CHAPTER 7

EDUCATION IN PREMODERN CHINA AND JAPAN

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BOTH China and Japan developed sophisticated and extensive traditions in education from very early times. China's major educational thrust was centered on educating the heart-mind for moral and proper conduct, a process of total education and self-cultivation. The thrust of this education was seen in the primacy of Confucianism and the examination system. Japan, heavily influenced by Confucianism from China, nevertheless adapted it to suit a unique culture and set of institutions. Temple schools, government schools, and nongovernment academies flourished in premodern Japan, educating both samurai and commoners.

China: Introduction

Education in China can be traced back to the birth of civilization in the second millennium BCE. Earliest written sources are inscriptions on the shoulder blades of deer and turtle shells divining the future. Someone must have taught those scribes. We lack information on who those teachers were, but archaeologists have uncovered practice bones used by beginners learning their craft. The ancient graphs evolved into standard characters, but drawing them continued to require long practice before the results were acceptable. If learning figured in the very gestation of Chinese civilization, the same was thought to hold for individuals. The tradition of prenatal education (Ch *taijiao*, J *taikyō*) was already evident during the Former Han (206 BCE–6 CE) when Lu Xiang (c. 77–76 BCE) praised the exemplary mother of a revered ancient emperor for exemplary conduct during her pregnancy:

> In ancient times a woman with child did not lie on her side as she slept, neither would she sit sideways or stand on one foot. She would not eat dishes having harmful flavor; if the food was cut awry, she would not eat it; if the mat was not placed straight, she would not sit on it. She did not let her eyes gaze on lewd sights nor let her ears listen to depraved sounds. At night she ordered blind musicians to chant the *Odes*; she spoke only of proper things.[1]

This behavior assured that her child would be healthy not only in body but in moral disposition and cast of mind.

Fascinating as these practices are, the concern here is neither with child raising nor with the birth and the early history of education, but with the mature product. That still takes us back about a millennium to the Song dynasty (960–1279), when printing first made books accessible to a wider public and the crucial intellectual, institutional, and economic foundations were laid for the subsequent premodern centuries. The ideas of moral disposition, as exemplified by prenatal education, were rooted in antiquity and drew on the classic and authoritative past.

China: Intellectual Foundations

Confucius (Kongzi, 551–479 BCE) was but one teacher during the formative period of Chinese classical thought that culminated in the "hundred schools," but he uniquely came to be venerated as "the teacher of ten thousand generations." Long before Song, the teachings associated with his name became the educational mainstream. Confucian texts dominated the curriculum. Beginning in the thirteenth century, these included, as the core of the core, *The Four Books,* followed by the ancient classics traditionally thought to predate Confucius, although now considered not to have taken their final form until the Han dynasty. One of these classics, *The Record of Rites* (*Liji*), tells us that as soon as infants could feed themselves, they were taught to use their right hand.[2] Next they were taught proper manners. The importance of early behavioral training was echoed and reinforced by the most influential of the Song Confucians, Zhu Xi (1130–1200), who taught that education should begin by teaching the children, among other things, how to speak and walk properly. Much concerned with education, he compiled his own influential and not so "elementary" *Elementary Learning* (*Xiaoxue*). It was also Zhu Xi who gave *The Four Books* their primacy in the curriculum.

The focus on proper conduct was deeply rooted in the origins of Confucianism. Responding to what they perceived as a civilizational crisis, Confucians, and other early teachers and theorists, were prompted to emphasize action rather than words. They were primarily concerned with how to live rather than how to understand the nature of the universe. This was built into the language itself, for *jiao* (as in *taijia*o), "teach or teaching," designated transforming the learner morally rather than just imparting information. Thought was not separated from action in a tradition that did not divorce mind from the body.

It was a tradition that had a great deal to say about the mind that it located in the chest and to which it attributed affection as well as cognition, dispassionate thinking but also gut feelings. Although they got the anatomy wrong, the Chinese understanding of the mind was more compatible with current neuroscience based on functional magnetic resonance imaging than with the classical Cartesian separation of body and mind once prevalent in the West. Nevertheless there remains the problem of how to translate *Xin*, the Chinese word for "mind" as well as "heart." For example, the famous Buddhist "Heart Sutra" surely concerns the "mind." More accurately, but also more awkwardly, the Chinese word is often translated as "heart-mind" or "mind-heart." Another alternative is to transliterate

rather than translate. Thus *Kokoro*, the Japanese pronunciation of *xin*, is the English as well as Japanese title of the most beloved novel by Natsume Soseki (1867–1916), one of Japan's greatest writers.

Educating the heart-mind entailed internalizing the lessons of the sages, absorbing their teachings until they formed part of oneself—learning them "by heart." The ideal was total education or self-cultivation. This signified not only learning the principles of morality and mastering the rules of conduct intellectually but learning how to perform the solemn rituals that structured life, how always, every day in public and at home, to act in accord with the demands of propriety that defined civilized life and were handed down in *The Record of Rites* and the other revered texts, and how to live by them until they became second nature. Education was as much about developing good habits as about learning how and what to think.

The rituals and rules of proper behavior were what separated the civilized from the barbarian. In its formative stages Chinese (and East Asian) civilization developed without contact with any comparably literate or sophisticated societies. There was only one Way to be civilized, and that Way had to be taught and learned. We are not born knowing how to mourn, how deeply and long to bow, or how to dress properly. We must learn. But it was more than that.

