, Mombusho decided to ask regional governments to take further steps to end preparatory education. The Tokyo Educational Section convened a meeting after which it issued a statement and yet another notice to the elementary schools. These are highly illustrative of the continued disobedience on the part of elementary schools. The statement noted that despite continuous efforts by the government, "recently, instead of easing, preparatory education at Tokyo's elementary schools has further intensified. Lessons at home, excessive home work, and alteration of prescribed school and subject hours continue without any regard to those students not seeking to

¹¹² "Jumbi kyôiku tori shimari" (Crackdown on preparatory education), 28 December, 1938, *Kokumin shimbun*, in *Shimbun shûsei Showa shi no shôgen*, v. 12, p. 529.

proceed to secondary institutions."¹¹³ It declared that the harmful effects on education continue, and in some cases, as at a Setagaya school, the situation had deteriorated to the point where several students were suffering from nervous breakdowns.

The circular to the schools repeated the previous prohibitions against changing the hours allotted to each subject, excessive homework, teachers holding sessions at their homes, and students' participation in mock tests or private school lessons. Concerning after school and weekend preparatory education sessions, however, contrary to previous prohibitions, it allowed "review sessions" on weekdays until four o'clock in the afternoon, and on holidays for two or three hours per day. Moreover, the government decided to designate 606 observers who would travel to schools and homes to see whether the conditions of the notice were being followed, and in case of an allegation, to suspend or otherwise punish the principal after investigation.¹¹⁴

By virtue of repeating previous prohibitions and outright acknowledgement that preparatory education had only intensified despite government efforts, the above statement and circular testify to the fact that the schools and parents had defied the authorities all the while. Though the last part of the circular suggests an ever stricter attitude in

113 Ibid.

114 Ibid.

the implementation of the directive, the recognition of limited review sessions means that, more than a threat, these directives were a capitulation on the part of the government to the tenacity of elementary schools and parents.

The secondary schools had defied the simplification of entrance examinations; it seems that in this case, the elementary schools were in fact even able to "manipulate" the bureaucracy to a certain degree by resisting policy. From the perspective of elementary schools, the pupils and their parents, as long as there were difficult secondary school entrance examinations, and lack of supply made them competitive, prohibition of preparatory education was not in their interest. In fact, schools and the students and their families were not merely responding helplessly to the existence of entrance examinations. The examinations served a purpose for them. Elementary schools could improve their reputation by increasing the number of graduates they managed to get into secondary schools. For the people, though the mental and physical hazards were there, there was also a sense of positive satisfaction with the tests. This is evident in the negative response to the abolition of entrance examinations in 1940. People regarded the examinations as the most meritocratic way of advancing to secondary and higher education. They were worried that replacement of entrance examination based on elementary school report cards

would create a worse "favoritism hell" (*jôjitsu jigoku*).¹¹⁵ The secondary schools worried that they would lose an objective and standard criteria to control the selection of entrants.¹¹⁶ For schools, the exact same entrance examination given to all applicants was the best way to ensure that the entering students were of a certain calibre or more.

In this chapter we saw that preparatory education for the secondary school entrance examinations became a routinized feature of elementary education in prewar Japan. We examined the harmful influence of preparatory education on the lives of elementary school students, who were not spared from "examination hell." Moreover, we discovered that the influence of entrance examinations reached even those students who did not plan to enter competitive secondary schools, for the elementary education they received was geared towards preparation for the tests. Critics and Mombusho bemoaned this fact, but it did not seem to bother those parents who could only afford to send their children to higher elementary school. This, however, is not surprising

¹¹⁵ "Gakka shiken fukkatsu no koe" (Voices for the revival of written entrance examinations), 31 January, 1940, in *Shimbun shûsei Showa shi no shôgen*, v. 14, p. 56.

¹¹⁶ "Mushiken shiken ni mo heigai ari: chûtô gakkô no tachiba kara" (Non examination method has evils as well: From the point of view of secondary schools), *Tokyo Asahi shimbun*, 16, September, 1939, in *Shimbun shûsei Showa shi no shôgen*, v. 13, p. 374. There were many other such articles at the time as well.

because no parents would have wanted any "less education" for their offspring than that available to the neighbour's children.

