Japanese Lessons

Benjamin, Gail R.

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Benjamin, Gail R.
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The Rest of the Day

**Lessons at Lunch**

It's not a hard and fast rule, but Japanese elementary school teachers seem to prefer to schedule the "heavy" academic subjects for before lunchtime, since lunch and the activities that go with it break up the concentration that the long morning provides; it also makes children and teachers a little more lethargic. In this book, too, lunch will provide a break in the academic discussions. Lunch takes a major chunk of the school day in Japan, however, and it's a mistake to think of it only as a distraction and not part of the curriculum.

A question we encountered over and over from Japanese during our time in Japan was, "Can you eat Japanese food?" At first we thought this was a way of asking whether we could use chopsticks, so we answered that Chinese restaurants in America had taught us to cope with that problem. But that's not what the question was about, nor was it about a specific issue like eating raw fish, which all Japanese know is not a Western custom.

The question really arises from the Japanese feeling that their food is a unique cuisine, part of their national character, so that non-Japanese are not expected to be able to eat it, let alone enjoy it. Japanese cuisine taken as a whole, the range and combinations of ingredients, tastes, and
textures and the patterns of combining them in a meal, is unique, sharing very little in character with other Asian food patterns. Unlike the French or the Chinese, who assume that everyone will adore their cuisine once exposed to it because it is simply the universal best, Japanese feel that their food is not something others will take to, and they’re not at all sure that they want others to be able to eat and enjoy it.

Having encountered this question often and having experienced the frequent newsletters and discussions about lunch at Sam’s preschool, I didn’t find it too surprising that both the school board officials and the principal of Okubo Higashi raised the question of school lunch as a possible stumbling block to having Sam and Ellen attend this school. They seemed very insistent, however, and I thought it curious that such a minor point would be raised more than once. But I hate packing school lunches, so I wasn’t about to suggest to anyone, child or adult, that such an alternative might be available.

Sam and Ellen didn’t say much about it, but they were understandably a little anxious about this issue, too. Japanese cuisine is about as different from American as it could get, and they have been expected to put up with a lot of very weird food in travels with their parents. (And at home, too, to hear them tell it.) When they came home from school their first day, the first topic of conversation was the food at lunch—how good it had been, and what was it anyway? (A fish and vegetable stew, Sam said, and Ellen resolved never to eat anything unidentified again, since she “hates fish.”) On the day the rice, usually a reliable friend, turned out to be mixed with one-inch long, skinny silver fish with bright blue eyes, there were some comments at home, too. Gradually we picked up more tidbits of talk and comments about lunch and learned why lunch is part of the curriculum, how it fits into a sense of Japanese identity, and why when a group of Japanese go to a restaurant they all order the same thing.

Every month a detailed plan is sent home, giving the menus for lunch each day at school. It lists the dishes for the day and tells whether it is a bread-, rice-, or noodle-centered meal; also provided is
a breakdown of the ingredients used into four categories—bodybuilding foods, heat- and energy-giving foods, body harmony-regulating foods, and seasonings. The first three seem to parallel American categories of proteins, carbohydrates, and fruits and vegetables. Milk is given to children every day, but they get no desserts except fruit, included about half the time.

A sample menu based on bread might include a meat stew, a cucumber salad, a roll, milk, and fruit; or chicken with lemon sauce, potato salad, a slice of bread, and fruit. A meal centered on rice might include oyako donburi, a dish of seasoned chicken meat and egg on top of a bowl of rice, a slice of pumpkin fried with sesame seeds, mixed pickled vegetables, and milk. Chopsticks are used for some meals, but a spoon-fork is used for the more Western meals.

Each month's menu plan also illustrates foods in season and discusses healthful eating. In October the importance of calcium and fiber were highlighted, a number of foods containing them were shown, and the consequences of a shortage (cavities and unhealthy gums) were pointed out. In February the danger of the month was not getting enough exercise: people have a tendency to stay in their warm rooms, huddled around the heaters and getting fat, during this coldest part of the year. For March, the last month of the school year, children are given a checklist of healthful diet habits and offered the opportunity to score themselves. The guidelines suggest that they should eat 80 percent foods they like and 20 percent ones they don't care for and that they should drink milk and eat soybean products every day, not eat too much meat and fish, remember to eat green vegetables, and avoid drinking juice and the like. "The like," I think, includes soft drinks and coffee, sold in the same kinds of cans as juice.

Most of the menus seem nutritionally in line with American thinking on good eating habits, and most of the advice sounds a lot like what we hear in the United States. The major difference is in the classification of fruit and the effects of sweet foods. Fruit is considered a sweet and therefore both fattening and debilitating, since sweet things
cause lethargy and listlessness, not, as in the United States, a sugar high. Pregnant women avoid fruits for this reason, and when I included apple juice and a banana in the lunch for my children on Sports Day, I was seen as sabotaging their efforts. (The peanut butter sandwich made it even worse.) A sweet tooth is considered a stereotypically feminine, childish characteristic, and I expect that older boys in elementary school are moving away from liking sweet things.

Nutrition and health are major focuses of the school lunch program, and the history of the program is rooted in these concerns. It began during the American occupation as a way of improving the diet of children in the war-impoverished country; American surplus foods supplemented what was available in Japan. The inclusion of milk as an ordinary beverage for children in the Japanese diet dates from this period, as do meals without rice.

The contemporary importance of school lunch is not nutrition, however; it is the social role of eating together and all eating the same thing. When teachers and administrators talk about lunch, this is what they emphasize. When children and parents talk about lunch, this is what they talk about, too. The Japanese recognize that individuals have different food preferences, and they recognize that there are certain foods children typically don’t like—carrots, for one example, and things that require a lot of chewing, for another. At home the general expectation is that these preferences will be catered to, and many mothers do prepare different dishes, or entirely different menus, for different members of the family. But in the context of a group, such insistence on individualism is not only a nuisance but also disruptive and destructive. One ought to be willing to subordinate one’s own tastes in that situation. This is a hard lesson for Japanese children to learn, but one that adults feel very strongly about. It doesn’t seem obvious to Japanese children that this aspect of self is one that needs to be given up. To behave properly, it is not enough not to insist on foods one is fond of; it is required that one eat foods that are disliked. Health may be improved by this, but moral character definitely
is—selfishness rooted out, sincerity and cooperation exhibited and attained.

By the time they are adults, Japanese have learned this lesson so well, and have come to feel so strongly that the camaraderie of eating in a group includes eating the same foods, that they naturally place identical orders in restaurants. When groups travel and eat in hotels or inns, the same meal is served to everyone, ordered by the host or the most senior person present. At weddings or memorial rites the same meal is given to all participants. When families dine out together, the same unanimity of choice is not necessarily seen. Most family restaurants have children’s menus, and in family groups people may order individually.

School lunch is important because it is a lesson in group life, in learning to like putting aside one’s own preferences in order to appear and feel more like a part of the group. It is a lesson that takes several years to learn fully. Ellen’s teacher was strict about trying everything, and Sam’s was less so. Overall, they both complained less about school lunch than they do in the United States.