> The dog guards the night
> The cock heralds the dawn
> If you do not study
> How can you become a person?
> The silkworm exudes silk
> The bee makes honey
> If you do not study
> Are you not like an animal?[3]

These verses are from *The Three Character Classic* (or more accurately *Trimetrical Classic* or *Three Characters per Line Classic*, thirteenth century), a primer traditionally memorized in China and Japan by children beginning to learn how to read and write. Education is not only what makes us fully human—it is what makes us human in the first place.

Ideally erudition and moral wisdom reinforced each other in a lengthy process that enabled an individual to become an exemplary person and even aspire to sagehood. A sage was one whose thoughts, feelings, and actions were always perfectly aligned and completely appropriate for the situation in which he found himself. It took even Confucius seventy years until he had internalized the rules to the point that he could let himself go without fear of transgressing. Confucius never claimed to be a sage, but he was later regarded as such on a par with the ancient sage-rulers who had taught humankind civilization. Though latter-day sages were few and far between, sagehood remained the Confucian ideal, comparable to sainthood in Christianity.

Tradition had Confucius distinguishing between three types of people. At one pole were the ancient sages, so brilliant at birth that they did not need instruction, and at the opposite extreme unfortunates inherently too stupid to be capable of learning. In between were those, like Confucius himself, who could learn. Fortunately, most people were assigned to

the teachable majority. Although the two greatest classical interpreters of Confucius disagreed, in that Mencius (c. 372–289 BCE) defined human nature as good and Xunzi (c. 312–230 BCE) maintained that it is bad, both men held that everyone was endowed with the same nature and the same heart-mind.

Later Confucians agreed on this and on the crucial need for education. According to Mencius, human nature has to be cultivated just as sprouts need nourishing if they are to grow into healthy plants. Xunzi stressed intense, concentrated, and lifelong learning as essential for turning inherently bad, unsocial, selfish people into civilized, moral human beings. Both Mencius and Xunzi taught that everyone has the potential of growing into a sage. Everyone is teachable: "From the Son of Heaven down to the common people, all without exception should take self-cultivation as the root."[4] These words are from *The Great Learning*, a chapter of the *Record of Rites*, singled out to become one of the *Four Books*.

During the Song dynasty, Mencius finally won his argument with Xunzi, and the optimistic view of human nature prevailed henceforth. His book, *The Mencius*, became one of the *Four Books* influencing ideas about education as well as what was taught. At the very beginning of *The Three Character Classic* the child learns of the goodness of human nature and the need for education:

> People at the start
> are by nature good
> By nature close
> they diverge in practice
>
> If they are not taught
> their nature will shift
> The Way of teaching
> Values concentration.

Mencius would have applauded the first stanza. Xunzi would have objected but heartily endorsed the second, for he urged students to be single-minded like earthworms and not slither sideways all over the place like crabs A frequent metaphor compared self-betterment to the grinding and polishing of jade.

The Confucian Way, always subject to interpretation, was not the only way in either China or Japan. In China, Daoists mocked Confucius and saw book learning as an obstacle to understanding and coping with the world; Legalists and Moists challenged Confucian values; and Buddhists wanted to release people from suffering rather than having them cultivate themselves. Buddhist and Daoist temples did train monks and nuns, and for a great many people in premodern China, Confucian ethics were reinforced by Buddhist and Daoist doctrines of retribution as set forth in the "morality books" (*shanshu*) that first appeared during the Song and the "Ledgers of Merit and Demerit" (*gonguoge*) of Late Ming and Qing. These texts had an educational mission and function; their values were Confucian, but they did not enter the school curriculum. Confucians did not have a monopoly on schooling, but their values constituted the mainstream of educational thought and dominated the discourse on education.

China: The Basic Curriculum

Infants, girls as well as boys, were taught to defer to seniors, sit and stand properly, and behave themselves. Girls and boys were taught to favor their right hand, but the differences in their instruction started early. Girls were required to show greater deference. The *Record of Rites* advises that boys be taught to speak forcefully and clearly, girls submissively and low. At seven *su*i (about five years of age) boys and girls were separated. Because of the nature of the sources, but also because of traditional East Asian practice, most of the following discussion will focus on male education.

The Han dynasty *Classic of Filiality* taught the primacy of filial piety. Model emulation was emphasized. *The Twenty-Four Paragons Filial Piety* (Yuan dynasty, 1271–1378) featured striking examples of devotion to parents.

There was no corresponding list of model students, but still today, even people not steeped in *The Three Character Classic* know of Kuang Heng boring a hole in the wall to let in light from next door and of Che Yin reading by the light of fireflies and in winter using moonlight reflected by the snow. If tea did not do the job, one could keep awake by emulating Sun Jing, who tied his hair to a crossbeam, or follow the example of Su Qin, who pricked himself with an awl. Child prodigies were praised, but the success of the octogenarian Liang Hao demonstrated to the child reciting the *Three Character Classic* that persistence pays and it is never too late.

Reading and writing were basic, and reading came first. Learning how to recognize characters began with wordbooks, some with pictures illustrating each character. Next came primers. During the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties, bookshops offered a profusion of primers, of which the three most widely used were known collectively as the *Three, Hundred, Thousand*. *Three* refers to the *Three Character Classic*. *Hundred* stands for a very different primer. *The Hundred Surnames* contains no sentences and tells no stories but consisted of 438 surnames, later expanded to a total of 504, arranged in eight-character rhyming lines. This must be one of the most tedious texts ever assembled anywhere. The closest Western equivalents that come to mind are the accounts of who begot whom in the *Bible*. The *Thousand Character Classic*, the oldest of the three primers (c. 540 CE), was designed to teach characters by not repeating any graph, although one does reappear. Like *The Three Characters Classic* and many other primers, it provided basic moral instruction and introduction to the physical world, humanity, civilization, and history.

