

# Archived Information

## Adult Learners: The Social, Cultural, and Economic History Behind Present Attitudes Toward Learning in Japan

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### Social, Cultural, and Economic History of Japanese Adult Learning

Japan is a small island country stretching in an arc along the easternmost coast of the Eurasian continent. And when we look at Japan's education and learning, we must remember the great influence exerted by this geographical situation. The British Isles are located at the western end of the same continent, and are separated from the continental landmass by the 32-kilometer wide English Channel. In contrast, Japan is separated from the continent by the Korean Straits, about 162 kilometers in width and swept by high waves. In the days when navigation was not well developed, Japan's geographical location kept it away from the main trade routes and isolated from other major countries, which were already taking pride in their advanced civilization. However, Japan's geographical location was not always a disadvantage for it, since it was this that made it possible for Japan to remain a peaceful community, free from invasion by other countries. (1)

There are four historical facts that are of major importance in terms of Japan's history of learning from and with foreign cultures, namely: missions to China in the period from the 7th to the 9th century; a national policy of isolation in the 16th century (the Christian century); the Meiji Restoration in the 19th century and the occupation policy of the United States after World War II.

#### Missions to China from the 7th to the 9th Century

Early in the 7th century Prince Shotoku carried out a policy of sending missionaries to China, a society which rightly took great pride in its advanced civilization, so that the institutions, science, arts and ideas that had developed in China might be introduced into Japan. Missionaries and students were sent once in the year 600, three times during the period 607–614, and at frequent regular intervals during the ensuing two centuries. Those who were sent included priests, scholars, medical doctors, artists, musicians and blacksmiths. Some people who had specialized in technical fields stayed in China for a number of years and continued to participate in intense study and training, eventually returning home to occupy leading positions in Japan. In the year 645, Japan became a nation governed by the rule-of-law. What the Japanese learned in cultural, academic, and technical fields during the periods referred to above exerted a great influence on their system of values and way of life for many centuries right up to the time of World War II.

Today it is taken for granted that a country will borrow elements of its political, social, and economic institutions from more advanced countries, but it is surprising that Japan should have, more than a thousand years ago, absorbed Chinese institutions and techniques and continued to do so for such a very long time. Japan took strenuous efforts to assimilate its borrowings in a systematic way. It was a function of the “Silk Road” and Nara, the capital of Japan at that time, was the end of the Road because of the barrier presented by the Pacific Ocean. (2)

In written language, Chinese characters are symbols by themselves rather than requiring a combining with others to express a meaning or idea. Transmitted through literature, the Confucian teachings and system of the region produced the “Chinese Letter and Confucian Cultural Zone.” It spread in the 3rd century to Korea and in the 7th century to Japan and it promoted a very high standard of culture and learning. Since then, Chinese letter learning and Confucian teachings have become very respected and the people of Japan have followed the morality and lifestyle of Confucianism. Learning was ranked highly by Kong Zi, the founder of Confucianism.

For that reason, people were very conscious of learning and educational standards. “Ke Ju”(the imperial examination system) had been implemented since the 6th century. In this system a person who mastered the arcane aspects of Confucianism and passed the examinations obtained a high position in the imperial hierarchy. Even in present-day Japan, this tradition influences people to respect examinations, qualifications, certifications and academic careers. Even poor parents are enthusiastic about education for their children.

There is no evidence that the Japanese had their own script before they adopted the Chinese characters early in the Christian Era. The earliest extant Japanese documents, the Kojiki (712), indicate that a Chinese people called “Wani” came to Japan through Korea bringing with them “Lunyu” (the analects of Confucius) and Buddhism scripture. It was in the 4th–5th centuries that this occurred. It is presumed that at that time Japanese nobles and the ruling class were thoroughly learned in Chinese characters. Therefore, through Chinese language they learned and adopted Chinese laws and systems during the Tang dynasty and established a nation based on codes of laws. (3)

“Lunyu” includes chapters on the encouragement of learning, ideal politics and administration, protection of tradition, virtue, happiness, and education. In the first chapter on Learning, the master said:

1. “Is it not pleasure to learn with a constant perseverance and application?”
2. “Is it not delightful to have friends coming from distant quarters?” and
3. “Is he a man of complete virtue, who feels no discomposure though men may take no note him?”

Already in the 4th century B.C., Kon Zi (552-479 BC) had said, “Learning is Pleasure.” Also the Master said in Chapter VI the following:

1. “At fifteen, I had my mind bent on learning.”
2. “At thirty, I stood firm.”
3. “At forty, I had no doubts.”
4. “At fifty, I knew the decrees of Heaven.”

5. "At sixty, my ear was an obedient organ for the reception of the truth."
6. "At seventy, I could follow what my heart desired, without transgressing against what was right."