In a different way, too, lunch is part of the moral curriculum. It is served by students, in the classroom, and students are responsible for cleaning up afterward. It’s not so easy to look at a cauldron of rice or stew and dish it up so that all forty students get helpings that they like, but starting in first grade this responsibility is left to children. Because food is served by children to other children, there is also some room for negotiation with the servers for smaller or larger helpings of particular foods. Your friends may help you out as a friend, or they may be less accommodating and become part of the peer group pressure to conform to the approved group eating behavior. Children who spill or make messes cause work either for themselves or the cleanup crew, who will not be shy about showing their displeasure. Everyone takes a turn at the lunch chores; they are neither reward nor punishment.

Pleasing and being fair to everyone, taking turns at responsibility and not causing trouble for others, enjoying the sociability of eating
together, finding a sense of community in shared activities and shared food—all these are things to be learned while eating a nutritious lunch.

The issue of school lunch as a distinctively Japanese activity has also recently come to the foreground of public attention. The many families returning from overseas bring with them stories of how different lunch is in foreign settings, and their stories reconfirm the social learning that goes on. When Japanese children in the United States speak of what they miss about Japan, school lunch is often on the list, and when Japanese adults talk about the differences between U.S. and Japanese schools, lunch is a topic usually raised. School lunch is about learning to be a social human, specifically a Japanese human.

In part because of this, and also because of a generally increasing concern about what it is to be Japanese, the actual foods served at lunch have come under scrutiny. As mentioned before, this program started under occupation forces initiative and with American foods as an important element in the menus. Now there is some impetus for getting rid of the “foreign” elements in the food. This has been expressed in the sentiment that modern Japanese children are not becoming skillful enough in the use of chopsticks and that the schools should assist in passing on this skill by serving more meals that require chopsticks. Taken at face value, this criticism of the younger generation is not very credible. The Japanese diet has changed and become more cosmopolitan recently, but Western food and Western eating implements have by no means supplanted Japanese customs at home. Children use chopsticks routinely and often at home. Nor has it ever in the past been part of the school’s task to teach children to use chopsticks. Only as another assertion of “Japanese-ness” does this make sense. It could be interpreted by Japanese of some liberal political persuasions as another move on the part of the Ministry of Education, or the education establishment generally, to reestablish the inculcation of patriotism and Japanese identity as part of the legitimate function of public schools, a function that has been vigorously contested since the
end of the Second World War. Okubo Higashi served chopstick meals about 40 percent of the time.

**Physical Education**

Japanese schools have large playgrounds and athletic fields. These spaces contrast with the congested buildings around them and in most neighborhoods are the only open areas. They almost always seem to be filled with boys and girls in physical education uniforms, all of them active. I had been more or less prepared for a strong academic program in Japanese elementary schools, but I was surprised at the emphasis placed on physical education and other nonacademic subjects, such as art and music. Japanese education has taken to heart the notion of educating the whole child.

Japanese schools approach physical education as an educationally important subject that should be fun. Children should learn skills, strength, and endurance, taught through a sound pedagogy and lots of practice. Everyone, not just those with athletic ability, can become physically proficient and have fun. Physical education is one of the subjects the national Ministry of Education requires and provides a curriculum for. Not only are there detailed guides for teachers, but there are also specified numbers of hours of physical education classes each year (three periods per week), and there is a textbook for each grade. It had never occurred to anyone in our family that there could be such a thing. There’s homework, too!

Children and teachers always change into their physical education uniforms in the classroom. Classes are usually held outdoors on the playground, and the equipment there is used in the curriculum—it’s the same in nearly every school in Japan. Each school also has a gymnasium and a swimming pool for use in the physical education program. The regular classroom teacher also teaches physical education, wearing a track suit for these classes and participating vigorously in
demonstrations. Some are known to be better at this that others; Sam’s teacher was considered a very athletic woman who had no trouble keeping up with the fifth-grade boys, and this was worthy of comment.

Children seem to enjoy these classes, and the general philosophy that everyone can do everything, with effort and practice, is in full play here. Competition between individuals is consistently minimized; even team activities are mostly of the kind in which any one individual’s efforts are submerged in the group’s efforts, so that praise or blame are not easily attached to specific people. But the skills that each child is expected to learn are quite challenging, and there are definite standards for achievement.

The physical education curriculum and style of presenting new material shares some general features with the pedagogical style found in other subjects. Each stage starts with instructions in how to do something everyone can already do and moves on to things that are new. These are presented in the same format as the ones already mastered. The effect seems to be to entice kids into new competencies with minimal anxiety, a sort of “Well, I did the last step, so I guess I can do the next one, too” attitude. (I can’t help thinking that an equally plausible reaction would be “It can’t be very serious if they’re teaching me stuff I already know,” but I didn’t see any signs that Japanese react that way.)

In keeping with this strategy, the first-grade textbook for physical education opens by showing pictures of how to use the playground equipment to play. There are pictures of children climbing the jungle gym, jumping over the tire hurdles, and swinging from the monkey bars. This same equipment is found in public playgrounds and preschools, and everyone knows how to use it. Most American children figure out what to do with a jungle gym without any instruction; so do Japanese kids.

The next page shows diagrams of how to run a simple relay race and of three versions of tag, again games children are very familiar with. Then there are some pictures of things to do on the stationary bars,
such as skinning the cat, several mounts, and turns or somersaults, which are not necessarily familiar. Other pictures on this page show first graders on low balance beams. Depicting several children on one beam at once is not just for economy of illustration; it's part of the lesson, mentioned in the box at the top of the page. If several children can use a piece of equipment at the same time, no one will have to spend much time waiting for a turn, and everyone will get more practice and play time.

On this page for the first time is a little chart for grading one's own performance. Most succeeding sections of the textbook include such a chart. Several questions about the activities of the unit are asked, and children are asked whether they could do these things very well, well, or if they needed improvement. But the questions, to my surprise, are not focused on objective or competitive measures of competence. Every set of questions includes the word *tanoshii*, "enjoyable, pleasant." It's the word teachers and parents use to entice children into doing something. "Try it, it will be fun." Or, "Did you have fun?" Children are really directed to ask themselves, "Did I succeed in having fun doing these activities?" Hidden in these questions is an assumption that skill brings pleasure, that being able to do something makes that activity enjoyable, that the way to have fun is to become skillful, and that one ought to evaluate this aspect of one's own participation. Failing to have fun in required activities is a failure, too, one that can be measured only by self-evaluation, not by grades.

The questions also focus on doing activities according to the rules, safely and cooperatively. By fifth grade the questions are also asking whether one has really tried and has set goals for learning new skills or improving one's performance. The fifth-grade text also has numerous charts of national performance averages and provides places to calculate class averages as well as to record one's own achievements. Competition and measuring oneself against others comes into play here, but the competition is not directly against classmates so much as contributing to the class's record compared with other classes.
The textbook for physical education are not just for show. In Ellen’s class each physical education period was preceded by looking at the textbook to study the day’s activities. At this level there are many pictures and not much text. Many of the pictures are series photographs or drawings showing how a game should be played, a relay race run, or a gymnastics move attempted. The class changed clothes and moved to the playground and, after short reminders about what they were to do, started the active part of the class. Usually the beginning of class included a demonstration of the activity, done by a student or the teacher. Sam reported that the fifth-grade procedure was about the same but with less use of the textbook. Probably other students read the text for homework, but Sam was unable to do this.