The fact that difficult entrance examinations were of so much concern to Mombusho that it repeatedly issued directives prohibiting them indicates that their consequences were widespread, indeed. If preparatory education had only been limited to the minority that proceeded to prestigious secondary schools, it is doubtful that Mombusho would have been as concerned as it was. The high degree of official concern and criticism are perhaps the strongest evidence showing that the influence of entrance examinations on formal education was extensive.

Entrance examinations testing the sort of skills described in this chapter do explain the need for preparatory education, but by themselves, they do not account for the intensity with which it was carried out, the vast numbers it affected, and the reasons why it persisted despite criticism and attempted reform. They are as follows: the heightened popular demand for secondary education; the preoccupation on the part of elementary schools to improve their reputation by sending as many graduates on to secondary schools as possible; both the schools' and the people's disregard of Mombusho directives in order to preserve their interests; the government's reluctance to satiate the popular demand by adequately expanding the nation's capacity of reputable secondary education institutions; the persistent

unwillingness of each secondary school to alter significantly the nature of the easily administrable yet powerful and efficient tool they possessed to select incoming students in the face of high demand; a similar realization on the part of the government of the obvious utility of entrance examination in controlling the number of elite the education system produced, a realization evident in reforms amounting to serious concern and vociferous prohibition of *jumbi kyôiku* but tacit approval of entrance examinations until the nation faced an emergency. It is all these factors that explain why, from the late Meiji period to the end of the 1930s, the excessive entrance examination competition at both the secondary and higher level and its associated insidious phenomena, though criticized, was routinized and was anchored so firmly in the education system that it took a war to temporarily detach the anchor.

CHAPTER 4

SUPPLY AND DEMAND: *RISSHIN SHUSSE* AND *GAKUREKI SHUGI*

The gap between the demand for and supply of "desirable" post-elementary education is the fundamental reason behind the extensive effects of entrance examinations, the continued necessity of the tests, and the routinization of their effects in prewar Japan. The issue of demand is also significant in explaining the people's opposition to the abolition of entrance examinations; for in a situation where demand exceeded supply, an objective and meritocratic selection method was deemed necessary. Schools also felt that they required the tests to select efficiently from an excess of applicants. The increase in demand from the late Meiji period and the imbalance between supply and demand thereafter is evident from statistics. It was also frequently noted by contemporary observers. Why demand increased and remained high, is an issue that has to be examined in light of *risshin shusse* (rise in the world) and *gakureki shugi* (educational credentialism). In this chapter, I will first discuss the high demand and then return to the reasons for it.

The entrance rate statistics for prewar higher schools show that these institutions did not come close to

accommodating the demand to enter them. (See Table 1 at the end of this chapter). The rate was still high around the turn of the century, for middle school education was still in its infancy. The demand increased rapidly, however, from the late Meiji period, and the schools could never accommodate more than 20% of the students that applied.¹¹⁷

By the end of the Meiji era, nearly all students were receiving elementary education and completing the full six years. According to a contemporary account, from the mid-Taisho period the majority of elementary school graduates were not satisfied with a primary education, and the parents were trying as well to put their children into some secondary school.¹¹⁸ The preferred options were the boys' middle schools and the girls' high schools. The demand for boys' education did not seem to surprise Taisho observers as much as the desire for girls' education. It was widely reported by the media that women seeking knowledge were increasing, girls leaving rural areas to enter city schools were on the rise, and the girls' schools were all full.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ See also "Shakai no hanei to naru kôkô shibôsha shûyô nôryoku no zatto jûbai" (Society is reflected in the number of students aiming for higher schools; that number is ten times what the schools can admit), *Hôchi shimbun*, 16 June, 1918, in *Shimbun shûroku Taisho shi*, v. 6, p. 208.

¹¹⁸ "Shitei o doko e" (Where to put the children), *Kokumin shimbun*, 7 March, 1917, in *Shimbun shûroku Taisho shi*, v. 5, pp. 90-91.