This is the idea of lifelong learning. (4)

However, Confucianism is the basis of the "ruler's logic," not democracy. The morality and system of Confucianism requires a family like "He"(harmony). That is, the integration of family, society, and state should have the same strength of relationships as those of a father to a son or a teacher to a student. Individuals should devote selfless loyalty to the group, society, or state to which they have affiliations. Confucianism is very strict in its teaching that men are superior to women. This concept and the attitudes it promotes is still deeply rooted in Japan's social system and results in sex discrimination.

During the ensuing two centuries, Japan continued to borrow many things from China, and on this foundation the Japanese were able to achieve explosive developments in their own culture. The Japanese situation was a striking contrast to that of Northern European countries, where cultural development took place at a very slow tempo as if feeling for a way forward in the darkness. (5)

## The National Isolation Policy of the 16th Century

Confronted with new ideas from the West, Japan was forced to make changes in every sector of its national life, in political, economic and cultural spheres. In the Great Navigation era, which started at the end of the 15th century, Japan was more or less under the influence of the European powers. The introduction of guns into Japan in 1543 was followed 6 years later, in 1549, by the introduction of Christianity by Francisco Xavier. Japan, as a whole, was then at war, so its situation was not conducive to being able to observe what was going on in foreign countries, but these two events compelled the Japanese to open their eyes to the outside world. (6)

The missionary work of the "Iyezusu Kai" (Society for Jesus Christ) was carried out in churches and schools of Christian teaching, opened where the missionaries established themselves, children's schools which aimed to get Japanese children to leave the temple school and study Christian teachings, the evangelists' school for the training of missionaries, and the medical school which opened in the hospital of Bungo to train medical doctors.

The generous attitude showed by the missionaries toward other religions evoked a strong resistance among the Buddhists to Christianity. After succeeding in unifying the country, Toyotomi Hideyoshi came to think that Christianity spread dangerous thoughts against the ruling powers and became aware of the fact that Spain propagated Christianity in the Philippines and conquered that country. In 1587, Hideyoshi issued a directive ordering that the Christian missionaries be deported.

Later, in 1635, Japanese were banned from traveling abroad or returning from overseas. In 1639, the entry of Portuguese vessels into Japanese ports was prohibited, and in 1641, a Dutch firm moved to an island off the coast of Nagasaki, completing the national isolation policy of the Tokugawa Shogunate in the Edo era (Edo is the old name for Tokyo). This policy continued for a period of over two centuries until 1853, when Admiral Perry's fleet visited Uraga Port. During the period of national isolation, Japan enjoyed peace and political stability at home, and its own culture matured.

Despite the national isolation policy Japan had external relations with the Netherlands, China and Korea. The Netherlands was, it was true, a Christian country, but it was allowed to maintain relations with Japan on condition that those relations were confined to trade and that Christianity was not brought into Japan. The Japanese were therefore able to obtain a little knowledge of trends in Europe from reports given by the crews of Dutch vessels that visited Japan. The study of the Dutch language also developed, restrictions were relaxed to allow the import of Chinese versions of foreign books.

During the isolation period, Japan enjoyed freedom from warfare at home and abroad. This period witnessed the stabilization of the system of local rule by military lord (Daikyo) under a strong shogunate authority. A self-ascribed ruling class of Samurai monopolized all functions of government above the level of village and town. Under this feudal system, the Tokugawa Shogunate defined four classes of people. These separate classes were, Samurai, farmers, commoners and townsmen (merchants). This was a system similar to that which originated in China. (7)

Japan experienced significant political, social, economic and cultural change during this period. It prospered both economically and culturally. Along with an increase in population, there is evidence of a general improvement of housing, food, clothing, and education over most of the Edo period. During the Edo period, Neo-Confucian thought was adopted as the official ideology.

Near the end of the Edo Period schooling had become significant. Large schools called "Hanko" were formally organized by dominant authorities which provided a graded system of instruction in Chinese classics to almost every Samurai child.

And local "Terakoya" private schools functioned as elementary schools, where reading, writing and arithmetic were taught by unemployed Samurai (warriors), monks or others. The textbook was called "ouraimono" by which youth were taught how to write letters which included greetings four each season, various kinds of invitations and greetings to beginning a new post and so on. It was said this was a masterpiece textbook of the world. Other private schools and academies (Shijuku) provided more advanced instruction in a variety of disciplines and schools of thought to both Samurai and commoners.

For the Japanese, the Edo period with the study of Chinese classics, was like studying Greek and Roman classics for the Elizabethan Englishman. These served as the repository of wisdom and knowledge. However, there was an important difference between them. In Europe, religion and

morality were predominant by the province of a separately institutionalized and powerful church. In Japan, the more weakly organized Buddhist Temple yielded authority in the moral spheres to the new Confucian schools.