I attended part of Sam’s physical education class on one of the parents’ visiting days. The students in their uniforms were standing loosely around the gym at the beginning of class, ignoring the visiting mothers. They were wearing headbands in four different colors. The class began as the daily monitors looked around at their classmates, announced it was time to begin, gave the signal for everyone to bow to the teacher, and intoned the usual opening formula, “Sensei, onegai shimasu,” “Teacher, please teach us.”

The first activity was warm-up calisthenics led by the teacher with a whistle. The routine seemed familiar to everyone. Even though some students were not very enthusiastic about doing these, no one stopped to scold them, and no child refused altogether to participate. Next they quickly divided into groups of five for some gymnastics, again done by whistle and command. These involved various balancing routines that would show up in the Sports Day performances later. Again, everyone seemed to have them pretty well under control, but occa-
sional mistakes passed without comment and were self-corrected. All of these activities moved along quickly and more or less in unison but certainly did not look militaristic. They would have seemed rather sloppy if military appearance had been the goal. But if the goal was for everyone to proceed at a quick but individual pace, and for everyone to do everything, then it was well done. Next they lined up by height and divided into groups to do basketball drills. I heard from Sam later that after the drills they played a “game” of basketball. The part I watched took about twenty minutes of a forty-five-minute period.

Textbooks give a good indication of what goes on in school but not a total picture. However, during summer vacation all children attended school swimming classes, and because these were held outdoors, it was easy for me to sit under a nearby tree and see how things proceeded. On various visits to the school, I watched other physical education classes outdoors as well, and Sports Day is a showcase for what children do in physical education.

On the first day of swimming classes for Ellen’s group, about eighty students and only six or seven mothers were present. Each child brought a uniform swimming suit, with a large name label on it, a swimming cap, green for first graders, and a health check card. This card is to be shown before each swimming lesson. You’re supposed to take your child’s temperature in the morning and record it, along with comments on their health that day. A teacher checks the card for each child and stamps it. One boy who didn’t have the card was sent in to telephone home. His mother came and looked through his pack for the card and couldn’t find it. She had to acquire a new one from the office and say he was okay. Then he was allowed in.

The students were divided into four groups, though these didn’t seem to be ability groups. There were two classroom teachers in charge of getting the pool ready, checking cards, and checking the water temperature and purity, and there was one teacher who did the swimming instruction. The first routine was stretching exercises. (The boy who came in late because he didn’t have his card was taken
through these separately before he joined the group.) All the children seemed pleased to be doing these and cooperated. In this, as in the other joint activities that followed, though the teachers clearly expected everyone to be doing them together, they were not willing to take the time to get 100 percent attention—85 to 90 percent seemed to be sufficient for them to move on. There was no one who was totally uncooperative; they all joined in before the activity was over.

After the stretching there were a few sentences of talk, and then the first half of the students got into the water, on a shallow ledge at the edge, and proceeded to splash themselves gently in the tummy, then turn around and splash each other’s back. Then the second group got in to do the same thing. Ellen was in this group, and it was 10:00 exactly when she got in the water for the first time, thirty minutes after the beginning of class. The next step was for the first group to do this all over again and also to walk over to the center of the pool and back. Then the second group. Then the first group did it again, walking to the center and going underwater. Then the second group. I left at this point and didn’t get back till the lesson was over at 10:45. Talking to Ellen, I sympathized that there wasn’t much swimming time and not much time for play. She seemed surprised and insisted it had been fun.

In other classes I watched, I could see that there was a great deal of variation in swimming ability at the beginning of these lessons. Many first graders have taken swimming lessons; others are beginners. The teachers largely ignored this disparity. Children with greater swimming skills were not held back or discouraged from swimming as well as they could, but they were not praised for this either, and they were not separated from less skillful children for different instruction. Nor were there any steps in the procedures that they skipped. Less able swimmers were matter-of-factly instructed, and their efforts were noted. The emphasis was on having everyone reach the goals for first graders set by the curriculum. Since not everyone attended every swimming class, it was hard to tell about the achievement of every child, but at
the last class I watched, every first grader managed to swim twenty-five meters, and this was recorded on a certificate.

During the winter term of our year in Urawa, everyone in school was given an inexpensive jump rope and a program for using it. Each grade had a list of goals, including several styles of jumping, such as forward, backward, on one foot, and with arms crossed and the number of times you should be able to jump in each style. There was also a goal for the number of consecutive minutes of jumping, which increased yearly. These goals were not impossible, but they were not easy for Sam and Ellen to achieve. Although classes at school gave children an opportunity to practice, they also brought their ropes home, and both Sam and Ellen needed the “homework” practice to reach the goals for their grade. I don’t think it’s accidental that this was scheduled for the winter term, a time when children might be inclined to be less physically active.

The routines of daily life for Japanese children also encourage physical activity, as they do to a lesser degree for adults. Children all walk to school and home, up to a mile each way, carrying heavy backpacks. Most families use public transportation most of the time; this always entails a walk to a bus stop or a train station and climbing stairs through the station at each end and at each change. Even though the public transportation system is efficient and easily accessible (unless you’re physically handicapped in any way), using it still entails more walking and carrying than using a family car. Women do most of their daily errands walking or on bicycles, including grocery shopping, and men who commute to work nearly always use public transportation. Many children play outdoors during free time, riding bicycles or playing soccer or baseball, and many are enrolled in activity classes. The most popular are probably swimming, gymnastics, ballet, and Japanese martial arts such as judo or kendo.

In addition to the sections devoted to physical skills in the textbooks, short sections on growth and development are included each
year, and each child’s height and weight are recorded several times a year. For the fifth graders this section also discusses the social and physical changes that are associated with approaching puberty. Among the physical changes mentioned are a general toughening of body for boys and a rounding and softening for girls, deepening voices for boys and first menstruation and breast development for girls, and more body hair for both. The book emphasizes that the timing of these physical changes varies greatly; charts show the range of ages at which Japanese boys experience the appearance of pubic hair and deepening of their voices and the range of ages at which Japanese girls develop breasts and begin menstruating.

Both sexes are said to be becoming more mature, with better judgment, greater physical and mental competence, increased capacities to persist and endure hardship, more ability to control the expression of emotion, and improved competence with words. This is shown by a chart indicating the growth of vocabulary during this period and by illustrations of disputes that they can now handle verbally. The text also points out that whereas boys and girls played together as young children, during third and fourth grades they formed separate play groups; but starting sometime in the period of fifth grade through junior high school, they can expect to become more interested in the opposite sex. Boys will become stronger and more manly; girls will become gentler, more thoughtful of other people, and more womanly.

On reflection, back in America with an adolescent and a preadolescent in the house, I am struck by the positive view of this period of life articulated in the text. There are no warnings about stormy emotional times ahead, about conflicts with parents and teachers, about new temptations and distractions that may appear. Instead of talking about troubles, this text emphasizes the new and greater powers of self-control and restraint that come with this stage of life—not a view of teenagers widespread in the United States.