¹¹⁹ "Jo gakkô wa mina manin" (Girls' schools are all full), *Hôchi shimbun*, 16 April, 1918, in *Shimbun shûroku Taisho shi*, v. 6, p. 134; "Chihô kara kuru jo gakusei -

The gap between supply and demand of secondary education became a permanent problem in prewar Japan. In the previous chapter, we noted an elementary school principal's comments in 1920 concerning the severe lack of secondary schools and the unavailability of secondary education for many competent students.¹²⁰ The secondary schools, on the other hand, were finding it impossible to accommodate the increasing number of applicants.¹²¹

The disparity between supply and demand is also illustrated by middle school entrance rates (Table 1). From the Taisho period the number of applicants always exceeded those accepted by around 100%. There was also a general increase in the number of applicants itself. As in the case of the higher schools, the number did fall in the late 1920s and early 1930s. This was accompanied by higher entrance rates, but the decrease in applicants did not render demand for these schools at parity with supply. Moreover, the drop in this track did not mean a general decline in the demand

sakunen yori nyûgaku shigansha ga ooi" (Female students coming from rural areas - more applicants than last year), *Yomiuri shimbun*, 6 February, 1919, *Ibid.*, v. 7, p. 35; "Chishiki o motomeru josei zôka - nyûgaku gansha no kazu wa sakunen no bai" (Increase in the number of women seeking knowledge - the number of applicants twice as last year), *Chûô shimbun*, 12 March, 1919, *Ibid.*, p. 99.

¹²⁰ See "Preparatory Education" section in Chapter 3.

¹²¹ "Chûgaku no nyûgakunan - manin de shûyô shikirenu" (The difficulty of entering middle schools - the schools are full and cannot accommodate the demand), *Tokyo Nichinichi shimbun*, 5 March, 1920, in *Shimbun shûroku Taisho shi*, v. 8, p. 91.

for post-elementary education. Unemployment of higher school graduates had become a problem in those years, and the decrease in applicants to the elite track was accompanied by an increase in students applying to vocational schools.¹²² This suggests that overall demand for post secondary education did not fall sharply despite harsh economic times.

The entrance rates for girls' high schools was similar to the middle schools' rate - usually in the range of 40 to 50%.¹²³ These rates indicate that the demand for middle and girls' high school education was generally twice the supply. The demand for "more desirable" schools within these tracks was even more disproportionate with supply. Public schools (those run by the local governments) were preferred over private institutions.¹²⁴ The entrance rates cited above are the aggregate for public and private schools. The rate for

¹²² "Shûshokunan kara jitsugyô gakkô oo mote" (Vocational schools become highly attractive due to high unemployment), *Tokyo Asahi shimbun*, 3 April, 1929, in *Shimbun shûsei Showa shi no shôgen*, v. 3, p. 114.

¹²³ See the "High School for Girls" section in the *Annual Report(s) of the Minister of State for Education*.

¹²⁴ In 1915, a private school principal laments this fact and argues that some private schools, such as his, are equally good. He also notes that his school experiences more demand than it can accommodate. "Chûgaku jogakkô no nyûgakunan" (The difficulty to enter middle and girls' high schools), *Yomiuri shimbun*, 23 February, 1915, in *Shimbun shûroku Taisho shi*, v. 3, p. 81.

public middle and girls' high schools was usually about 25%.¹²⁵

The situation on the entrance application day for public middle and girls' high schools in 1930 is also illustrative of the high demand for a public education. These schools started accepting applications on February 10, and within two hours all of them had already received more than the number of spaces available. The First Prefectural Middle School had 230 openings but had already received 800 applications by the end of the first day, and by the deadline it expected to receive applications from seven to twelve times the number of students it could accommodate.¹²⁶ The case is from Tokyo, and therefore the demand may be higher than elsewhere, but since there were fewer schools in other areas, one suspects that the situation was not too different.¹²⁷ Moreover, even in rural areas, those parents who could afford it were eager to educate their sons and daughters at city schools.

The case of the First Middle school in the above account points to the highly excessive demand for a few elite schools within the government schools category. Mombusho's annual

¹²⁵ "Chûtô gakkô no nyûgakunan - nyûgaku ritsu wa wazuka ni niwari nanabun" (The difficulty to enter [public] secondary schools - entrance rates are only 27%), 14 April, 1923, *Shimbun shûroku Taisho shi*, v. 11, p. 137.

¹²⁶ *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 11 February, 1930, in *Shimbun shûsei Showa hennen shi*, v. 5, p. 96-97.