In the Edo period, traditional music, dance, tea ceremony, flower arrangement, “Noh” play, and military arts matured. The *temoto* system (master-family system) each school inherited secret traditions and prized art objects of the school. Traditional cultural activities such as tea ceremony, flower arrangement and calligraphy were a kind of “Education for marriage” for girls. The *temoto* system still exists and offers a degree and qualification as master or teacher and a great number of Japanese people learn and enjoy cultural activities. (8)

## The Meiji Restoration in the 19th Century

In the latter half of the 19th century Japan underwent drastic changes as a result of its opening up to the rest of the world. The impact of Western civilization on Japan was the most traumatic and disturbing event of its entire history. Like other non-Western countries, Japan was exposed to the overwhelming force of a capitalist civilization showing off its tremendous productivity and military strength as well as its advanced science and technology. For Japan, this process of opening up the country to the world was indeed a watershed in its history. Subsequently, non-Western countries including Japan, no matter whether they became colonies of the Western countries or not, were compelled to break with their traditions and accept the challenge of Western civilization.

Under the great pressure exerted by the European countries and the United States, Japan feared that it might become a colony of the Western powers. So the Japanese implemented a policy of getting to know the secrets of the wealth and power of the countries of Europe and America, so that they could absorb these secrets into their civilization and make use of them to make Japan a strong nation. Japan’s leaders were well aware of the necessity of training qualified manpower capable of absorbing Western technology, institutions, and ideas and of taking the lead in building a modern economy and society. They knew that without such manpower any effort to modernize Japan could hardly bear fruit.

The situation was similar to that of old Japan that vigorously imported Chinese civilization a thousand years earlier. But in the era of the Meiji Restoration, Japan absorbed Western civilization faster and more systematically. Those selected for study abroad were chosen after careful consideration of their ability, and the countries to which they were sent also chosen with great care. The strengths of different countries varied according to subject, so the selected persons were sent to those countries that were strongest in the subject in question. For example, some went to Britain to study the navy and merchant shipping, some to Germany to study the army and medical science, some to France to study local administration and law and some to the United States to study business practice.

A prominent Japanese educator, writer and founder of Keio University, Fukuzawa Yukichi was influenced by the British Statesman, John Stuart Mill, as a utilitarian was the opinion leader of his day. His book entitled “An Enlightenment of Learning” in 1872 was the best seller at that time. (9)

At the same time, the Government invited to Japan “foreign experts” who were well paid and who served as government advisers. The expert of Education was David Murray (1830–1905) from the United States of America. He stayed in Japan for the period of 1873–1879 and established an infrastructure of education and culture which included teacher training as well as adult education. He created the first Western style university, Tokyo University, and museum. At that time the slogan was “Japanese Spirit and Western Knowledge.” (10)

The modern school education system started in 1872. The Meiji government began a policy which committed people to three primary responsibilities: military service, tax payment and education. Persons who neglected their duties were punished. Among the children there were some who could not attend the schools because of coming from economically poor families. Nowadays, Japan is one of the countries that provide a complete and thorough education for almost the entirety of its people.

The national administration of education was reformed to cope with the rapid changing society following World War I and, in 1929, the Social Education Bureau was established in the Ministry of Education. From then on, Japanese social education was closely controlled by the Government until the end of World War II. (11)

When the term “social education” was formally adopted, it replaced the term “popular education.” (Tsuzoku Kyoiku) Beginning with the Meiji restoration in 1868, the enlightenment of people in the form of “popular education” was encouraged with the introduction of European model institutions like libraries and museums. At the same time, the primary emphasis was on education for working youth, including technical training and the establishment of youth organizations (Semen-dan).

Democratic ideas introduced into Japan with the Westernization process brought about by the Meiji Restoration were forcibly suppressed as representing a dangerous ideology that was opposite the Government’s bureaucratic and, one could say, coercive policy of “conveying the will and ideas of those who govern to those who are governed.” This situation continued up to the end of World War II. (12)

## End of World War II and U.S. Occupation 1945–1952

Having been defeated in the Second World War, a shift in values took place under the U.S. occupation, from militarism and ultra-nationalism to democratic ideas. This was a Copernican change for the Japanese. Basically, the U.S. occupation policy aimed to inculcate three principles: internationalism, pacifism and democracy. It was emphasized that Japan should carry out a policy of international cooperation and that an environment should be created that would enable Japan to discard its insular attitudes and increase intellectual exchange with foreign countries.