Finally, there are several sections in the text that deal with safety concerns, especially those involved in streets and roads for pedestrians.
and bicyclists. In fact, Saitama prefecture supplements these sections with additional small textbooks devoted solely to safety, mostly concerned with traffic and roads, the setting of most injuries to children.

Children in America often dislike physical education for various reasons. Those who are physically proficient view it as additional playtime hampered by the interference of adults, while those who are not proficient feel that they are not “taught,” that the classes do not give them new skills or competencies but simply highlight their abilities vis-à-vis more athletic classmates. The range of activities in Japanese physical education classes is wide, very little of it is competitive, and there is an emphasis on learning skills. After all, this is another area in which native talent is thought to play only a very small role; everyone needs to learn and practice, and ability follows. Even the best students are thus willing to do drills and accept instruction, making their activities in class not so different from those of other students. It turns out to be true that almost everyone can become competent at these activities and improve performance to acceptable and enjoyable levels. For, though students do not compete directly with each other, there are many activities in which they try to reach or exceed standards set from outside by the Ministry of Education, which determines how far first graders should be able to throw a softball and how many seconds fifth-grade girls should take to run fifty meters. When I watched children during physical education classes, I noticed that most of them seemed happy, all of them were active almost all of the time (no waiting passively in line for one’s turn), and their activity was focused, not just horsing around.

ART AND MUSIC

When friends in Japan needed to explain a word to me, or ask for a word in English, they often drew a picture. I can’t draw, so I was denied this useful technique. Addresses in Japan only get you to the general neighborhood, so people draw maps to help one another quite
frequently. I was always impressed with their neatness, accuracy, and pleasant appearance. I myself could barely produce an intelligible map of how to get to our house from the train station. At some point I began to wonder why everyone in Japan could draw and I couldn’t. Of course, I’d known since about second grade that I wasn’t good at art, and I hadn’t drawn anything since then. I had only vague memories of any art classes in school, though I enjoyed wood carving, weaving, and some other crafts in seventh grade.

When I started reading about the Japanese philosophy of education, the “anyone can do anything” school of thought, I wondered how teachers could sustain this attitude in the face of what seemed to me to be overwhelming evidence of natural differences in talents and inclinations, especially in the arts. But not being able to draw bothered me more and more as I reflected on my friends’ competence and comfort in drawing. Surely not all 120 million Japanese could be more talented than I.

I finally decided that I would make a private test of the Japanese approach, and I signed up for beginners’ drawing lessons at a local museum. I learned that I could learn to draw. I still think I have no talent, and it would take more than eight Sunday afternoons to become competent, but I’m sure I could do it. Drawing is a very physical skill, I was somehow surprised to discover, and practice pays off, just as it does in music. The confidence those eight afternoons gave me enabled me to avoid quitting in panic when I discovered that my flower arranging lessons in Japan included making a drawing of my finished arrangement at the end of each class. Teachers and fellow students were polite enough not to comment.

In the United States Sam and Ellen had both had art as a regularly scheduled subject with specialist teachers. Sam had brought home some art projects that seemed interesting and good to us, usually constructed, three-dimensional things rather than drawings. Ellen has always been considered the one in our family who is “good at art,” the
kind of child who always carries around a notebook and pencils or crayons to fall back on during boring times, like car trips or religious services.

I was really looking forward to seeing how art and music would be handled in elementary school in Japan, and I was sure the lessons would incorporate the idea that everyone, not just specially talented people, could do these things. I was able to watch some classes in these subjects, see the things children produced and listen to their performances, listen to my children talk about them, and study the textbooks.

To me the most surprising thing about the first-grade art projects was how many of them were cooperative efforts. Even drawings, such as murals for the classroom wall or huge drawings made with chalk on the school playground, were joint productions. Large sand sculptures in the school sandbox, as well as snowmen and snow buildings, were part of art class, and the text shows pictures of a group of children using newspapers on the gym floor to lay out a human figure big enough for everyone to lie down on. Sometimes individual children made parts for a larger construction such as a mobile or a display of many clay figures all arranged on the seat, the back, and the legs and rungs of a chair.

Sometimes children did individual drawings on suggested topics: something nice that happened at school today, a picture to tell sensei a story, a picture to show a friend. Several projects called for making toys, puppets, or props for playing house, or floating toys for a bathtub or pond.

Art is scheduled for a double class period, so children have at least ninety minutes for each art lesson. Some of the projects are quite elaborate and require several steps. “How good it’ll feel when we’re finished!” seems an appropriate comment in the text.

The fifth-grade art curriculum continues the emphasis on using a wide range of media and on persistence in carrying out a project. Like the first-grade text, the fifth-grade one is illustrated mostly with things
made by fifth graders, but some illustrations of artworks by both Japanese and Western artists are also used, in contexts that make them seem like achievable models.

Fifth graders continue to do drawings on assigned topics, such as "A Day to Remember," but more technical advice is now offered. Planning is emphasized: what shape to use, choosing a viewpoint, the emotions conveyed by color choices, how to frame a picture with one’s hands to compose it, choosing what to foreground and what to exclude. A lesson on watercolor landscapes teaches various approaches to representing the sky. Explicit approaches to figure drawing and perspective are included in the text. One lesson on illustrating a folktale suggests choosing the three most important elements of the story and somehow incorporating all of them in the illustration, as well as including other supporting elements. Six examples of this for one story are shown.

One of the big projects of this year, which took several art periods, was making an illustrated storybook for a younger child. This meant choosing the story, planning the layout of text and illustrations, writing the text, making the illustrations, mounting them on pages, designing and making a cover, and binding the book. Other projects also took planning and difficult execution with a variety of tools: wood block prints, geometric cardboard boxes decorated with cutouts, a wooden jigsaw puzzle made with a power jigsaw, and fanciful wooden frames for mirrors. Even stone carving is included in the text, though Sam said his class didn’t do this. There were still a few class projects, but many fewer than in first grade.

There is a national holiday in October in Japan, Culture Day, and though it is a day off from school, it is celebrated on other days in school. Friends commented to me during the month, “Ellen is in first grade, isn’t she? Did she have a chicken at school for Culture Day?” If an activity turns out to be a good idea in Japan, it can turn into a tradition, not a sign of stagnant thinking. Ellen’s class did have a chicken, alive and wandering throughout the classroom for Culture Day.
children talked about how it looked, imitated its movements, fed it, watched its activities, and drew it. Ellen came home excited about the day, exclaiming about how hard it was to draw something that didn’t hold still. Later I saw the exhibit of all the drawings from the class. The first graders were instructed to “fill the page,” and they did (Ellen had to start over to do this), but otherwise there was a great deal of variety and spirit in the many depictions.

Sam’s class did what fifth graders and many older children do: they went to a nearby temple to draw and sketch and prepare to do a watercolor to be finished in later art periods. I have often seen groups of children on expeditions like this and have been impressed by several things: their freedom—one teacher taking forty-five seventh graders to a park for the day, when many of them will be out of sight for much of the time?—their high spirits and high jinks, the amount of work they did actually get done, and the variety of the works they were producing. Everyone might be sketching in the same temple grounds, but some were making meticulous drawings of small detail, some focusing on a large landscape of the grounds, others choosing different features of the temple to highlight. Some worked in charcoal, some in pencils, some in crayons, some in watercolors.