Such primers merit investigation as repositories of shared values, information, ideas, and lore. Mastering all three enabled students to recognize about two thousand individual characters. That they were introduced in poetic form not only aided memorization but also eliminated the need for learning how to punctuate, a far from obvious skill that required good comprehension of the text.[5]

Learning to write began with instruction on grinding ink and holding the brush. Next came tracing out simple characters and writing them in squares before proceeding to more complex graphs. The ancient practice bones were succeeded by heaps of paper. During these early years children were also learning basic arithmetic, but use of the abacus was left for later instruction for those who would need it occupationally.

Command over this elementary curriculum provided baseline literacy and numeracy sufficient for ordinary folk to make their way through life and prepared some for apprenticeships in workshops or commercial enterprises. At the top of the scale in cities and towns

prosperous merchants needed to read and write to conduct their business and perhaps indulge in some of the fiction and other publications that made modest demands on their readers.

However, such an education was only a beginning for those who aspired to the elite education that opened the door to the civil service examination. Few candidates made it all the way to a "presented scholar" degree, but even partial examination success could lead to employment—perhaps as a teacher or tutor. Medicine, proffering legal advice, and astronomy/astrology entailed specialized training but offered reasonably attractive career opportunities. Even setting up as a village scribe and letter writer released a man from the drudgery of working in the fields and paddies.

At the core of the examination curriculum were *The Four Books: The Great Learning* (a chapter of *The Record of Rites*) that linked individual self-cultivation and world governance; the *Analects*, revered as conveying the purported conversations, sayings, and actions of Confucius; *The Mencius* and *The Doctrine of the Mean*. The latter was another chapter of *The Record of Rites*, which supplied classical grounds for the Neo-Confucian philosophy and morality that dominated the examination system until it was abolished in 1905.

Although in Ming and Qing memorizing all 99,010 characters of *The Rites* became optional, examination preparation demanded filling an enormous memory bank: 621,206 characters, reduced to 518,000 in 1796, all written in a classic nonvernacular language. Beginning at age eight and completing this foundational curriculum by fifteen required memorizing around two hundred characters daily.[6]

Beyond the core texts, examination candidates needed to familiarize themselves with Zhu Xi's commentaries, with lengthy histories, and with China's vast literature. In addition, they studied model examination essays and, beginning in Ming, practiced composing the highly stylized and artificial "eight-legged essays" demanded by the exams. From 1370 to 1756 candidates were not required to write poems, but competence in poetry was expected of a gentleman, as was elegant calligraphy. The exact mix varied over time, but the load was always a heavy one.

The chances of ascending all the way up to a "presented scholar" degree were minimal, but even incomplete examination success brought status and prestige. Under these circumstances the demands of the examinations molded the curriculum. While some dedicated teachers admonished students to study for the sake of self-cultivation, there was a strong tendency for the students to dream of acing the exams. Careerism tended to trump disinterested scholarship. Students who wished to pursue their own intellectual interests and chafed at the examination system curriculum were told that they owed it to their parents to pursue examination degrees. Defying one's parents and dropping out was not an option.

The sons of criminals and boatmen were excluded, but the examinations theoretically and legally were open to the vast majority of males. Wealthy families could hire a tutor to supervise home schooling, but even those who disdained the schools might want to attend an academy or study at the university.

China: Schools

China is as diverse as it is vast, and sources were much sparser for the less prosperous areas than they were for the flourishing Yangtze region, yet all regions did share a common

classical heritage. *The Record of Rites* reports, "A jade uncut will not form a vessel; a man who does not study will not know the Way. Therefore when the ancient kings were establishing their states and governing the people, they gave priority to instruction and schools." The text then names the schools established in hamlets, neighborhoods, districts, and state capitals. It outlines the contents of the nine years of schooling and describes the ceremonial opening of "The Great College" (*daxue*), complete with the presentation of vegetable offering, the singing of three odes, and the beating of drums. It is less important to speculate about the historicity of this account than to recognize that it was widely accepted and not only provided classical sanction to government schools but insisted on the ruler's duty to educate the people. Also widely accepted by Song was the meritocratic idea that the well-educated should be privileged. State and society agreed with Mencius that mind workers should be supported by those who do physical labor.[7]

As *The Record of Rites* specifies, schools were sites of Confucian ceremonies, and this remained the case for nongovernment as well as government schools. In schools that could not afford a separate shrine, solemn ceremonies were performed in front of a tablet or sometimes a sheet of paper representing Confucius, Zhu Xi, or another Confucian worthy. Zhu Xi himself approved of pictorial representations but ruled out statues.

During the Song there was a government attempt to open schools for all males. Going still further, the founding emperor of the Ming, a man of overwhelming ambition, decreed that there be a government school in every country and prefecture. Reaching down to the very base of society, he also decreed that a community school be established in every village. His aim was to "transform by education" (*jiaohua*) "all under heaven." However, Sarah Schneewind, after careful scrutiny of local gazetteers, reports a lack of correlation between imperial orders for schools and what was actually done.