¹²⁷ In Sapporo, for instance, *nyûgakunan* for middle schools was a problem. *Sapporo shi kyôiku iinkai, Kyûsei chûgaku monogatari*, Sapporo city, 1984, p. 300.

report provides separate entrance rates for the two middle and girls' high schools each that were attached to the higher normal schools. At these "national" schools the rate was a meager 10% to 15% on average. Ochanomizu Girls' High School was one of these schools. The demand for this elite school seems to have received separate media coverage.¹²⁸

In the preceding section we have seen that the demand for post-elementary education was high and always exceeded the supply in prewar Japan.¹²⁹ The difference between the demand for and supply of "more desirable" education was particularly great. The social reasons for this high demand lie in the popular ideology of *risshin shusse* and in *gakureki shugi*. These phenomena are extensive subjects in themselves

¹²⁸ See "Ochanomizu hajimatte irai no nyûgaku shibôsû" (Highest number of applicants ever in the history of Ochanomizu), *Yomiuri shimbun*, 9 December, 1922, in *Shimbun shûroku Taisho shi*, v. 4, p. 62; and "Jûsû bai no nyûgaku shigan - Ochanomizu kôjokô" (Over ten times more applicants than spaces available - Ochanomizu Girls' High), *Yomiuri shimbun*, 14 February, 1916, *Ibid.*, v. 4, p. 62.

¹²⁹ The number of secondary schools did increase from the early Taisho period. (Mombusho, *Gakusei kyujunen shi*, 1964, pp. 604, 606, and 608.) It seems, though, that the near 100% spread of elementary education produced more aspirants than the increase could accommodate. Competition to enter secondary schools remained high till the late 1930s. See, "Shôgakusei no juken sensô" (The examination war of elementary school students), *Shôgakusei shimbun ni miru*, v. 1, p. 68.

and have been insightfully discussed by some scholars.¹³⁰ Their origins in the Meiji period have been particularly well treated. I will limit my analysis to a brief explanation, and stress that from the early 1900s, as almost all began to receive elementary education, the concept of "rising in the world" appealed to considerably more youths than in earlier years.

The idea of rising and succeeding in the world (*risshin shusse*) became popular in the early Meiji era. Compared to the Tokugawa period, anyone with ability could, in theory, prosper and rise to a position of prominence. As in any society, limiting factors such as financial resources and one's sex still existed. The school system, however, was open to all; and any person, regardless of social status, could proceed to the imperial university and compete in the higher civil service examinations.¹³¹ Self-improvement through studying privately or at a school was considered to be most essential in achieving *risshin shusse*. Fukuzawa Yukichi's *Gakumon no susume* (An encouragement of learning)

¹³⁰ See, for example: Fukaya, *Gakureki*; Shimbori, *Gakureki: Jitsuryoku shugi o habamu mono* (Daiyamondo sha, 1966); Amano, *Shiken*; Takeuchi Yo, *Nihonjin no shusse kan* (Gakubunsha, 1978); Ogawa Taro, *Risshin shusse shugi no kyôiku* (Nagoya, Reimei shobô, 1957); R.P. Dore, *The Diploma Disease* (London, Allen & Unwin, 1976); and Kinmonth, *Self Made Man*.

¹³¹ These examinations are discussed in: R. M. Spaulding, *Japan's Higher Civil Service Examinations* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1967).

and Samuel Smiles's *Self Help* (*Saikoku risshi hen*) were highly popular books at the time.

Gakureki shugi (educational credentialism) is the use of one's academic credentials in determining one's occupational and social status.¹³² As the school system was gradually consolidated from the mid-Meiji period, education credentials became the means of success. The roots of this credentialism lie in the 1880s, when the government sector gave preference to Imperial University graduates in hiring and promoting officials.¹³³ Ronald Dore has argued that "late developing" nations promote the use of credentials more vigorously than may be the case in other societies.¹³⁴ Amano has also argued along the same line. As the modern industrial sector expanded from the early 1900s, there was great demand for white collar workers. Individuals with experience were scarce, and credentials were the next best thing to rely on.¹³⁵

The use of credentials by the private sector was especially significant in the routinization of *gakureki shugi*. Most companies sought graduates of secondary or higher institutions for white-collar jobs. Salaried, white-collar employment in the private sector became the success

¹³² See Fukaya, *Gakureki*, p. 15. The last school from which one graduate carries the most weight.

¹³³ Amano, *Shiken*, pp. 161-163.