Sam made a watercolor of the temple, showing its great looming roof, the delicate wood carving, the bell to summon the gods, the old trees, and the frame for hanging up fortune papers. It’s not a masterpiece, but it’s pleasant, recognizable, somewhat atmospheric, and shows some control of watercolor techniques. When I asked Sam how he knew how to make it, he said, “Oh, I was mixing the paints with too much water, but the kids showed me how to do it.” He didn’t mention the drawing style, though it’s different from anything I have seen him do before or since.

In music, the major instrument used by first graders is called a pianika. It’s about twelve inches long, four inches wide, with a piano keyboard of two octaves. But it is a wind instrument with a long plastic tube to blow into. One can rest it on a table, so that it can be played
like a small piano—powered by wind—or it can be carried vertically, so that it is played like an accordion keyboard, with the air power coming from the player's breath instead of a bellows. Every child has one of these to be used at school and taken home for practice.

Besides this instrument there is a variety of percussion instruments in the class used during music lessons. Each classroom also has a small electric organ for the teacher. Several teachers told me that the hardest part of their preparation for becoming a teacher was passing the course and examination in music, especially playing the piano or organ.

First graders learn the mechanics of playing a wind instrument with a keyboard, so they have to control both their breath and their hands. By the end of the second third of first grade, students have learned twelve short songs. They are all in the key of C major, but some of the later songs involve a change of hand position during the song, and one involves both an ascending and a descending scale in C major, with thumb-under and finger-over fingering patterns.

First graders have also come a long way in learning to read music by this time. They can read the pitch of tones in the C major scale on the treble clef and they know the solfege names of the notes. They know how to count the beats in a measure, the concept of rests, and the time values of notes. The last third of the year is spent in gradually introducing standard music notation for these concepts. The number of beats in a measure is first introduced simply by writing 2, 3, or 4 on the staff at the beginning of the piece, but in the last third of first grade, this is written in the standard 2 over 4 or 3 over 4 notation on the staff. Time values are introduced by using notes of different shapes, such as half circles for half beats and elongated ovals for long notes, but by the end of the year, quarter, half, and eighth notes are written in the standard forms.

When I went to Ellen's class on the second parents' visiting day, I found we had been invited for a music class. They were working on a song I had heard Ellen practicing at home. They all knew how to sing it and had talked about the solfege pattern of the melody. Today's
lesson involved using their pianikas to play a part of each line in unison. The teacher played the first part of each line on her organ, and the class, or various portions of it, played the end of the line. She insisted that they come in at the right time, with no break in the timing of the song, all together, and play the right notes. If an individual made a mistake, she usually made the class or the group repeat the line. For variation sometimes a part of the class used bells as percussion accompaniment. After working on the ends of the lines for a while, she got individuals to give her the solfege pattern of the beginning of each line, and they practiced a little bit at playing that with their fingers in the air, as a group. It looked as though the goal of this set of lessons was to be able to sing the song, to play the whole thing correctly on the pianika, and to be able to perform it as part of an ensemble that included at least three parts: organ, pianika, and percussion.

Ellen as a first grader got in on the beginning of learning to read music and could keep up with what was going on. (I couldn’t help feeling sorry for her. Here she was, having just learned to read English, needing to learn to read Japanese, and now music, too. She didn’t complain about the music, though, and not even about Japanese after the initial hump during summer vacation.) Sam, though, had not had private music lessons at home and had had only one semester of recorder playing in fourth grade in school. He had to learn to play the recorder, the instrument most used in Japanese fifth grade, and how to read music, fast. His teacher asked me during one visit how it was that he hadn’t learned to read music and seemed surprised that not everyone does this in school in the United States. Sam said, though, that he was just given easy parts in the ensemble playing and that he was not left out of the lessons. He did study the fingering for the recorder at home and apparently picked up enough to get by. It didn’t seem to surprise him or anyone else that he would or could do this. When the fifth graders gave a performance for their mothers near the end of the year, Sam’s group chose to play several musical selections, and Sam participated as everyone else did.
In the apartment building where we lived, there was a piano available in the recreation room, and for about six months Sam and Ellen took piano lessons and practiced there. In retrospect, and as I write this book, I am amazed that we would have thought piano lessons were a good idea at that time. It seems that life and school in Japan, as I report it, would be more than enough to keep everyone busy. In some ways that is true, but Sam and Ellen also found themselves with some leisure time that was hard to fill. After their forty or more hours a week in Japanese-speaking school, even Japanese TV was not too enticing. They watched some, but not very much. They also played with friends after school, but some days they just wanted to escape having to deal with Japanese. I read a lot in the evenings to Ellen; Sam usually listened, and he read more in English than ever before or since. Piano lessons turned out to be an activity that gave them each a feeling of accomplishment that didn't depend on knowing Japanese. Sam said that learning to read music made music in school better too.

The teacher we found was a university music student who also taught the son of some friends. I went along to the lessons, both to help translate and to observe. Much of the lesson procedure was familiar from my childhood piano lessons, but two parts of each lesson were activities I had never done. The first was a dictation: the teacher would play a simple sequence of notes, and Sam or Ellen would have to write them in music notation. She would give them the first note, but after that they could not see what she was doing. They were supposed to get both the rhythm and the notes annotated correctly. This is difficult to do, but its value in learning to listen seemed clear to me, and I wished I had had similar practice.

The second activity is still puzzling to me. Here the student turns away from the piano, and the teacher plays a single note in isolation, which the student then identifies by pitch name. She always used notes in the range of the pieces the children were playing. This seemed very peculiar to me because I associated the ability to do this with "having perfect pitch," something one simply had or didn't have, like blue
eyes. When I finally asked the teacher about this part of the lesson, she said it is standard practice in Japanese music lessons, and that everyone who studies music at a university is tested on their ability to identify the absolute pitch of any note in the range of the piano. One can learn "perfect pitch"? Only in Japan. On reflection, and thinking about other abilities humans have in hearing, I can't think of any reason why one can't learn to identify eighty-eight pitches, but the skill isn't one American music lessons typically emphasize.

Some Japanese children take private music lessons. Elementary school is considered the best time for this, because children may have to sacrifice such recreational activities if they are serious about preparing for high school entrance examinations during junior high school. Okubo Higashi school has a marching band, which some children join. For some reason this is a more popular club activity for girls than for boys. Children get some instruction for these instruments and can use instruments owned by the school. The PTA was planning to buy uniforms for them with money raised the year we were there. The band plays for some school assemblies, on Sports Day, and in the city parade held during the Urawa Festival each summer. In comparison with school bands I have heard in the United States, I thought they sounded good.