In 1945, General Douglas MacArthur, presented to the Japanese Cabinet a proposal entitled “The Five Major Points for Democratization of Japan.” First on the list was the emancipation of the women of Japan through their enfranchisement—“that being members of the body politic, they may bring to Japan a new concept of government directly subservient to the well being of the

home.” This was to be supported by a major effort to enhance civics education among Japanese adults in general. The Occupation Authorities Officer In-Charge of Education was J.M. Nelson. Under these points, insurance of equality in “decision making,” observance of the decision once made, and careful attention paid to the decision-making process were essential to a democracy. The revision of the Election Law in 1945 legislated the equal right to vote for women. And, under the guidance given by the Occupation Authorities, among all adult education programs the greatest stress was given to women’s civic education. (13)

The guidance given by the Occupation Authorities in adult education was based on the theory of group-work. On November 3, 1946, the Japanese Constitution, the so-called “Peace Constitution,” was promulgated.

The preamble to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Constitution which states that “Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that defenses of peace must be constructed” struck a chord in the hearts of many Japanese who now had a strong desire for lasting peace. As an occupied country, Japan was not allowed to acquire membership in UNESCO, but the preamble to the UNESCO constitution stimulated the upsurge of a movement for positive cooperation with the world body. Direct education in international understanding was to be carried out under the occupation policy aimed at diffusing democratic ideas through the introduction of the American way of life, together with UNESCO policy aimed at increasing Japanese international understanding. (14)

In 1947, the Fundamental Education Law was enacted, aiming to raise self-reliant citizens in a peaceful and democratic state, and provide equality of educational opportunity for all, according to their abilities. The law emphasized the encouragement of social education, calling on national and local authorities to establish such institutions as libraries, museums and Kominkan (citizens’ public halls). In the main, social education was to be conducted through community-based adult civic education, its programs closely related to the needs of the community. A fruitful outcome depended greatly on learners’ willingness to pursue their studies spontaneously and independently. Even today, citizen’s public halls remain central to adult education.

“The Survey on Literacy of Japanese People” was conducted in 1950 by the National Institute for National Language under the guidance of Mr. John C. Pelzel, a social anthropologist affiliated with the CIE. Its purpose was to examine how the post-war occupation policies of the United States of America affected the degree of illiteracy among Japanese people. It was the largest survey of the time. (15)

In Japan, family planning began not as an issue of reproductive rights, but simply as economic necessity. According to traditional Japanese concepts, a child must be welcomed as a gift from God. There was no room for the individual to decide if she should have a child or not. The introduction of the idea of equal rights for men and women did not provide the incentive for family planning either. Difficult living conditions resulting from the wholesale destruction of the war had made life hazardous. Family planning for the first time was accepted as necessary for the protection of the mothers’ and children’s health.

In 1954, The Family Planning Federation of Japan was formed at the request of Ministry of Health and Welfare, and would promote the movement for family planning. The Federation's activities resulted in a dramatically reduced birth rate. It was later called a population revolution or the "Japanese population miracle." (16)

The introduction of American democracy brought about a revolutionary change in Japanese women's lives in other ways as well. It completely altered traditional views on women and laid the foundation for the improvement of women's status both in and outside the family. With the new Constitution and introduction of the Education Act and the Labor Standards Act, male superiority in the family began to fade. A true coeducational system would appear, along with the formal endorsement of equal pay for equal work, and legal protection for maternity. Indeed, as early as 1945–46, many women were elected to the Japanese Diet.

Up to this time, most Japanese women accepted a life that was decided by others. However, woman's life-spans were being extended. They now had much smaller families and therefore a shorter period of child-rearing. The load of housework was reduced through the diffusion of household electrical appliances that enabled them to have more free time. Their educational level began to increase rapidly, furthering the pressure for equality between men and women. Women became more and more aware of the importance of selecting and creating their own lives-styles. (17)

## Rapid Economic Growth—Adult Education to Meet a Swiftly Evolving Society 1955–1974

During the period 1955 to 1974, Japan's great economic growth was increasing rapidly perhaps due to Japan's unique lifelong employment system, education system and seniority system. The seniority system links promotion and benefits strictly to age and length of service. The root of this practice goes back to the 1920s and 1930s and has continued to the present. However, the situation has made this system of practices incompatible with the rise in life expectancy and joint participation of men and women in the labor market.

It led to neither reconstruction nor the increased democratization of small communities. On the contrary, it resulted in rapid migration to cities that became thronged with workers, especially the young. Family structures evolved relatively quickly from the extended family model to the nuclear family model, bringing significant changes in the social environment. It weakened the linkage among the inhabitants of local communities. Signs of disorganization and disintegration of rural communities began to appear. Furthermore, rapid unbridled economic growth resulted in air pollution, water contamination, massive traffic congestion and it generally made people feel as if things were badly out of balance. Gradually, with so much emphasis on growth and development, individuals became aware that they themselves had to take action if there was going to be an improvement in the quality of their lives. (18)