¹³⁴ Dore, *Diploma*, p. 44.

¹³⁵ Amano, *Shiken*, pp. 271-272.

most youth aimed at.¹³⁶ Government jobs, after all, were few. Moreover, top jobs in the bureaucracy required passing the higher civil service examination after, in most cases, graduating from the Imperial Universities. In the private sector, though, the companies relied mostly on educational background to recruit employees.¹³⁷ The use of company examinations started in the early 1920s. However, the last school a person had graduated from was the essential precondition, as it still is today.

From the late Meiji period, as virtually all school age children began attending elementary school, *risshin shusse* through educational credentials became possible for the majority of the nation's youth. In fact, the abundance of elementary school graduates rendered an elementary school diploma worthless in comparison to a secondary school credential. The latter became the minimum requirement for maintaining or improving one's status. For women, secondary education opened the possibility of a teaching career, and became almost essential in marrying into the same or higher social class. Hence, the general increase in demand for post-elementary education was directly related to the popular ideology of self-advancement, and to the indispensability of

¹³⁶ The change in the meaning for success from the Meiji to the Taisho period is discussed extensively by Kinmonth in *Self Made Man*.

¹³⁷ Amano, *Shiken*, pp. 293-296.

a secondary or higher school diploma for that self-improvement.

Risshin shusse and *gakureki shugi* also explain the higher demand for the more desirable secondary schools. The use of credentials to hire and promote employees, or to determine one's social status, was not limited to judging from the general level of education one had completed. The prestige of the school from which one had graduated made much difference. Therefore, students (with pressure from parents) hoped to enter the more prestigious, public schools rather than private institutions; in addition, they aimed at as highly ranked a school as possible. *Gakureki shugi*, in other words, is what gave meaning to the schools being ranked by entrance competition.

The desire to *risshin shusse* and the feasibility of the same through educational credentials explain the high demand for desirable post-elementary schools in prewar Japan. Since demand did not match supply, and school diplomas were so precious, a fair and meritocratic method for selecting those able to attain the credentials was necessary from the perspective of the people. For them, entrance examinations were such a method. The tests ensured that established groups and the rich did not monopolize the route to success. In other words, they were the means by which a fair *risshin shusse* through education was possible for all. Thus, the demand-supply gap, *risshin shusse*, and *gakureki shugi* are

also significant in explaining the utility of entrance examinations for the people. They opposed the tests' abolition because of this utility. The demand-supply inequality also accounts for the tests' usefulness for schools in selecting from an excess of applicants; and for the government in effectively limiting the amount of demand that was satiated. Moreover, this multiple usefulness explains why entrance examinations and their influence persisted despite the vigorous reform efforts. To summarize, the demand-supply gap in a *risshin shusse-gakureki shugi* society was the underlying reason behind the extent, the routinization, and the persistence of entrance examinations' influence in prewar Japan.

TABLE 1

MIDDLE SCHOOL ENTRANCE RATES

year	number of applicants	number accepted	entrance rate
1894	12,509	9,074	72.54
1898	36,296	22,968	63.28
1902	49,463	28,407	57.73
1906	55,238	29,746	53.85
1910	60,595	32,007	52.94
1914	73,088	35,255	49.59
1918	85,190	39,844	46.77
1922	155,566	63,504	40.82
1926	145,613	76,977	52.86
1930	108,658	75,078	69.10
1934	131,093	78,848	60.15
1938	180,203	89,713	49.78

HIGHER SCHOOL ENTRANCE RATES

1898	3,178	1,580	49.7
1902	4,574	1,646	36.0
1906	5,151	1,475	28.6
1910	9,278	2,147	23.1
1914	9,427	2,025	21.5
1918	11,833	2,675	19.2
1922	29,715	4,452	15.0
1926	59,144	6,091	10.3
1930	37,837	6,685	17.7
1934	30,038	4,622	15.4
1938	35,096	4,660	13.3

Source: *Annual Report for the Minister of State for Education*, Tokyo, nos. 28-59, (1900-1932), and Masuda, *Nyûgaku shiken: kako kara genzai made*, Minshû kyôiku kyôkai, 1958.