**Moral Education**

Among the subjects prescribed by the Ministry of Education for study during all nine years of compulsory education is one called "morals," to be studied one hour each week. This is an idea that always startles Westerners, especially Americans with their fixation on separation of church and state. It is also an idea that is the subject of a great deal of anxiety and opposition in Japan. After describing the morals curriculum, I want to show how the basis for support and opposition to the idea and fact of "morals in the schools" is fundamentally different in Japan and in Western countries.
I observed one morals class, and I have carefully studied the textbooks for first and fifth grades and discussed with teachers and parents the nature of these classes. Sam and Ellen are relatively unable to report on their morals classes; their language competence wasn’t at a high enough level to do that. The morals textbooks share the style of the other textbooks—they are paperbacks, attractively illustrated and printed, with thirty-eight lessons for the year. The lessons are stories with study questions appended. One difference from other textbooks is the reading difficulty level. In this book alone, *kanji* (Chinese characters) that children might have difficulty with are identified with accompanying syllabic symbols, so that even students who are not up to grade level in reading ability are not deterred from reading the stories. In other words, the emphasis is resolutely on the content, which is not being used to teach “academic” subjects. These books are also among those that open in the Japanese style, “backward,” as are the Japanese language and calligraphy texts.

The stories in each text fall into several categories, each represented in each year’s book. The first type of story tells about how some individual overcame a real or perceived inferiority, acknowledging the help of others and emphasizing persistence and hard work. A fifth-grade story, for instance, is told by a woman who is the voice of a famous cartoon character known to all Japanese children. It tells how she made a strength of her “strange” voice. It seems important to me that this model woman succeeded not by changing this characteristic but by using her strangeness in a way that was effective. She didn’t have to deny her individuality, or hide it, but learned to use it to best advantage.

A second type of story emphasizes the importance of commitments to other people. A first-grade story about the devotion of penguin mothers to their eggs and chicks is in this category, as is a fifth-grade story about an aspiring performer who makes a promise to perform for a sick child, then is offered a chance to appear in a prestigious show but turns it down to keep his promise to the child. Perhaps the story
about a little girl who tries to bring her housebound grandmother an apron full of sunshine and whose disappointment is met by her grandmother’s statement, “There is sunshine in your eyes,” fits in this category, too. The first-grade story about appreciation day for the school kitchen workers, which tells about one girl’s recognition of the hardness of this work as shown by the cafeteria workers’ hands, is another example. Each individual is valuable, and the sacrifices or efforts people make for one another should not be unacknowledged.

Another set of stories emphasizes the importance of standing up for what is right and defending others against injustice. A fifth-grade story with this moral is set on a train where a man is berating a fellow passenger, a woman who has inadvertently bumped against him. She apologizes, but he refuses to accept her apology, finally suggesting she kneel with her hands on the floor of the train and kowtow to show her sincerity (thus invoking deep-seated notions about the “dirtiness” of any surface that is touched by people’s shoes, surfaces both physically and ritually dirty). An elderly woman then intervenes but is shoved aside by the man, who continues to rail at the offending woman. Suddenly, the old woman calls out in a strong voice, “Wait, all of you. Why are you quiet? Why do you overlook this bad conduct? You mean it is okay as long as you yourself are safe?” The narrator of the story then finds himself protesting to the man; he is joined by the other passengers, and the unforgiving man escapes the train at the next station. The elderly woman tells the storyteller not to be afraid any more. The study questions that accompany this story ask students to evaluate the storyteller and to think about whether they have ever behaved bravely in public.

A first-grade story with this theme is set at school, where a boy observes the class rowdy hiding the shoes of another boy, so that he can’t find them when it is time to go home. Though he is afraid of the bully, he suggests to him that he should give back the shoes. The bully’s response is a glare, and the storyteller, with his heart pounding, stares back. The story ends with no further resolution.
Many of the stories seem to stop without an obvious conclusion. Another example is an incident in which a boy denies responsibility for spilling milk and instead blames the family cat. His mother accepts his story, but he then feels sad. That's the end of the text.

Another set of stories extends the notion of moral behavior to encompass areas of nature, as well as human relations. One way this is done is through focusing on the beauty and intricacies of natural phenomena and pointing out that humans ought not to destroy these, so some stories show children noticing natural things that they could destroy, such as insects laying eggs or flowers blooming in the snow, but leaving them alone. Another is through attributing moral behavior to animals or plants—the dandelion that pushes through asphalt to bloom seems to be meant to express the idea that persistence is a "natural" virtue. The penguin as an exemplary mother also suggests that human behavior and animal behavior have features and motivations in common. There are several reasons for using animals in fables, and Aesop is a favorite source for stories in these texts, but the effect is to make a connection between humans and other living things and to suggest that their realms are not totally distinct. A major motivation in the proliferation of books with only animal characters for preschool children in the United States is the desire to sidestep the problems involved in identifying characters by race, ethnic identity, and sometimes age. If everyone in the book is a dog, or a cat, or a pig, or a dinosaur, you don't have to decide which occupations to assign to different races, for instance. This motivation is not present in Japan, though the desire for cuteness certainly is also present there.

Nationalism or patriotism is a theme presented by retelling stories from Japanese history or folklore and by discussions of Japanese traditional customs. A fifth-grade story, for instance, tells about a boy going with his grandfather to watch the summer fireworks at the Sumida River in Tokyo (a wonderful display, as we can attest). The grandfather tells how he came as a boy and how the festival had to be suspended for many years because the river was so polluted. Both are
glad that the river is now clean and the festival has been reinstated. The study questions for this story ask students to think about the grandfather's feelings when the fireworks were resumed. They also ask, "When do you feel happy about living in your local area? When do you feel happy about living in Japan?"

The nationalism in these stories is neatly balanced by internationalism themes. Non-Japanese are regularly offered as models to follow, two heroes from the first-grade text being Florence Nightingale, presented saving an injured puppy, and Lord Byron, shaming a bully and defending a friend at boarding school. A fifth-grade story recounts the ambivalence of a Japanese boy at seeing the splendid artworks from Japan in a museum in Boston. Though he is proud of them, he also regrets that they are no longer in Japan. An American man tells him, "Japan is a small country, but its art is world famous. Don't you feel that Japan has expanded to the world? When we non-Japanese look at Japanese works, we appreciate Japan. These works are so good they should not be confined in Japan. They are treasures of the world and should be shared with the world." A study question after this story asks, "What do you think about foreign cultures and people?" The depth of the Japanese ambivalence about themselves and other cultures is evident, and hardly resolved, in this lesson.

One of the most striking stories, to non-Japanese, is one found in the first-grade text. This story tells how a boy from the first-grade class becomes suddenly ill and is admitted to the hospital. His classmates send a letter exhorting him to try hard to get better, but he dies without ever returning to the class. After the funeral, his best friend keeps a diary of thoughts about the missing classmate and how they can never again meet or play together. The last line from the diary says, "But your friends will never forget you. We will all persevere to make up your part." Several Japanese graduate students in America confirmed this as a good translation of the Japanese. But it was still a puzzling story conclusion, and I had to ask a number of Japanese students to interpret the meaning for me.
Their first reaction usually was, "What's the problem?" I answered that I didn't understand what "making up his part" meant—what was the dead boy's part, and how could other students make it up? Several themes consistently showed up in their attempts to explain this notion, which seemed straightforward to them until they started to explain it to me. First and most consistent was the recognition that the dead boy's life had been unfinished, cut short in a way that meant he would not experience a full human life. Not only did this mean there were certain positive experiences he could never have, but it meant that there were responsibilities he would not be able to fulfill. His death also meant that a group that had once been complete, the first-grade class, now had a missing piece, a hole. His friend's farewell, "But your friends will never forget you. We will persevere to make up your part," emphasizes that the classmates will carry out his responsibilities and repair the completeness of the group by not forgetting him. All the Japanese agreed that the expression of this sentiment was intended to make the dead boy feel better, more than the living one.