This rapid economic growth enabled householders to procure electrical appliances, ready-made clothes and pre-cooked foods, all of which lightened the housewives' tasks and increased their leisure time. Combined with governmental policies designed to develop women's vocational outlets in order to boost the economy, these developments resulted in many middle-aged women

going to work. They usually waited until after their children had grown up to start working. After having devoted considerable time and effort the raising and educating what was becoming fewer children in the home, most women went to work on a part-time basis. (19)

The Japanese government issued a report entitled “The Restoration of Humanities in the Community Life.” About the same time, the Minister of Education officially consulted with his Social Education Council on “What should social education be like in the rapidly by changing social structure?” On the equality front, the joint participation of men and women in many fields was well in progress. In the latter half of the 1960s, Japan’s national policy introduced the concept of volunteer work as a part of both youth and women’s education. In the 1960s, a “volunteer center” was established in every prefecture to support government efforts in the field of welfare. Some issues addressed by volunteers were new community problems resulting directly from stupendous growth including the destruction of nature, public pollution, misuse of natural resources, the degradation of community social structures resulting from industrialization, urbanization, and an increase in the number of elderly people who lived alone. The inhabitants of smaller communities wished to recreate the spontaneous solidarity and cooperation in their communities they had known in their youth. In order to help solve those problems, about 30 percent of the women in their 30s and 40s took part in some kind of volunteer work. (20)

At the same time, private culture centers run by educational and cultural industries were becoming highly developed. Often a function of profit-making broadcasting, department stores, railways and press interests, these centers provided a tremendous number of opportunities for exposure of the general public to a variety of national and international educational and cultural exhibits.

## International Women’s Year—Growth of Feminist Consciousness 1975–1984

Women’s liberation in Japan was characterized as a new cultural movement aimed at the study of women. Its obstacles were, and are, many, including the Patriarchy, Buddhism, Confucianism and the idea of the vertical, male-oriented society that divides individuals into upper and lower classes. One of the peculiarities of women’s problems in Japan is that women are unaware of their human individuality. According to Confucian ethics, “Harmony is the Greatest Virtue” and Western individualism has been denied as contradictory to social harmony. As a result, women’s primary value derived from their traditional role in the family system. The “Good Wife and Wise Mother” have been regarded as ideals for all women, regardless of personal aspirations. International Women’s Year in 1975 provided great impetus to Japanese women. (21)

The Japanese government carried out the most vigorous programs ever seen in Japan with the aim of increasing equality between men and women and thus raising the women’s social status. In particular it worked strenuously for the enactment of the Law for Employment Equality between Men and Women.

The year of 1983 can be said to have been the first year of the new media age in Japan. Today, various communication media, which have effectively contributed to socio-economic development, have penetrated deeply into our daily lives. They have played an important role in economic and social change. It is up to the individual to find ways of obtaining and managing appropriate information and knowledge for personal and social benefit. Terms such as multimedia, Internet, personal computer communication has become, familiar to us, but understanding the meanings of these words is a different matter. There are many that are illiterate in computer technology. There is a wide gap in technical knowledge between computer users and non-users. This may be partially due to people's ages. (22)

The development of information technology is faster and more intense than was expected. Able individuals have been actively participating in social changes that aim to develop a sustainable society. The government encourages workers to keep up their vocational skills throughout their working lives and tries to reduce their working hours and establish systems of paid leave for educational and professional training.

## Lifelong Learning Movement—Requirements of a Modern Society: 1984–1994

For the past 50 years the Japanese have chosen to use the term “social education.” For adult learning this term is probably the equivalent of the term “liberal arts adult education” used in the West. This kind of education does not necessarily lead to specific vocational or professional qualifications, instead, the adult's main reason to learn may be intellectual curiosity, cultural improvement, sports, improvement in one's quality of life, mental satisfaction, or just for fun and pleasure. “Lifelong learning” is used in Japan as the broadest of learning terms, encompassing all learning activities including formal education, sporting and cultural activities, recreation and outdoor activities. “Social Education” is just a part of the total lifelong learning concept.

In the 1990s, Japan became a multilinguistic and multicultural society with a great number of migrant workers and their families coming to Japan. As of 1996, the number of foreigners living in Japan was 1,362,371 or 1.09 percent of the total population. The largest group was Korean with 49 percent of the total foreigner population, followed by Chinese at 16 percent, 13 percent were Brazilian, 5 percent were Filipino, 3 percent were American, and 2 percent were Peruvian. A realistic figure adds some 200-300,000 illegal migrant workers. After the Immigration Law was revised in 1989, the number of 2nd and 3rd generation Japanese-descendant Brazilians and Peruvians returning to Japan with their families increased steeply. These are significant numbers considering the Chinese-Confucianism culture of Japan, which has a tradition of placing much value on blood linkage. (23)

The population of older adults has rapidly increased. The ratio of older adults has doubled in a 24-year period to rise from 7 percent to 14 percent. As compared with other countries we can see a significant difference: France 114 years, Sweden 82 years, the United States 69 years, the UK 64 years and Germany 42 years. Japan's Labor Laws set the retirement age at 60 but most men choose to take another job until the age of 65. Following their second retirement most men

embark on a third learning course. The pattern of Japanese working women follows an M curve. Many retire to start a family. After child rearing, it is difficult to reenter the workforce on a full time basis so most work part-time. There is a large demand for extra learning from women over the age of 35.