CONCLUSION

I have argued in this thesis that the social and educational influence of entrance examinations was not limited in prewar Japan--it was not limited in the sense that it extended beyond the few that managed to enter the elite schools, and in the sense that many phenomena that characterize the entrance examination competition today were already routinized before the Pacific War. The schools were ranked by the difficulty of their entrance examinations and by how well they prepared students for the examination to the next stage. The competition to enter the most prestigious schools was excessive. "Escalator" schools that led to higher education with considerably less effort were in place. Private tutors, *juken* literature, and *yobikô* thrived on the competition among the *jukensei* and *rônin*. Occasionally, frauds related to entrance examinations also surfaced. The students preparing for the tests suffered from "hellish" emotional and physical anguish. This examination hell extended to fifth and sixth grade elementary students aiming to enter a secondary school.

The more significant influence of the prewar entrance examinations lies in the effect they had on elementary school education. The schools conducted extra review sessions for the tests after school and on weekends, and sometimes

replaced extracurricular classes with such sessions. Elementary education in general became geared towards examination preparation. Thus, preparatory education for secondary school entrance examinations affected even those who did not intend to sit for the tests.

The content of the prewar entrance examinations, and the pervasiveness of their social and educational consequences, suggest considerable continuity between the situation before and after the Second World War. The Occupation period overhauled the school system but did not put an end to entrance examinations. In fact, in the confusion of the quick transition to a drastically different system, higher institutions had to rely on entrance examinations. As we noted in the Introduction, the tests' influence remains extensive in the postwar period. Even though the percentage of the nation's students actually taking the examinations is higher in postwar Japan, in some ways, the impact was harsher before the war. Today, preparatory education begins at the secondary level for the majority of the students as opposed to the elementary level before the war. Moreover, the *hensachi* (deviation value) system allows today's *jukensei* to know their ability, and is a helpful indicator in choosing schools.¹³⁸ Prewar students had no such systematized indicator.

¹³⁸ Private firms conduct mock tests for final year students at the junior and senior high levels. Each student gets the deviation value of his score. The firms calculate

Our other major concern is why the extensive influence of entrance examinations was possible, and why it persisted despite criticism and attempted reform. The essential reason was the gap between the demand for and supply of desirable post-elementary education in a society where success through educational credentials was accessible to all the youth. The vast amount of material an examinee had to remember to pass the examinations of preferred schools also explains the extra efforts in and outside school. The tough content of the examinations was itself a result of severe entrance competition generated by the demand-supply difference.

The reforms aimed at simplifying entrance examinations and ending preparatory education failed because the examinations served some purpose for the bureaucracy on the

the average deviation value of previous students who passed the entrance examination of each higher-level school. The *jukensei* can compare their deviation value with the school averages while selecting where to apply. The relationship of *hensachi* with the actual entrance examination of each school is indirect, however, the students can get an idea of their ability relative to those who passed the test in the past. These examinations are usually conducted by large *yobikô* and are open to non-members, since a higher number of participants produces better estimates. For the same reason, students (and *rônin*) try to take the mock tests given by *yobikô* with a nationwide chain, such as Yoyogi Zeminaru (Seminar). Using their *hensachi* in choosing schools means that most students can pass the examination of at least some school. This does not deter high school graduates from doing *rônin*, for the rank of the university they enter and graduate from affects the rest of their lives. Thus, many students study extra year(s) to raise their ability and enter a prestigious school.

one hand and both the educators and those being educated on the other. For the people, the tests were a nondiscriminatory vehicle for achieving economic and social status. To the elementary schools, every examination season was an opportunity to increase prestige. For post-elementary schools, the examinations were a highly effective instrument for selecting from excess demand. Simplifying the content of the tests made this instrument less useful or even ineffective. The government saw the tests as valves that only "vented" a safe amount of demand for education. The government was extremely concerned about the negative consequences of entrance examinations, but it could not risk removing the valves. As a result, it attempted to remove the consequences of the tests without removing the examinations themselves, much like trying to blow away nails inseparably stuck to a powerful magnet. This allowed the schools, the students and their parents to protect their interests and defy government reform. The upshot was that the magnet remained powerful and the nails did not budge--the examinations remained difficult and the consequences persisted.