The Ming founding emperor tried to divorce community schools (*shexue*) from examination preparation, but that did not work. What they did do was to combine moral, ritual, and basic literary instructions. Their agenda as well as their names invariably reflect their Confucian aspiration to "transform by educating." Significantly "Nourishing Rectitude Community School" was the most popular name for these institutions.[8]

The vicissitudes of community schools provide a fascinating barometer of numerous interrelated aspects of the history of the Ming dynasty. These include religious tensions pitting Confucian schools against Buddhist temples and the shrines of local cults whose buildings and grounds faced the threat of confiscation for the benefit of local schools. By the sixteenth century community schools were most often founded by government officials stationed in a locality serving their tour of duty, but the schools were locally financed.

Politically the failure of the founding emperor's school program reflected the tension between center and locality in which the local elite gained the upper hand. Alternatives to community schools included home schooling for those wealthy enough to employ a tutor and lineage schools that provided instruction to promising boys from humble homes to promote lineage solidarity and in the hope that their academic and examination success would benefit the whole lineage. Such lineage schools flourished especially in the lower Yangtze region and were a source of new blood for officialdom.

Another alternative to community schools were charity schools (*yixue*), similar in function and in depending on local financial support, so that in the seventeenth century the line between the two kinds of schools became indistinguishable. Still more disconcerting evidence from Guangdong indicates some "community schools" became "schools" in name only while engaged in various other local activities.

China: Teachers and Pedagogy

The passage below was quoted by Ye Cai (fl. 1248) in his commentary to "The Way to Teach," chapter 11 of the *Jinsilu* (*Reflections on Things at Hand*), a Neo-Confucian anthology enormously influential in Japan as well as in China. It begins by restating the importance of education and agrees that education needs to start before the infant is capable of comprehension.

> Mencius said: The noble person has three delights, and being ruler over the world is not among them. That his father and mother are both alive and his older brothers present no cause for concern—this is his first delight. That he can look up and not be abashed before Heaven, look down and not be ashamed before others—this is his second delight. That he can get the most eminent talents in the world and educate them—this is his third delight.[9]

Confucius himself was a teacher. Teaching was the most noble calling, and those engaged in it were to be treated with the utmost respect. As a Han source put it:

> Be certain you are respectful and reverent, keep the expression on your face harmonious, examine your language and commands, be quick in leaping forward and in jumping back, and be certain you are serious and decorous. This is how one honors teachers.... This is because: Teaching is the most important of our moral duties, and learning is the culmination of wisdom. The greatest of moral duties is to benefit others, and nothing is of more benefit to others than teaching.[10]

Confucius was recorded as saying different things to different disciples according to their needs. Ideally a teacher was a life coach imparting "situational learning." But a coach needs to discipline, and the passage quoted above from the *Record of Rites* includes in its account of the beginning of school the introduction of the disciplinary rod (*xianchu*) that formed part of a teacher's stock in trade. The *Three Character Classic* echoes *the Rites*:

> To raise but not teach
> that is the father's fault
> To teach but not be strict
> that is the teacher's laziness.

In China as in the West, there is no way of knowing how many teachers spared the rod.

Like a coach supervising calisthenics or an army drill sergeant, much of the teacher's work consisted in drilling the students in the chanting the texts. Some teachers did explain the meaning of the characters, agreeing with Wang Yun (1764–1854) that children are not

dogs or pigs and should not be forced to memorize texts without explanation like chanting sutras or chewing wood.[11] Many primers did tell stories to interest children, but it was universally accepted that children up to age fourteen were good at memorization but had little understanding, whereas later their abilities were reversed. It followed that emphasizing rote memorization at the start of schooling was appropriate.

Perhaps a text really need not be read aloud a thousand or even a hundred times, but a strong case for repeated practice can be made for training the hand to write correctly, while leaving students to figure out on their own why some of their characters failed to pass muster but honed their capacity for visual analysis. When it came to wielding the brush, he who hesitated tended to be lost. A similar principle applies today in teaching foreign languages by having students memorize pattern sentences before introducing rules of grammar and syntax. Whatever the arguments in favor of rote learning, listening to the sing-song recitation of a text over and over again surely was trying for all within earshot.

Then as now, being a teacher was not an unmitigated delight. A teacher might be diligent yet have discipline problems, as depicted in *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (or *Story of the Stone*), when a substitute lost control over a room full of unruly boys from a great lineage. Teaching provided stopgap employment for a man preparing for the civil service examinations, but a teacher's lot was not necessarily a happy one. If he assigned too little work, the parents complained, but the pupils hated him if he made them work too hard.

As always, circumstances varied in the status of the teacher and in pedagogy. Wang Yangming (1472–1529), next to Zhu Xi the most influential Neo-Confucian, played down book learning: "If words are examined in the mind and found to be wrong, although they have come from the mouth of Confucius, I dare not accept them as correct."[12] He advocated a more lenient pedagogy with emphasis on singing, but his actual influence is difficult to ascertain.

China: Higher Education

The history of the Imperial University (*taixue*) goes back to Han, but by Ming two directorates of education (*guozijian*), one in Beijing and another in Nanjing, were the primary government "universities." In the early years of the Ming dynasty, with thousands of students engaged in active academic life, they enjoyed an international reputation, but by the sixteenth century they lost their vigor and degenerated into institutes of higher learning in name only.