Due to the increase in leisure time during weekends for both school children and adults, a group, or circle, and volunteer activities have become popular methods for seeking to fulfill one's life by creating unique lifestyles. Since 1992, the Ministry of Education and Science, Culture, and Sports has proposed a conceptual design where people are engaged in various kinds of volunteer activities consistent with their knowledge or skills gained through lifelong learning programs. At the Nagano Winter Olympiad, 32,000 volunteers worked there. However, we need to study a social evaluation of volunteer activities that pays travel expenses or lunch. It seems to me, volunteer activities promoted by the public sector are the Japanese pattern of participation.

Contemporary society can be defined in such terms as "information society," "the global society" or "the aging society." In these contexts, Japanese people are seeking to change their lifestyles, to live with more autonomy, individual fulfillment and cultural self-expression based on their own original ideas and ability. A book entitled "Thought of Seisin (honest poverty)" written by Koji Nakano was published in 1992 and it was a best seller. The book describes the lifestyle of a priest of Zen Buddhism who, though he had a minimal standard of living, developed a high quality of thought. The book's ideas warn against the social climate of materialism. The people most influenced by these ideas are hard working senior workers in their fifties who are retiring soon. It is interesting that people in Europe and the United States of America take an opposite view as compared to the Japanese. Americans work for wealth in their retirement.

## Present Learning Activities of Japanese Adults

In 1995, the total population of Japan was 125,569,000 with 73 percent of total population living in cities. The ratio of adult population (over 20 years of age) was 64.3 percent. The ratio of the older adult population, of those over 65 years of age was 15.6 percent. In the 1990s Japan's Labor Laws set the retirement age at 60 but most men choose to take another job until the age of 65.

As of 1996, the number of foreigners living in Japan was 1.09 percent of the total population. The largest group was Korean followed by Chinese, Brazilian, Filipino, American, and Peruvian. A realistic figure adds some 300,000 illegal migrant workers.

## Learning Activities

### *Illiterate People*

The Year of International Literacy was 1990, yet most Japanese people are not aware of the domestic problem of illiteracy. They assume there are no illiterates in Japan. However, there are a sizable number of illiterates who wish to become literate. Because of the high economic growth

in Japan, nationwide research on literacy has not been conducted for 40 years. Therefore, the Japanese people are not aware of the problem. However, approximations indicate that 3 million or 3 percent, of the total population are illiterate. These are mostly the Buraku people, members of a socially segregated group, and members of the Ainu tribe. The largest groups among these are middle aged and older women. Recently, the population of refugees from Vietnam and Cambodia in Japan is high. Koreans, returnees from China, and workers from Asian countries are adding to the increasing number of illiterates.

During the 1960s, the Buraku liberation movement expanded rapidly, demanding the central government make a policy for the Buraku liberation. After a special law was passed in 1969, the housing and health environment with regard to Buraku people rapidly improved. But even with these improvements, less than 20 percent of the Buraku children go to universities, as compared to about 40 percent of Japan's other children.

### *Literacy Classes*

Literacy classes in Buraku communities are organized as a movement for liberation. Literacy activities in Buraku communities began in the 1960s with the rising liberation movement. Today, throughout Japan it is said that there are 600 classes in literacy being conducted in Buraku communities. As of 1986 there were 34 evening classes conducted at junior high schools with 2,700 learners. To further these initiatives, the Central Committee for the Year of International Literacy was established in January 1990.

Some community centers offer learning opportunities in Japanese Language. These classes are widely open to all people, not only Japanese but also to Koreans, foreign workers from other Asian countries, as well as foreign women who married Japanese. Besides "Literacy Class" there are evening classes at Junior High Schools and Voluntary Literacy Classes conducted by Koreans, such as the Mugi-mame Class (barley-beans) in Osaka. (24)

### *The Adult Learner*

According to a report entitled "Comprehensive Study on Educational Planning of Lifelong Learning Society" conducted by National Educational Research, the ratio of people enrolled in Social Education programs conducted by cities, towns and villages during 1990 was 56 percent. The learners, both men and women, increase in number by age groups—women in their sixties were the highest at 65 percent. The number of students who were enrolled in the University on Air was 66,730, of which males were 45 percent and females were 55 percent. As for age groups, the twenties were 27 percent, the thirties 23 percent, the forties 20 percent, the fifties 12 percent, and over sixty was 11 percent.