When the Japanese students talked about the incompleteness of the dead boy's life, it was the lack of positive experiences, such as graduation and marriage, that they most often mentioned. But the word that I have translated as "persevere", gambaru, is one that has a definite sense of taking up a burden as part of its meaning. I think two Japanese ideas are part of the explanation for this choice of words. First is the notion that doing well what one ought to do is a source of pleasure, and thus there is cause for regret that the dead boy will not have the opportunity for these feelings. Second is the notion that a complete and harmonious group is the result of effort by all its members; therefore, the remaining children will have to "repair" the group by making up the work the missing boy would have done.

Finally, there is the notion that there continues to be a connection between the dead boy and his living classmates, one that is nurtured by memory. When I pressed the Japanese students as to how the children might keep alive the memory of their classmate, they suggested things
like taking his photograph along on school trips or picnics. They also said, "Of course, we can’t really live his life for him. We can’t really increase our efforts to make up for his. But we like to think about this." There was some disagreement about whether the dead boy, if he were remembered, would progress through something like an earthly life course, though he is dead. On the one hand, death is final. This does not cause a problem in the case of someone who dies at a ripe old age, his life course run. Those who remember him will remember him at different ages, in different ways; their memories will be of a complete life. But in the case of a young child, those who remember him will also think about the life he would have lived and imagine what his later years would have been. The Japanese students seemed unsure of whether this in effect meant the dead child would in some way move through later life stages. One student mentioned, and others recognized, an unusual custom: living relatives sometimes arrange spirit marriages between young people who have died without having had this life-fulfilling experience.

The last oddity about this story is its extreme unlikeliness in modern Japan. Unlike children in many poor countries, Japanese children have very little experience with death among their contemporaries. Given the long life expectancies in Japan, most of them will be well into their adult years before anyone they know dies. Why, then, include this story in a first-grade text?

It would be wrong to say that this is a story about religion or ancestor worship, and yet it is a story that points up attitudes that underlie those practices, without which they make no sense. First is the idea that the lives of the living are connected to the lives of the dead, and that the dead take an interest in the living (in Japan, a benevolent interest). Second is the idea that not being remembered by the living causes distress to the spirits of the dead and may even make them vindictive in their connection to the living, the premise of most of the many Japanese ghost stories in folklore and literature. And third, there is the theme of the interrelatedness of responsibility and pleasure and
their parts in a complete human life. Elements of all these themes and ideas can certainly be found in other views of life and death and religion, but it seems noteworthy to me that this particular conglomeration of ideas and ambiguities should be purposely raised in the context of a first-grade morals class.

There are many other interesting features of these stories as a moral curriculum. First, there is no appeal at all to any god. There is no sacred writing offered as a source of moral guidance, no set of articulated principles, such as the Golden Rule or the Ten Commandments or Buddha’s Eightfold Path—even Aesop’s fables are given without their tag-line moral. There is no mention of supernatural reward or punishment. But at the same time there is no hint that the lessons are anything but universal in application. They are not specifically Japanese, there is no suggestion that different kinds of people should follow different principles of behavior (men and women, for instance, or people of different status), and the narrators of the first-person stories are left so vague in character that they could stand for any reader.

Conspicuously absent, compared to Jewish or Christian religious/moral education, is any mention of either personal or community charity or help for the unfortunate. In fact, only in stories set in premodern times are there any people who might qualify as the recipients of charity—poor, or crippled, or outcasts of some sort. One might see this as part of the overall attitude of protectiveness toward children found in Japan, or one might read it as part of a government conspiracy to deny any imperfections in modern Japanese society, if one considered the Japanese government to be that sort of government.

There is an interesting set of moral principles being taught and an interesting intertwining of themes. Individuals are clearly held responsible for their actions and decisions in these texts, and the rightness of their actions and decisions is dependent on human, not supernatural, outcomes. Individuals, regardless of station in life, are treated as valued people. Sacrifice, although it may be called for in some cases, is treated as a personal offering, not something demanded by one’s position or
role. Rulers as well as subjects in the tales from history are presented as constrained by moral standards. The kind of connection and identification of humans with the nonhuman natural world is one that encourages ecological responsibility, not exploitation. Nationalism and internationalism themes seem evenly balanced, and the nationalism is of a fairly benign sort. It certainly does not suggest anything like an ambitious “manifest destiny” role for Japan in the world. It also, however, does not suggest that Japan has major social or political problems at home, such as discrimination against minorities or women, or unjust economic disparities.

Most of these principles of moral behavior are probably ones that would be acceptable to most Westerners, Christian, Jewish, or secular humanist. Religious people would probably feel that the divine basis for the behaviors being promoted is important, but the behaviors themselves are ones most people can agree on, and no one religious base is being presented to the exclusion or denigration of others.

The whole “religion” aspect of morals is omitted in Japan, where morality and religion are largely separate spheres of action and thought anyway (and where sex is a nonissue, for religion and morals). One of the consequences of this separation is that the emotional and sensual aspects of religion do not serve as reinforcing of moral behavior for Japanese children. Because religion and morality are seen as connected spheres of thought and behavior in the West, and because religious practices use music, art, special foods, and gatherings of families and communities to mark religious occasions and holidays, those (generally pleasant) customs reinforce ethical behavior. It may be partly because Christmas is the most pleasant of Christian holidays that it is also the time for the greatest offerings of charity. Surely, the music, food, presents, trees, and family gatherings associated with Christmas in the Western world help to make the custom of giving charity at Christmas time a lighter obligation than it would be if presented only as an intellectually derived principle. This morally enjoined behavior is tightly associated with all these other positive things and becomes a part of
them; most people feel there is something missing if Christmas, however secular, does not include charity.

Similarly, Western children who are involved in active religious families and churches can have a sense of community about moral behavior that Japanese children may have a hard time gaining. For them this tends to be more a school subject, and their reference group for thinking about these issues is their classmates and, to a lesser degree, their teachers. It does not include people of many different ages, for instance, or those who have family or community connections to themselves.

On the other hand, probably most Western children get a very spotty exposure to religious education, or none at all. In Japan every child has to spend at least forty hours a year more or less thinking about ethical issues broadly defined. That’s more than most Western children spend in Sunday school, and in Japan that time is not shared with learning worship customs and Bible history and theology as well as ethics.

Why is it that morals is a subject in the compulsory education of Japanese children, and not a matter to be taught by families or religious institutions or in some other arena? Why is the inclusion of morals in the school curriculum a matter of controversy in Japan, especially opposed by the leaders of the teachers’ unions, as well as by some Christians and radical political opponents? The answers to these questions lie in traditional Japanese views of education and the family and in modern Japanese history.