Similarly, early in the dynasty some government schools apparently functioned well and boasted impressive libraries, but by mid-Ming they had degenerated into places for men simply to register in order to secure their standing in the civil service examinations. Staffed by low-ranking and all too often senile educators who might show face only when required at Confucian temple ceremonies, they provided little instruction. Consequently higher education was predominantly private. Some men studied on their own, for preparing for examinations could occupy most or all of a lifetime. Some employed tutors. Others enrolled in academies that became centers of scholarship and intellectual life as well as examination preparation.

Most famous and widely emulated also in Japan was the White Deer Grotto Academy (*Pailutong shuyuan*, also White Deer Hollow or Cave), dating to the tenth century and restored by Zhu Xi while he was an official in Jiangsi. That its purpose was moral as well as academic education is clear from the sayings posted on the lintels of the academy's doors, based on *The Mencius* (3A:4):

> Affection between parent and child
> Rightness between ruler and minister;
> Differentiation between husband and wife;
> Precedence between elder and younger;
> Trust between friends.[13]

Zhu Xi did not believe in detailed regulations, but this did not deter his followers from drawing up strict precepts instructing students "to stand erect" and not "stand on one foot or lean to one side," to "speak respectfully," to "keep clothing neat," to "look and listen properly" without staring or cocking the ear, to "eat and drink temperately" and not "eat to the full or hanker after rare delicacies," while "drinking only at festivals or when ordered by superiors," and then not more than three cups and never to the point of drunkenness. The list ends in allowing them leisure after studying, to play the lute, practice archery, and play pitch-pot as long as they followed the rules. But board games were interdicted.

Judging by the three examination questions still extant, the curriculum covered the whole spectrum of formal Chinese learning. One question required students to analyze the thought of seven prominent Song scholars in terms of their relationship to the original teachings of Confucius, and another required an analysis of the persistence of heterodox theories calling for a comparison between the old heterodoxies of Yang Zhu and Mozi and those of Buddhism and Daoism that Zhu was intent on refuting.

Zhu Xi invited fellow scholars to lecture at White Deer, including Lu Jiuyuan (1139–1192). Zhu disagreed with Lu philosophically but surely appreciated his talk "The gentleman understands rightness, whereas the petty person understands profit."[14] Sounding rather like a topic for a sermon, this illustrates Neo-Confucian melding of moralizing and philosophizing. Originally, Song academies were temples of Neo-Confucian learning, but even before the end of that dynasty, they compromised with the demand for examination preparation. Beginning in the thirteenth century, when Neo-Confucianism prevailed in the exams, it paid for gentlemen to steep themselves in Zhu Xi's writings.

During the Ming the academies continued to serve as intellectual centers as well as institutions for examination preparation. In the Late Ming some also became political centers and suffered repression. Most famous was the Donglin Eastern Grove Academy of Wuxi that led a reformist movement that ended with the execution of many of its members and the razing of the academy in 1626. The ultimate fate of the academies was government co-optation in Late Ming and Qing.

Government was a male preserve, and at all levels government and education were deeply intertwined, nourished by the same Confucian roots. Education served the state by promoting state values. It channeled much of the intellectual energies of the people, but it also empowered people and equipped them to be critical of the government. Huang Zongxi (1610–1695), in his *Waiting for the Dawn*, envisioned an independent academy as a

counterweight to the imperial establishment. This never came to pass, but it does attest to the dual nature of Confucian education, legitimizing those in power but also prompting a dedicated few to speak truth to power.

China: Female Education

When Lan Dingyuan (1675–1733) wrote *Women's Learning* (*Nüxue*), thereby contributing to and participating in an "explosion" of didactic handbooks for women, he naturally drew on *Admonitions for Women* (*Nüjie*) by Ban Zhao (48?–c. 114?), China's most famous female scholar, who completed her brother's *History of the Han*. Ban Zhao's *Admonitions* acquired the status of a classic of proper female behavior, prescribing that women should practice "The Four Virtues": "morality," "proper speech," "proper bearing," and "diligent work." Lan followed her and, following the example of Liu Xiang's *Biographies of Exemplary Women* (*Lienu zhuan*), included "idealized brief lives of women, often dramatic, always moralistic, sometimes either precious or perverse." Lan wrote his book for women because he argued that what they needed to learn differed from what men needed to learn:

> The content of education women receive should be different from that of men. It is because men should be learning all their lives, thus they have ample time to study classics, history and various schools of philosophy. As for women, they have only about ten years to learn before they committed themselves to household duties. Owing to the limitations of time, they should read books specially meant for them, otherwise it would not be easy for them to understand the subject thoroughly.[15]

Ban Zhou defined women's work as follows: "Learn how to weave with hemp and ramie, don't mix fine and rough fibers. Don't run the shuttle of the loom so quickly that you make a mess. When you see the silkworms spinning their cocoons, you must attend them day and night, picking mulberry leaves to feed them.... Learn how to cut out shoes and make socks. Learn how to cut fabric and sew it into garments. Learn how to embroider, mend and darn."

Girls had to learn not only proper conduct but also the frugality and diligence required for household management, and they were expected to develop skills in spinning, weaving, and needlework, painstaking embroidery of pillows, and, in Ming and Qing, wear tiny shoes to cover their tiny feet. Years of excruciatingly painful foot binding held lessons on how to endure suffering.