Student preferences by majors at the University on Air are as follows: Development and Education 26 percent, Life and Welfare 23 percent, Human study 19 percent, Society and Economy 13 percent, Industry and Technique 10 percent, Understanding Nature 10 percent. As for their academic backgrounds, high school graduates are 41 percent, junior college, university and graduate school 28 percent.

## *Content of Learning*

As for adult learners, the three highest concerns about the content of learning are hobbies, sports and health care. As categorized by age groups, the young highly prefer sports, vocational training, computers and languages. Their concerns are active training and self-development through vocational programs. To the contrary, the older adults highly prefer hobbies, culture, current topics, health care and social activities.

According to the answers collected by gender, men prefer to promote their vocational knowledge, skills or technique, academic knowledge and culture. To the contrary, women engaged in learning do so to promote their happiness, health, friendships and life-refreshment. We may just as well say men seek an immediate and direct effect from the programs while women have an inclination for indirect benefits produced by the programs.

In the past, it has been said that the enjoyment and promotion of culture were purely for amusement. However, the situation has changed with the increase in leisure hours on weekends for both school children and adults. The aims of adult learners are two fold. These days every citizen is expected to live an enriched life, aiming to develop his or her personality to the fullest and striving to achieve self-fulfillment. At the same time, adults have to participate in balanced, independent social and economic development. Adult learning should be modified and improved in response to recent changes in socio-economic and cultural development.

## *The Level of Learning*

In response to the question “What subjects did you learn most eagerly?” The answers were as follows: at the beginner’s level, 22 percent; at a slightly more advanced level, 27 percent; at an even higher academic level, 17 percent; unable to judge 24 percent. From this it can be said that a variety of programs cover the beginners’ level through higher academic levels.

The primary factors that prevent participation in learning activities are as follows: time 44 percent, location 23 percent, information 22 percent, expenditure 21 percent, and motivation 19 percent. The total number of the adults who take part in lectures and classes offered through Social Education was 73,710,000. The facilities and programs offered by the Social Education Board and other non-public cultural centers or services have rapidly increased in number in order to support the vast number of learners. Universities and other school-based education institutions have opened and offered their projects for the public to support. (25)

## **Workers**

The labor force participation rate was 64 percent in 1995, and the ratio of unemployment was 3 percent. The proportion of females to total employees was 39 percent in 1996. Japan’s economy and society today is confronted with rapid changes in industrial structure driven by technological innovation and the progressive shift of company activities overseas. This trend has accelerated the urgency of training human resources capable of supporting business developments in high, value-added sectors and new areas of industry.

In order to promote the cultivation of advanced human resources capable of supporting high, value-added and new business areas, subsidies and other assistance is available for employer groups and other organizations that develop and implement systematic and planned education and training along the lines of the advanced human resource guidelines. The framework for human resources development are divided into two categories, in private enterprises and public sector.

### *In the Public Sector*

To promote occupational opportunities development for the unemployed or those wishing to change their jobs, and to provide pre-employment preparation for young persons, the National Government and prefectural governments have established public human resources development facilities, where efforts are being made to provide vocational training matched to the needs of the workers and enterprises.

In particular, to meet the challenges of technological innovations in recent times, microelectronics and office automation equipment are being updated, and efforts are being made to enrich the contents of training. The types and numbers of human resources development facilities are as follows:

Polytechnic College (31)	Long-terms advanced vocational training for graduates of upper secondary schools
Human Resources Development Centers (228)	Long-term vocational training for graduates from lower or upper secondary schools
Polytechnic Centers (65)	Short-term vocational training for the employed and the unemployed

### *Private Enterprises*

To ensure that as many enterprises as possible the Ministry of Labor provides the following active measures for human resources development:

1. Enterprises are encouraged to appoint a human resources development promoter who plays a central role in human resource development programs.
2. At the Human Resources Development Service Center established in each prefecture, formation as well as advice and guidance concerning human resources development are provided to employers, by using the Ability Development Database System (ADDS).

3. The following system of grants has been created to help employers provide their workers with vocational training, in line with the concept of lifelong human resources development:
  - i. Grants for Lifetime Development of Vocational Abilities
  - ii. Grants for dispatching workers to authorized Vocational Training

### *Present Situation of Learning Through Workers' Self-learning*

According to the 1992 report, "The Learning of Working Life" by National Institute of Educational Research, the purposes of learning by workers of their own initiative was as follows: "development of ability directly useful for job" 51 percent, "acquisition of qualifications outside the company" 28 percent, and, "expansion of personal far-sighted vision" 21 percent.