The story of the routinization of entrance examinations and the phenomena that accompanied them in prewar Japan is relevant to the general theme of the state-society relationship at the time. It is yet another aspect that brings into question the all too common "active director" and "passive responder" characterizations of the state and the

society respectively in the course of the nation's prewar history. The issue examined in this paper is evidence of the vibrant and, at times, somewhat autonomously active nature of society as opposed to the view of it being meekly led by the collar by the state. Society--in our case, the schools, the students and their parents--was as important a player in the situation described here as the government and the bureaucracy, and perhaps even more so. In other words, in the complex educational drama revolving around entrance examinations, society was not always the assistant director working within the guidelines set by the director. Instead it often neglected those guidelines and assumed the role of the real director in the scene that actually resulted. Similar possibilities of a more active and autonomous role on the part of the non-governmental sectors, such as scientists, religions, and businesses, have been suggested by some scholars.¹³⁹ Together they point to a need to move away from overly state-centered explanations for, if not political, at

¹³⁹ J. Bartholomew, "Science, Bureaucracy and Freedom in Meiji and Taisho Japan," in *Conflict in Modern Japanese History: The neglected Tradition*, eds. T. Najita and J.V. Koschman (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1982), pp. 295-341; S.M. Garon, "State and Religion in Imperial Japan, 1912-1945," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 12:2 (Summer 1986), pp. 273-302; W.D. Wray, *Mitsubishi and the N.Y.K., 1870-1914: Business Strategy in the Japanese Shipping Industry* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1984); A. Gordon, "Business and the Corporate State: The Business Lobby and Bureaucrats on Labor, 1911-1941," in *Managing Industrial Enterprise; Cases From Japan's Prewar Experience*, ed. W. D. Wray (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 53-85.

least economic and social conditions that characterize "imperial" Japan.

The continuity in the influence of entrance examinations and the failure of reform in prewar Japan are relevant to the controversy that surrounds the examination system today. Reform of entrance examinations to reduce some of the negative consequences is a concern among critics and officials alike. The criticisms are much the same: education being geared towards examination preparation and the plight of the students. Minor reforms have been attempted, but examination hell shows no sign of abating. The continuity means that the roots of current problems related to entrance examinations extend further back in time than the postwar era. The same is true of the central position the examinations occupy in society at large. Thus, the issues that contemporary critics and reformers have to address are not young phenomena that can be removed easily.

Perhaps the key point is the other side of the controversy: the perceived benefits of the examinations evident in their long acceptance. Parents and students obviously do not relish the anguish caused by examination hell. As in prewar Japan, however, they accept the tests as a very fair and meritocratic way of selection. People have learnt to live with evils for the sake of the rewards that not all receive but can try for. School administrators may express sympathy for the suffering students, but are not

willing to give up entrance examinations. In their eyes, the tests remain the most objective and effective selection method. With this long history of acceptance by the public, the government cannot risk enforcing radical reform. Moreover, the education system has supposedly served well the economic "success" of the nation, and is being studied by outsiders. The government may not want to attempt radical reform. It does acknowledge the excesses of the system and has tried to recommend a standardized test to all national universities. Some universities are participating, but they still conduct their own examinations in addition. The prewar reform experience suggests that any reform (to remove the negative consequences) that does not enforce the abolition of separate examinations for each school is tantamount to no reform. The fact that the tests continue to hold a certain utility for the concerned sectors suggests that the story of entrance examinations may be a never-ending one.

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GLOSSARY

Note: In English equivalents "examination" denotes "entrance examination." The only exception is *shiken* which means examination. Definitions for terms that were predominantly used in the plural form are in that form. In Japanese the same term is used for the singular form.

gakureki shugi. educational credentialism

gakureki. academic credentials

Ichikô. First Higher School

juken jigoku. examination hell

juken zasshi. examination magazines

juken. to take an examination

jukensei. students preparing to take an examination

juku. cram schools offering preparatory classes in the evenings and on holidays

jumbi kyôiku. preparatory education

jumbi. preparation

katei kyôshi. private tutors

Kyôiku jiron. Education opinion

kyôiku. education

Meiji period. 1868-1912

Mombusho. Ministry (Department) of Education, Japan

nyûgaku nan (nyûnan). the difficulty to enter a school, or
severe entrance competition

nyûgaku shiken (nyûshi). entrance examinations

risshin shusse. rise in the world

rônin. unaffiliated students studying after graduation for
the entrance examination of the next higher level.

shiken jigoku. examination hell

shiken. examinations

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yobikô. preparatory schools for rônin