A significant number of scholars believed that women should be taught to read but limited to works pertaining to virtuous behavior and everyday practicalities. *The Instructions of Mother Wen* (*Wenshi muxun*) told its readers, "Women should learn only a few hundred words like firewood, rice, fish and meat. Knowing more would bring no benefit but harm." Others wanted mothers to know enough to instruct their children, but there was a wide range of opinion. The *Three Character Classic* includes praise for Mencius's mother's devotion to her son's education, but also for Cai Wenji, famed for her musicality, and Xu Danyun,

famous for her poetry. Cai and Xu are there to show that even girls are capable of great achievement. There is no mention of the female virtues nor of needlepoint or household management. Less is known about female musicians, but there is much information about outstanding poets. Indeed there was an advantage of being excluded from the civil service examinations, for it also meant release from the curriculum. Truly scholarly women did master *The Four Books* and familiarize themselves with the classics, but they were comparatively free to pursue poetry and indeed the results quantitatively as well as qualitatively are impressive.[16] There were those who held to the adage that female talent and virtue do not mix, but there was ample proof to the contrary.

Japan: Introduction

By 1600 Japan had been exposed to Chinese influence for over a millennium but differed profoundly in culture and institutions. The Tokugawa (1600–1867) was the third and most successful shogunate, that is, a government headed by a shogun (generalissimo) formally invested by the emperor but owing his actual power to the feudal loyalty of direct retainers who administered his considerable holdings, and of *daimyo* (hereditary lords) who enjoyed wide latitude in governing their domains.

During some two and a half centuries of peace, samurai were mostly turned into Confucian-style officials. "Taming the samurai" was a far-reaching process that varied over time and place. The shogun's school in Edo (modern Tokyo), a fountainhead of orthodox Neo-Confucianism, served as a model for some twenty-seven domain schools before the shogunate ended in 1867. Political fragmentation and the absence of a Chinese-style examination system made for great regional diversity. For example, under the leadership of an exceptionally devoted daimyo, in Okayama by 1764 some 124 local writing schools (*tenarai-ijo*) provided elementary education for commoners.[17]

During the Tokugawa period, most samurai lived and worked in the castle towns that served as political capitals. Samurai alone were entitled to wear a sword and, at least theoretically, to lord it over merchants, artisans, and farmers—the remaining three officially recognized hereditary classes. Enterprising commoners, however, profited from the unprecedented economic growth that stimulated and financed an increasing demand for literacy not only in urban centers but also in the countryside, beginning with headmen responsible for tax collection. Inhabiting the interface between local society and the state, village headmen needed to read and respond to government paperwork. Other members of the village elite were motivated to acquire sufficient education to enable them to keep an eye on the headman and navigate the legal/economic system.[18]

Japan: Basic Commoner Education

The venue and finances for basic education varied widely. In Okayama the domain took the lead, but frequently the initiative was local. A wealthy village family teaching its own children might invite less well-off youngsters to join in. Doctors and retired family heads might

teach part or full time. Priests, physically disabled farmers, and *ronin* (masterless samurai) were another source of teachers. A seventeenth-century comic play (*kyogen*) pokes fun at such a priest. Asked about his writing skills, he admits, "I can't really write well. My letters look like worm trails or sparrow tracks." Assured by villagers, "We want you to be a writing teacher for our small children," he is delighted to accept the job.[19]

Private "writing schools," in urban centers as well as villages, were often called "temple schools" (*terakoya*), reflecting their origins but not the Tokugawa reality, when they were private secular institutions focused on teaching literacy, devoting most of their class time to writing practice. A set of school precepts begins, "To be born human and not be able to write is to be less than human. Illiteracy is a form of blindness." Since many teachers wrote their own primers, their number was legion; one scholar identified a total of 1,993 for the Tokugawa period. Many children began by copying *Teikin orai* (*Home Correspondence*), one of the three most widely used primers. It contained twelve letters, one for each month, covering a wide range of topics, beginning with ceremonials and ending with sickness. Written in old-fashioned Sino-Japanese with Chinese characters floating in a sea of phonetic squiggles (*kana*), as they do in modern Japanese, it introduced vocabulary that would have been useful had not so much of it been outdated. Two other popular primers, *Teaching for Children* (*Doji-kyo*) and *Words of Truth* (*Jitsugo-kyo*), were in Chinese. Optimistically attributed, respectively, to Bai Zhuyi (772–846), Japan's favorite Chinese poet, and Kobo Daishi (Kukai, 774–832), the founder of Japanese Shingon (True Word) Buddhism and a culture hero, both texts predate Tokugawa. They expounded Confucian values "although as part of a world-view that is fundamentally Buddhist." In time, however, the Buddhist elements were attenuated.[20]

School discipline seems not to have been unduly harsh. A standard punishment was for a child to stand on a desk or in a corner holding an incense stick to mark the time. A precept declares that boys who mistreat girls or younger children are "animals in human form" but does not specify a penalty.

Japan: Government Schools and Private Academies

Officially sponsored domain schools got a slow start but grew in the eighteenth century until 215 of the approximately 260 domains supported them. Although their purpose was to give samurai the moral training and knowledge of public affairs required for them as the official elite, a few (seventeen) admitted commoners as students, while others allowed commoners to some functions, such as public lectures. After all, as the thinking went, commoners too needed moral instruction.

Boys began their studies at age eight and spent the next seven years, sometimes under the supervision of more advanced students, immersed in Chinese texts that they read not in Chinese but in a hybrid Sino-Japanese style consisting of Chinese characters accompanied by Japanese particles and verbal inflexions.[21] For learning characters, the Chinese *Thousand Character Classic* figured prominently, as did *The Classic of Filiality* and *The Great Learning*. The rest of *The Four Books* followed. Then came the Chinese classics. In premodern East Asia, as in premodern Europe, an elite education required mastery of a language one did not speak.