In premodern Japan, certainly throughout the Tokugawa era (1603 to 1868), if not long before, education was primarily conceived as moral education, and the most important beneficiary of education was the state. This set of ideas is broadly identified with Confucianism, a political-moral philosophy borrowed and adapted from China. In China education supported a theoretically meritocratic examination process that prepared men to become part of the ruling elite on the basis of their performance in the national examinations. In Japan education supported the preparation of young men from the ruling classes
to take over their fathers' roles as rulers. Because everyone is capable of learning whatever is needed for this role, it was not necessary to find the "right" man for a leadership position; the problem was simply to get the right education to the next generation.

There is no need to become a scholar widely read and with encyclopaedic knowledge. It is enough to get a thorough grasp of the principles of loyalty, respect, filial piety and trust. Wide learning and literary accomplishments are not necessary. Anyone can manage to get hold of the general principles of the Four Books and the Five Classics by the time he is thirty or forty. It all depends on diligence. Even the dullest of wits can manage it if he applies himself earnestly enough. (Nishi-oji fief school rules, quoted in Dore 1965:181)

In Japan the state sponsored and supported this kind of education. Commoners and those who wanted education that was not geared toward governing could pursue those interests privately. Mathematics, reading and writing in Japanese (instead of Chinese), literature, and science were among the subjects that fell into this optional area, along with all education for girls and women.

Moral education, or education in general, because it was designed to produce effective and legitimate rulers, was primarily concerned with political philosophy and morals as they related to public life. It seemed reasonable that such education should take place in a public, nonfamily setting. Because the ruling class could not always dominate the religious groups or control their teachings, this was also a nonreligious setting. There are elements of social justice even in Japanese Buddhism. In the long run, the secular institutions took over the political role of the religious ones, which retreated to a concentration on "private" concerns, especially ancestor worship, maintaining purity, and fostering a connection with immanent divinity.

In modern Japan the feeling that morals cannot be really experienced or taught at home has become stronger as amae, the cultivation of loving dependence among family members, has become the primary
force for holding families together, as economic integration and interdependence has lessened. *Amae* works best if the unique individuality of the people involved is emphasized, overriding more rule-governed behavior norms. Morals involves the application of general principles to behavior between people, so it needs to be discussed and learned in a context where those principles are applicable, not at home.

For these reasons parents, teachers, and the general public feel that school is the right place to learn these lessons, and they agree that it is important for children to receive instruction in morals, that the continued existence of Japan ("such a poor, crowded country") and a civilized Japanese society depend on imparting these lessons to everyone.

The puzzle is why there is any opposition to morals in the schools, if those attitudes are very widespread. What opposition there is stems from more recent Japanese history, the Second World War and the period preceding it. As Japan pursued its progress toward industrialization and modernization, with the quest for raw materials and markets in the international arena that were required, its foreign policy became more expansionary and aggressive. Both modernization and these foreign ventures led the central government to demand sacrifices from the population of Japan. The school system was one locus in which these practices were justified to the people, and in which their intellectual and emotional commitment to the policies was cultivated (as our school systems emphasize the great benefits gained from the taxes paid by citizens, for example).

One of the major ideological forms that the persuasion effort took was an emphasis on the emperor as a godlike, fatherlike embodiment of Japan as a nation and a people. Schools taught emperor worship, including the beliefs that the emperor was to be unquestioningly obeyed, that he had the right to demand any sacrifice from his subjects, and that he and his images and words were to be treated with many of the same behavior patterns that were used with reference to the gods.
After the defeat of Japan in the Second World War, many Japanese teachers came to feel very strongly that they had been exploited and deceived into teaching this set of ideas to their students, and they felt extremely guilty about their role in helping to create a docile population who followed the military into these foreign adventures that brought such grief and suffering to the Japanese people. Postwar Japanese teachers collectively resolved through their unions not to engage in such immoral teaching again. Emperor worship had been taught under the title of "moral education" in the prewar and war periods; these teachers were opposed to a postwar resumption of "moral education" under the control of the Ministry of Education.

During the occupation period following the war, the American military shared these views and banished moral education from the curriculum. They also tried to weaken the role of the national Ministry of Education so that it could never again have such ideological control over education. The Americans sought to institute local control of education to destroy the power of the central government over education. For many reasons this attempt was not very successful, and it became less so after the occupation troops left Japan. The Ministry of Education was never very effectively "purged" after the war and has been regarded as a conservative and nationalistic ministry during the entire postwar period.

Certainly there is only a tiny minority of Japanese who would wish to repeat the practices that led to Japan's expansionism and defeat in the Second World War; no one wishes for the return of emperor worship in the schools. But the ideas outlined above about the importance of moral education for children and the appropriateness of schools for such instruction have not disappeared. Despite teachers' and parents' legitimate fears of ideological indoctrination in a moral education curriculum, the need for a moral education curriculum in the school setting has been stronger. Moral education has been reinstated as a school subject, and opposition has decreased but not disappeared.
It should not be thought, however, that the curriculum of moral education is predetermined in the Japanese school setting, that it consists of only innocuous Japanese platitudes. The subject matter called morals in Japanese schools is a set of ideas that could be designed much differently than it is, within the framework of Japanese culture. Several ethnographers have given us descriptions of “spiritual training” in other settings in Japan, and the content is quite different from the school curriculum. In particular, the absence of the themes of filial piety and the concept of on, obligation that must but cannot be repaid, is striking to those familiar with Japanese culture.

Kondo, in her book Crafting Selves (1990), gives us a vivid picture of a self-improvement course, a “spiritual training” course at Rinri Gakuen (Ethics Institute), to which her employer sent his full-time employees for their personal growth and development and to make them better employees. Here the theme of filial piety, of immeasurable gratitude to parents for the gift of life, was one of the major motivating themes, one that elicited strong emotional reactions from participants. The acceptance of life as it is, including existing authority relationships, was also emphasized at Rinri Gakuen; this theme is absent from the school morals curriculum. Rinri Gakuen enforced behavior patterns, such as the rote repetition of verbal formulas and greetings, that were meant to break down the “selfish” insistence on individuality that variations would indicate; this sort of self-denial is also missing in the school curriculum. There is instead an impressive emphasis on individuality, independent judgment, and remaining true to oneself in the school curriculum. In other contexts concerned with morals in Japan, these are generally de-emphasized if not disapproved of altogether.

It will be apparent from other chapters that Japanese schools do not confine their teaching of morals to the one hour a week labeled with that title. Neither the administration, the teachers, nor the parents feel that the rest of the time in school is devoid of moral content. Many policies, such as those seen in the cleaning of the school, the opportunities for group life experiences in school trips and expeditions and for
cooperative activities on Sports Day and at other events, and delegating to groups of students the responsibility for running many everyday activities, are quite self-consciously adopted and maintained because of their moral value, not their academic value.

Japanese pedagogical theory stresses the importance of "doing" in learning, rather than talking. If actions are the desired ones, the thoughts that support them will follow. Morals class, once a week, is mostly talking. School life, every day, is the related "doing."