On the other hand, while the desire for learning as expressed in the statement "expansion of personal far-sighted vision" is 58 percent, "preparation for and acquisition of qualification for promotion within the company" remains at 19 percent. On the other hand, items surveyed such as, "acquisition for development of special ability or personal ability" was 50 percent, "to foster international ways of thinking, including foreign language study" was 47 percent. It shows that while workers wish to learn a wide range of content, in fact they continue to learn content that is relative to job performance. This indicates that workers' self-directed learning is executed entirely apart from the enterprise.

### *Needs of Vocational Training of Enterprise and Workers*

According to the above referenced survey, there is a great gap between what the enterprise provides and what the workers need. The workers' needs are "education in office automation," "design of quality of one's working life" and "fostering international ways of thinking which includes a foreign language skill." These are the big three. However, the most important three needs of enterprises are "education for work administration," "education for business," and "education of specialty skills." This means that enterprises think of education as an enterprise-group education whereas the workers seek personal learning.

In consideration of the fact that the most powerful motivation for developing occupational abilities is the desire of workers to better themselves, a system for supporting workers' self-learning has been strengthened as an integral part of lifelong human resources development. (26)

## **The Older Adult**

According to the Basic School Survey, conducted by The Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture (1997), 51 percent of 60-year-olds have attended high school and only 10 percent have attended a junior college or university. After 1954, these percentages rose significantly. The ratio of those who go to high school (97 percent) and junior college or university (39 percent) has increased rapidly.

Those older citizens who were educated have a rich depth of knowledge, technique, and experience and pay attention to their health. They are totally different from the image of a weakened individual and their lifestyles are active. Some have the power to engage in a global market, with far-advanced skills and information for understanding the impact of globalization. Some are excellent in languages and computer skills. Retirement surely is a turning point in life, but we are now in the age of ageless, gender-free societies where men and women play many active roles in the fulfillment of life as it exists in Japan. (27)

### *Learning Activities of the Older Adult*

According to the 1996 report, “The Basic Survey on Social Life” by the Statistics Bureau, Management and Coordination Agency, Japanese Government, the ratio of the persons between the ages of 60–69 engaged in learning or research is 20 percent. And over 75 years of age is 4 percent. As for topics of learning or research, the 60–69 year old prefer “Art and Culture”-30 percent, “Current Topics”-25 percent and, “Home Economics and Housekeeping”-24 percent. The over 75 population sample prefer the following: “Arts and Culture”-33 percent, “Current Topics”-26 percent, “Humanity”-22 percent, “Home Economics and Housekeeping”-22 percent, and, “Medicine and Health Studies”-21 percent. The older adults in Japan love their traditional culture and moreover try to study current topics so that they might not fall behind the time.

### *Activities of Older Adults*

The ratio of the older adult, those over 60, who participated in any circles and, or groups is 63 percent of which the average class participation per person is 1.8 circles or groups. On the other hand, the typical responses to the question “why don’t you participate?” are that some have family affairs to attend to (34.2 percent), and others are not sure of their physical strength and health. More than 70 percent of those people who want to spend their thriving lives through circle and/or group activities need to have active relations within their communities. The ratio of the older persons in Japan who participate in such group activities is higher than those of the United States and Germany.

The ratio of Japanese people who in 1997 had graduated from high school was 97 percent and from Junior College or university was 39 percent. These rates have increased in past years. The level of Japanese adult’s learning require higher academic levels, not only high school level. Lifelong learning in response to the needs of the public. With the sharp decrease in the number of children 18 years of age and under, universities and all of higher education, have had to change their policies from the old system to new ones and accept adult students.

With the rapid development of computer technology and electronic networking, governments and local agencies, as well as public institutions including adult learning, are urged to engage in rapid and radical change. This technology can be effective for volunteer activities and networking. It can become a method of social participation for expressing one's own opinion. Learning that uses multimedia technology is at once both mutually engaging and communicative. The key for educational purposes are networking, and cooperative learning. Learning becomes a networking process and can provide access to various kinds of educational resources.

The introduction of multimedia provides the result of mutual learning and mutual teaching to the learners—a growing, shared knowledge base. But, it requires the learner to be self-motivated, self-assertive, and self-directed, and able to exercise good listening-skills and an independent mind to become self-confident learners.

On the other hand, as the process of decentralization occurs and more flexible administrative and management styles arise, former patterns of centralization of administration and administrative initiative are changing. The society is working together with the central government and local government, administrative officers and citizens as partners. Citizens are required to be more autonomous and actively participate in the local administration of decision-making processes. In order to participate in social, economic and cultural development of local administration, learning about administration and politics such as law, system, enclosure, administrative information, and, questioning the authorities are necessary learning points for citizens.

The Central Educational Council of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports published a report entitled “Japan’s vision for Education towards the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.” The concept of learning in the report was “the power to live in and create an affluent society.” Needless to say, a healthy body is essential in order to survive in this changing society. This fundamental idea for learning should be realized as Japan approaches the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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