Since samurai were supposed to be warriors as well as scholars, there was general agreement that they should receive martial (*bu*) as well as civil (*bun*) instruction. Schools taught swordsmanship, how to use a lance, and other martial skills, but in the course of time these came to amount to "formal gymnastics and disciplined choreography."[22]

Domain schools ranged in quality but generally did fill the need for educated samurai. Some had distinguished teachers, but, as on the continent, the most stimulating and influential teaching took place in nongovernment academies. Some had predominantly samurai students; some admitted commoners as well as samurai. Osaka's Kaitokudo primarily taught commoners.

Japan: Schools of Thought

The Tokugawa period experienced the flourishing of various schools of Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism as well as warrior theory (*bushido*), a nativism associated with Shinto, and the introduction of Western ideas known as "Dutch studies." The academies, centers for ideas as well as pedagogy, were as diverse as Japan itself. A few prominent examples suffice.

When Yamazaki Ansai (1619–1682), an ardent champion of Zhu Xi and of Shinto, established his academy in Kyoto, he adopted Zhu's White Deer Grotto slogans, word for word. His academy of mostly samurai students was known for its strictness and for Ansai's lectures. Lectures were also the mode of instruction at many academies, with students regurgitating the teacher's words. Such mindless parroting could not escape criticism. Ogyu Sorai (1666–1728), a major thinker and rare champion of vernacular Chinese, complained that some students even marked places in the text where the teacher stopped to clear his throat.[23]

Fortunately, on the opposite side of the Kyoto street from Yamazaki Ansai was the very different academy of Ito Jinsai (1627–1705), who, himself from a distinguished commoner background, welcomed townsmen and taught through group readings and discussions. The two academies also differed in that Ansai promoted Shinto as well as Neo-Confucianism, whereas Jinsai, seeking to get back to original Confucianism, even rejected *The Great Learning*. He was also unusually open to the literary masterpieces of the Heian Period, disdained and condemned by strict Confucians as immoral.

A century and a half later another distinguished commoner, Hirose Tanso (1782–1850), presided over a large academy in Kyushu with only a 5.5 percent samurai enrollment but rigorous discipline. The day began at 5 a.m. and the students were instructed to sweep until 6, after which they read and explained passages in Confucian texts before being allowed to wash and eat at seven. After lunch and supper, they were allowed a walk, but the rest of the day was devoted to classes and testing (three hours every day!). Evenings were for studying until they could retire at 10. The curriculum was strictly Confucian, leaving little time for such frivolities as reading a novel. There were also specialized schools, including a few small schools offering "Dutch learning." Much larger and more prominent was Osaka's Kaitokudo, home of Confucian merchant ideology. More broadly, Robert Rubinger has shown that by the middle of the nineteenth century, academies had "become agents of change" both in curriculum and in serving as social and political "escalators" for commoners and lower ranking samurai. Yet no matter how groundbreaking, enrollment in all academies remained strictly male.[24]

Japan: Female Education

Geographic and class differences limit all generalizations on this as on other topics. Although boys predominated, girls, including commoners, did go to school in Tokugawa Japan, but their numbers varied enormously, regionally and between city and countryside. Geisha needed sophisticated education. Large merchant families were more apt to educate daughters to help out in the shops than were farmers, but there were always exceptions. Just learning the simply phonetic *kana* syllabary was better than nothing.

Only one domain made special provision for commoner girls, but girls did attend some local "writing" or "temple" schools, and there were even some girls-only schools. As with boys, moral instruction was their first priority. Among the texts most widely used for this purpose was *The Great Learning for Women* (*Onna Daigaku*), instructing women to be good daughters and devoted wives, warning them against laziness, discontent, slander, jealousy, and especially silliness, but occasionally insisting "that these yielding qualities should be spiced with reserves of aggressiveness which would make her capable of defending her honor and her husband with the ferocious courage of some of the heroes of the *Lienu zhuan* (i.e., *Biographies of Exemplary Women*)."[25] The attribution of *The Great Learning for Women* to the Neo-Confucian scholar Kaibara Ekken (1639–1714), though questionable, reflects its prestige as well as Ekken's own reputation and possibly also that of his wife, a scholar, calligrapher, and poet.

There were other books addressed to women, and sophisticated samurai women were encouraged to read the *Tale of Genji* and other Heian classics written predominantly by women. Tokugawa ladies were expected to be literate and accomplished in "the performing arts such as tea ceremony, stringed musical instruments, dancing and drumming, martial arts, visual arts (including tray painting), flower arranging, calligraphy, literary arts such as poetry, and the bodily training imparted by etiquette."[26]

Meanwhile in Japan as in China women had to be prepared to run the family household while men managed public affairs. Educating their children was high on their list of duties. In Japan today, "education mother" (*kyoiku mama*) has negative connotations, but in China as well as Japan, mothers contributed hugely to a record of remarkable educational achievement.

Issues and Prospects

As everywhere, education in East Asia was pivotal, connecting life and thought, the concrete and the abstract, through long centuries. Today scholars ask new questions, bringing to bear new concepts and new data.

A currently thriving area of investigation is the history of women in China and Japan, inseparable from the investigation of female education. Scholars now insist on recognition of female agency—and not only in childhood education—without, however, minimizing female subordination in patriarchal societies. They recognize that Chinese and Japanese cultures were immensely enriched by superb elite writers like Lady Murasaki (late tenth–early

eleventh century), while concurrently all too many illiterates, male as well as female, suffered harsh economic and social conditions.

Good work continues to be done on literacy and the diffusion of knowledge, suggesting late traditional China and Japan bear easy comparison with the contemporaneous West. The same holds for the history of publishing and the book. Literacy and social structure were closely related in a China where education was a prerequisite to examination success, but scholars now agree that the examinations predominantly provided mobility within rather than into the elite. In Japan birth was destiny, but economic developments stimulated commoner literacy while even within the samurai elite continental ideas of meritocracy found a strong echo.

Scholarship continues to deepen as well as complicate our understanding of the past as scholars go beyond the view from the center to uncover the immense diversity of China as well as within more politically fragmented Japan. Regional as well as local studies are giving us a better understanding of the cultural and political dynamics as China continues to transition from empire to state and Japan seeks a new role in a multistate world. In both cases the long history of education fosters a sense of the continuing importance of the past.

Along with investigations into the social aspects of education there continues to be lively reassessments of its intellectual content. Most noteworthy is China's turn to a positive evaluation of Confucianism, paralleled in the West by new appreciation of Confucian "virtue ethics." Education remains at the heart of what Confucianism is all about.

Ever since its publication in 2000, Kenneth Pomeranz's *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World* has stimulated lively and edifying debate about how and when the West grew more powerful than China. More recently, this has also raised the question "For how long?" The discussion has focused on economic, social, and political history, but students of educational history would do well to take note—and participate.

Fortunately comparative education is gradually taking its place along with comparative philosophy, comparative history, and transnational studies. Students of traditional East Asia are well equipped to participate in ongoing debates about rote learning and fostering creativity, about teaching values as well as encouraging critical thinking, about balancing general and specialized education, about developing the talents of individuals as well as a sense of social solidarity fostering meritocracy and ensuring equality, and in the process learning from the past while preparing for the future. The Chinese and Japanese past does not offer easy answers but does provide a wealth of experience and ideas.

Notes

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2. Michael Nylan, *The Five "Confucian" Classics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001); Chinese Text Project, *Li Ji*, Nei Ze: 72, trans. James Legge, https://ctext.org/liji.
3. Translated by the author. Other translations without citation were translated by the author.
4. Ian Johnson and Wang Ping, trans., *Dazue and Zhongyong* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2012), 135.
5. Endymion Wilkinson, *Chinese History: A New Manual* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 295.

6. Benjamin A. Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 267; Cheng Duanli, "Daily Schedule of Study in the Cheng Family School, Graded According to Age" (*Chengshi Jashu Dushu Fennian Richeng*), in *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, comp. Wm. Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom, 2nd edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999) 816–819.
7. Chinese Text Project, *Li Ji*, Xue Ji, 1–5, trans. James Legge, https://ctext.org/liji, modified by author; *Mencius* 3A: 4.
8. *Mencius* 3A: 95.
9. *Mencius* 7A: 20. *Mencius*, trans. Irene Bloom (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 148; Wing Tsit Chan, trans., *Reflections on Things at Hand: The Neo-Confucian Anthology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 260.
10. For this and the next excerpt, see John Knoblock and Jeffrey Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 124–125, 47–48; Juanjuan Zhao, "Confucius as a Critical Educator: Towards Educational Thoughts of Confucius," *Frontiers of Education in China* 8 (2013): 13.
11. Limin Bao, *Shaping the Ideal Child: Children and Their Primers in Late Imperial China* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2005), 40.
12. Quoted in Cynthia J. Brokaw, *The Ledgers of Merit and Demerit: Social Change and Moral Order in Late Imperial China* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1991), 19.
13. Wm. Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom, compilers, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 2nd edition, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999–2000), 743, 810–811; Wm. Theodore de Bary, Carl Gluck, and Arthur Tiedemann, *Sources of Japanese Tradition,* 2nd edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 253.
14. *Analects* 4:16.
15. Clara Wing-Chung Ho, "The Cultivation of Female Talent: Views on Women's Education in China during the Early and High Qing Periods," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 38, no. 2 (1995): 196; Susan Mann, "The Education of Daughters in the Mid-Ch'ing Period," in Elman, *A Cultural History*, 21; Ban Zhao, "Admonitions for Women (Nüjie)" in de Bary and Bloom, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 828.
16. Dorothy Ko, "Pursuing Talent and Virtue: Education and Woman's Culture in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century China," *Late Imperial China* 13, no. 1 (1992): 25. See Kang-I Sun and Haun Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China: An Anthology of Poetry and Criticism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999); Dana Berg, *Women and the Literary World in Early Modern China, 1580–1700* (London: Routledge, 2013).
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20. R. P. Dore, *Education in Tokugawa Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), 323, 276; Janine T. A. Sawada, *Confucian Values and Popular Zen: Sekimon Shingaku in Eighteenth Century Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993), 117.
21. Dore, *Education*, 127.
22. Ibid., 151.
23. Marleen Kassel, *Tokugawa Confucian Education: The Kangien Academy of Hirose Tanso (1782–1856)* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 140.
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25. P. F. Kornicky, "Women, Education, and Literacy," in P. F. Kornicky, Mara Patessio, and G. G. Rowley, *The Female as Subject: Reading and Writing in Early Modern Japan* (Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Japanese Studies, 2010), 15; Dore, *Education*, 65.
26. Anne Walthall, "Women and Literacy from Edo to Meiji," in Kornicki, Patessio, and Rowley, *The Female as Subject*, 215.

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